



National Women's Council of Ireland A Feminist Future -Programme for Government 2020

Established in 1973, the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) is the leading national women's membership organisation in Ireland. NWCI seeks full equality between men and women and we draw our mandate from a membership of over 190 groups and organisations across a diversity of backgrounds, sectors and locations.

The Covid 19 pandemic and the response by Government clearly shows the importance of the role of the state to provide for all those who live in Ireland and the need to increase investment to provide effective and sustainable public services and infrastructure for all. Ireland has a devastating housing crisis, a two tier, struggling health system and underdeveloped care provision disproportionately relying on the underpaid work of women. The impact of these inequalities fall most heavily on women in our society and on those most marginalised. The Programme for Government should express a vision for Ireland that values our care and interdependence with each other. Our collective response to the Covid 19 pandemic shows that Irish people are deeply committed to caring for each other and concerned for the well-being of all and it is important for our recovery from this crisis that this commitment is reflected back to people in the next PFG. The commitments and actions in the new Programme for Government will be critical to ensure that we build an Ireland post COVID 19 that responds to people needs and aspirations, significantly reduces inequality and seeks to rebuild a country based on values of equality and social justice and inclusion. Ireland has experienced significant progressive change in recent years and women have been at the heart of that change, the next PFG should reflect an ambitious programme for advancing women's rights and equality.

NWCI believes that a future Programme for Government vision must be aligned to UN sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) recommendations and it must fully implement our obligations under the Istanbul Convention. It must pay particular regard to delivering a Just Transition to a low-carbon, sustainable, just society and economy, and address the internationally established reality that as climate impacts increase, existing inequalities, deprivation and exclusion will be worsened, with the highest impacts on women.

To deliver this vision of a just and equal Ireland NWCI believes we need to develop meaningful and inclusive social dialogue with the Community & Voluntary sector present as equal partners with the State, Trades Unions, Employers and Farmers. Our key recommendations for constitutional reform, legislation and social investment are below and we welcome the opportunity to discuss these further.

End the Housing and Homelessness Crisis

New legislation to introduce a moratorium on rent freezes and evictions has shown what we can achieve in a recognised national crisis. NWCI believes that our historically high rents, high levels of homelessness and precarious private rental sector must also be seen as a national crisis. Long term measures building on the supports introduced during the Covid-19 period must address this situation.

- Hold a referendum on the right to housing
- Establish a statutory Traveller Agency with powers to approve and enforce Local Authority accommodation
- Maintain the emergency rent freeze
- End direct provision
- Deliver a national programme of building public housing
- Establish gender sensitive support services for women living in homelessness

During the Covid 19 emergency we must also ensure

- Travellers, people in direct provision and people with disabilities living in residential settings have a safe place to self-isolate.
- Support a rent moratorium and ensure renters are not accruing debt they cannot pay

Prioritise Women's Health

Covid 19 has demonstrated the inadequacies of our two tier, struggling health system. Sláintecare provides a clear way forward to develop a single tier health system based on need, not ability to pay. In addition the delivery of Sláintecare must recognise the different health needs of women and men.

- Deliver Sláintecare
- Implement the actions of the Department of Health's Women's Health Taskforce
- Fully fund the National Maternity Strategy
- Deliver the new national maternity hospital under public ownership
- Introduce a scheme for universal, free access to contraception
- Develop & fund women-specific mental health programmes

During the Covid 19 emergency we must also

- provide additional resources to women centred mental health services, particularly talk therapies to support the impacts of caring roles, experiences of violence and abuse, and body image pressures,
- provide access to Personal Assistance and other social care supports to guarantee independence, ensure people can self-isolate safely and guard against the risk of institutionalisation for people with disabilities and older people.

Ensure safe, legal and local access to abortion

- Legislate for safety zones
- Complete a women-centred review of the operation of the Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy Act
- Provide resources to ensure local provision of the full range of care across the whole island and in all maternity hospitals

During the Covid 19 emergency we must also ensure

- access to abortion care is guaranteed through allowing remote/digital appointments

Make Public Quality Early Years and Childcare a Priority

Quality affordable accessible childcare is an essential public service that provides critical support to families and creates a positive environment where children can thrive. The absence of a comprehensive model of early years and out of school hours childcare impacts disproportionately on women, particularly women parenting alone. In addition the reliance on a poorly paid workforce is unsustainable and does not support the high quality model which we all aspire to for our children. The response by the Government during the COVID crisis to subsidise the sector and the salaries of the workforce are key building blocks which must be further developed in the PFG and accompanied by strong regulation including the regulation of fees to parents.

- A comprehensive public model of quality affordable accessible early years and out of school hours care
- Support the development of a Sectoral Employment Order for the sector
- Establish a single Early Years and School-Age Childcare agency for the sector
- Increase investment in early years to of 1% of GDP over the next decade
- Resource a living wage for workers as a first step towards professional pay scales and recognition
- National Programme for afterschool care
- Monitor & allocate resources to ensure no parent is negatively impacted by transition from Community Childcare Subvention Scheme to National Childcare Scheme

During the Covid 19 emergency we must also ensure

- childcare workers who work through this crisis earn at minimum a Living Wage
- the childcare system under development for frontline workers includes all workers deemed to be at the frontline, including those working in vital retail, cleaning services, those working in refuges or other supported accommodation

Change Ireland's record on Violence Against Women

Violence against women goes to the heart of women's equality in our society. 1 in 4 women will experience domestic and/or sexual violence in Ireland. Prioritising the full implementation of Istanbul Convention with regard to measures and actions focused on prevention, prosecution, legislation, investment in frontline services and comprehensive data in the PFG will make a significant advance to achieving the elimination of violence against women.

- Establish a National Rapporteur on Sexual Domestic and Gender Based Violence
- Develop new family Court system, including physical infrastructure.
- Establish an Online Safety Commissioner
- Legislate for Domestic Homicide Reviews
- Establish a national programme for supervised contact centres
- Criminalise stalking including cyber-stalking, up-skirting, and all forms of image-based abuse.
- Legislate for an Objective Relationship & Sex Education Curriculum
- Amend legislation to ensure full decriminalisation of prostituted women and people working in prostitution-draft guidelines to protect women selling sex in pairs or in small groups
- Ratify ILO Convention 190 on gender-based violence and harassment in the work place
- Legislate for a minimum of 10 days paid leave for abuse and violence
- Develop and resource a National Action Plan to end Female Genital Mutilation
- Provide appropriate refuge and accommodation to meet the needs of women and families seeking safety and in accordance with the Istanbul Convention.
- Separate, safe, supported accommodation should be made available for women who have been, or are at risk of being trafficked
- Fund exit and support services to support those who are in or who wish to leave prostitution
- Comprehensive reliable data collection for both domestic and sexual violence.

Eliminate Poverty & Deliver Economic Equality

The increases in social welfare payments during the pandemic highlights the current inadequacy of payments for people to maintain a decent standard of living. Protecting worker's incomes and increases to illness payments has demonstrated how precarious the majority of workers incomes are, living pay cheque to pay cheque with a significant minority of often female dominated labour forces dependent of state subsidies to survive.

- Legislate for equality budgeting to become a statutory process, including expenditure and taxation actions
- Broaden the tax base including a wealth tax, financial transaction tax, a minimum effective corporation tax rate
- Introduce the Living Wage as the minimum wage level for Ireland and legislate for all programmatic expenditure & procurement processes to have living wage clauses.
- Close the Gender Pay Gap through addressing low pay and legislating for wage transparency in public and private sector and amend the existing Bill to include firms of 20 people
- Legislate for collective bargaining instruments
- Establish a Statutory Maintenance Authority
- Establish an All Party Oireachtas Committee to make recommendations on the reorganisation of work and reduced working time.
- Legislate to benchmark social welfare payments to a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL)
- Make reducing deprivation and poverty levels in one parent families a priority
- Allow lone parents to receive both the Jobseeker's Transitional payment and Working Family Payment
- Reduce requirement for Working Family Payment for lone parents to 15hrs
- Exclude Working Family Payment from income assessment for differential rental schemes
- Ensure no-one required to accept insecure, non-fixed hour jobs as 'reasonable offer of work'
- Commission an independent national study on the prevalence and nature of pregnancy discrimination and disadvantage in the workplace
- Establish a dedicated helpline to assist women who experience discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace

Pensions

- NWCI as part of the Stop 67 campaign is calling for the establishment of a national stakeholders forum on Pensions
- Introduce a universal state pension system
- Ensure the Total Contributions Approach (TCA) is limited to 30 years for the maximum pension
- Resource & publish a gender impact assessment of TCA & Auto-enrolment
- End private pension tax relief-Begin with introducing standard rating tax expenditure on pensions-& invest savings in first tier state pension

During the Covid 19 emergency we must also ensure

-additional supports to cover increased costs of staying at home for the most vulnerable families i.e the school meal programme, additional health care costs if people get sick, need to bulk buy goods such as a double OPF payment
-retailers and An Post to include lone parents in their vulnerable groups list in order to access designated shopping hours and home deliveries in a similar way to older people

Advance women's leadership and participation in decision making at local and national level

Women in Ireland continue to have low levels of representation in all sectors of society. Women comprise only 21% of ISEQ 20 directors and only 12% of directors of other Irish listed companies, amounting to an average of 16% women on the boards of all Irish listed companies. Only 36 out of our 160 TDs are women and the recent General Election saw only one additional woman elected. 24% of those elected to local councils in 2019 were women, compared to an EU average of 32% for local/municipal councils. Serious regional disparities exist; only seven out of 31 local councils have achieved a critical mass of 30% women's representation. A pro-active approach is required to ensure that at all levels of decision making, women are equally represented.

- Legislate for a 40% quota for gender balance, with targets for diversity, on all non-state Irish company boards
- Legislate for a 40% gender quota candidate selection for local elections & additional targets to improve diversity of representation
- Legislate for a 40% gender quota and targets for diversity for decision making structures in communities
- Introduce maternity/adoptive leave for councillors and TDs
- Increase investment in the women's sector including women's community development groups

Create a Caring Ireland

Covid 19 has clearly highlighted our care and interdependence with each other and the absolute centrality & importance of those who care for others in Irish society. Our collective response to the Covid 19 pandemic shows that Irish people are deeply committed to caring for each and concerned for the well-being of all. However, the unpaid and paid labour of care has been shown to be deeply gendered and often extremely undervalued. The Citizens' Assembly will report in the lifetime of this Government and make substantial recommendations with regard to care and care work.

- Hold a referendum to replace the Article 41.2 with an inclusive and gender-neutral acknowledgement of the value of care
- Hold a referendum on Article 41.3 to ensure a broad and inclusive understanding of the family based on relationships of care and interdependence not marital status
- Provide a statutory right for a broad spectrum of paid maternity, paternity, parental leave and carers leave
- Legislate for a full and retrospective Homecare credit to support women to access a full pension
- Provide a statutory right to home care to support older persons to remain independent
- Provide a range of public care options for older people to enable people to live their older years with dignity
- Provide a statutory right to a Personal Assistance Service for disabled people
- Introduce four months' paid parental leave
- Extend paid paternity leave to 1 month
- Resource a full & retrospective Homecare Credit that also acts as re-entry credit to access training
- Introduce six paid days of carers' leave

Implement a Green New Deal

The Covid 19 emergency has shown how a large scale global crisis exasperates existing inequalities and deprivation and that the social exclusion and poverty of the most marginalised is worsened, with the highest impacts on women. NWCI believes that climate chaos and environmental degradation is having the same impact.

- Just Transition legislation policies & investment must be gender & poverty proofed
- National planning must ensure Ireland's climate polluting emissions reduce by a minimum of 8% annually
- Introduce 'polluter pays' environmental tax measures
- Remove fossil fuel subsidies
- Divest from fossil fuel investment
- Establish no new fossil fuel exploration licenses

- Prioritise rural and urban public transport infrastructure including cycling over roads building
- Invest in our natural heritage & biodiversity
- Invest in a just transition plan for rural development including ending intensive livestock production

Create an Inclusive and Diverse Society

Creating an inclusive society and combatting racism and discrimination should be central to the next PFG. In addition the Covid 19 emergency has highlighted the contribution of migrant workers and our newer communities to the well-being, safety and care of Irish society. From retail, catering, cleaning and care workers to nurses and doctors, we have seen the value and strength of our diverse society. NWCI believes we must acknowledge and affirm our diversity, work to ensure that communities are properly represented and supported, and that their rights are upheld, protected and advanced.

- Develop a gender sensitive National Action Plan Against Racism
- Develop a gender sensitive National Action Plan Against Racism for the inclusion of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, Roma, Travellers and all minority ethnic communities
- Establish a whole of Government approach to the implementation of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy with dedicated resources, targets, indicators, outcomes, in full consultation with Traveller and Roma organisations.
- Legislate to establish the right to citizenship for children born in Ireland
- Regularisation for undocumented workers through the development of pathways to papers for children, young people and workers who are 'undocumented' to regularise their status.
- End direct provision, through the development of an action plan for the overhaul of the direct provision system based on human rights standards and international best practice
- Establish targets for diversity in leadership at all levels of local, national and corporate decision making & governance bodies

Guarantee Access to Justice

The Covid 19 emergency has demonstrated our capacity to protect and support the rights of all in a challenging and stressful time. NWCI believes now is the time to come to a full resolution with the legacies of our past when the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalised were not upheld.

- Develop an inclusive and just process for an Adoption Rights Bill
- Publish the final report for the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes
- Legislate for a National Archive of Historical Institutional and Care-Related Records
- Support the Judicial Council to prioritise sentencing guidelines for domestic and sexual crimes
- Provide full redress to all Magdalene survivors
- Resource a National Archive of Historical Institutional and Care-Related Records
- Develop a purpose-built family courts complex, modernise the family court facilities nationwide, specialist judges and a comprehensive Court Welfare Service.
- Resource a full review the civil legal aid scheme

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Maintain the emergency rent freeze
Establish a statutory Traveller Agency with powers to approve and enforce Local Authority accommodation
End direct provision
A referendum on the right to housing

Prioritise Women's Health

Deliver Sláintecare
Fully fund the National Maternity Strategy
Introduce a scheme for universal, free access to contraception
Develop & fund women-specific mental health programmes

Ensure safe, legal and local access to abortion

Legislate for safety zones
Provide resources to ensure local provision of the full range of care across the whole island and in all maternity hospitals

Make Public Childcare a Priority

Increase investment in early years to of 1% of GDP over the next decade
Resource a living wage for workers as a first step towards professional pay scales and recognition
Monitor & allocate resources to ensure no parent is negatively impacted by transition from Community Childcare Subvention Scheme to National Childcare Scheme

Change Ireland's record on Violence Against Women

Establish a National Rapporteur on Sexual Domestic and Gender Based Violence
Legislate for Domestic Homicide Reviews
Legislate for the establishment of a dedicated and integrated family court
Ringfence funding for frontline, specialised services to combat violence against women
Provide resources for refuge spaces per Istanbul- one space for every 10,000 people

Eliminate Poverty & Deliver Economic Equality

Legislate for equality budgeting to become a statutory process, this includes expenditure and taxation actions
Introduce the Living Wage as the minimum wage level for Ireland
Legislate for wage transparency & amend the existing Bill to include firms of 20 people
Establish a Statutory Maintenance Authority
Legislate to benchmark social welfare payments to a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL)
Establish a national stakeholders forum on Pensions

Create a Caring Ireland

Hold a referendum to replace the Article 41.2 with an inclusive and gender-neutral valuing of care
Legislate for a full and retrospective Homecare credit to support women to access a full pension
Provide a statutory right to a Personal Assistance Service for disabled people
Introduce four months' paid parental leave and extend paid paternity leave to 1 month

Advance women's leadership and participation in decision making at local and national level

Legislate for a 40% quota for gender balance, with targets for diversity, on all non-state Irish company boards
Legislate for a 40% quota for gender balance for Local Elections 2024 & additional targets to improve diversity
Legislate for a 40% gender quota and targets for diversity for decision making structures in communities

Implement a Green New Deal

Just Transition legislation policies & investment must be gender & poverty proofed

National planning must ensure Irelands climate polluting emissions reduce by a minimum of 8% annually

Prioritise rural and urban public transport infrastructure including cycling over roads building

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