



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

Submission to Department of the Housing, Planning,
Community and Local Government on Ireland 2040
National Planning Framework

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Introduction

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (DHPCLG) consultation process on the development of Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework and how we would like to see Ireland in twenty years' time.

Founded in 1973, the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) is the leading national women's membership organisation. We represent and derive our mandate from our membership, which includes over 180 groups and organisations from a diversity of backgrounds, sectors and locations across Ireland. We also have a growing number of individual members who support the campaign for women's equality in Ireland. Our mission is to lead and to be a catalyst for change in the achievement of equality for women. Our vision is of an Ireland and of a world where women can achieve their full potential and there is full equality between women and men.

From the outset, NWCi firmly believes that any new planning document for the future must include the views and perspectives of women, it must have a gender balance in the governance and oversight structures established to implement it and must be gender proofed to access the differential impacts on women and men. This planning framework provides an opportunity to deliver tangible results for the current and future generations of citizens who rely on our shared public services and social infrastructure. We welcome the commitment to a fundamental shift in how we do things and the acknowledgement that we cannot continue as "Business as usual". Any new framework must include comprehensive disaggregated data pertaining to a range of issues where women's rights are engaged. An absence of the views and participation of women in this new planning framework will undermine the legitimacy of this policy.

The Current Landscape for girls and women in Ireland

Recession and austerity have had a disproportionate economic and social impact on women and girls in Ireland. Increasing deprivation levels, rising consistent poverty levels and high income inequality remain serious concerns for our society. Women are significantly under-represented in all levels of decision making and the responsibility of unpaid care continues to be unequally shared among women and men. Women are frequently disadvantaged by policies that do not recognise their different realities and experiences, including unequal pay, responsibilities at work and home, and gender-based violence.

Issues and Choices

Investment in social infrastructure

There are important choices to be made by government on how public funds are spent and to tackle the lack of investment in public services and infrastructure during the recession. Ireland still lags behind the rest of the world, investing less than half the OECD average in early year's services. Critical to repairing our social fabric and delivering the solid groundwork needed for a more equal and sustainable future is a reformed, progressive, European tax system that ensures women and men have the capacity to contribute individually to meeting collective needs, rather than individualised tax breaks and tax rebates that erode public services and increase the privatisation of social risks.

Tax concessions do not represent the most strategic use of hard-earned public funds and overwhelmingly benefit high income groups. Women utilise public services more and we see women fill the gaps in providing care for the vulnerable in our society due to an underinvestment in services for disabled people, older people and those in ill health. Because women are the primary recipients of public spending such as care provision and services, education, training and health including sexual and reproductive health, it has a far greater impact on women than men. Outsourcing and commissioning of public services should not be seen as a replacement for public delivery of public services. A risk analysis and assessment on the potential implications for the long term public control and accountability should be carried out. Current commissioning models need to be reviewed in terms of impact on gender equality and public good.

Role of Local government and Local Economic and Community Plans

The local government sector has been named as a key player in driving and implementing this framework alongside central government and the regional assemblies. It is vital that because of their proximity to communities that local authorities are creating the conditions for effective participation of women and women's groups and addressing women's social exclusion. It is crucial that any review and assessment of the thirty one individual Local Economic and Community Plans are aligned to the new framework. Local communities also have a vital role in the success of this planning framework and need to be engaged. Resources to the community and voluntary sector should be restored so that integral developmental work can be carried out and so the most disadvantaged can be enabled to participate in these processes. There should be recognition within local authorities that victims of domestic abuse have unique and varying circumstances. Their circumstances and needs may not meet the specific housing criteria. Local authorities should have a policy which allows them to exercise flexibility and fluidity when dealing with victims of domestic abuse.

Social progress

2017 is the 20th anniversary of Ireland's first national anti-poverty strategy. We cannot forget our long standing and established commitments in the development of this framework including the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and Anti-Poverty strategies. As we rebuild from recession we face some fundamental choices: building a more equal society, an end to poverty and investment in our public services. NWCI believe that a more equal society is not an aspirational idea which might eventually be achieved through the overspill of a 'trickle down' economy, rather it is the core foundation upon which any sustainable economy must be built. Indicators such as 'deprivation levels', risk of poverty 'consistent poverty' 'Gini Coefficient and crucially the 'gender pay gap' must be seen as crucial tests of any recovery and should be at the centre of economic decision making. To ensure sustainable communities and creating a more equal Ireland requires the state to protect the important work of informal unpaid caring through the development of more flexible work practices, a social security system that is flexible and responsive and supporting men's equal responsibility for care work through proactive measures.

Where will we work?

Women still predominate low paid, part-time, low skilled more vulnerable sectors. 60% of low paid workers are women. There has been an increasing casualization of labour and seasonal, contract work.

NWCI believes that the best way to ensure quality standard of living is by ensuring decent income and taking action against low paid, precarious work. Low paid employment is linked to poor working conditions with the use of low and non-fixed-hour contracts in the retail, hospitality and care sectors increasing. These sectors are significant employers of women.

Where will we live?

Ireland has one of the highest rates of overall female homelessness in Europe. NWCI want to highlight in particular the needs of minority ethnic women including Traveller women, one parent families and victims of domestic abuse. Victims of domestic abuse are a particular high risk group and particular policy changes need to be put in place to adequately protect women and children. Violence against women as a pathway to homelessness is rarely referenced in national homeless policy or local authority policies. NWCI recommend that this framework engage with the reality that domestic and sexual violence is a key contributing cause of women, children and young people becoming homeless and work to seriously protect vulnerable groups. Housing policy and provision must not jeopardise women and children's welfare and safety.

Spatial deprivation and the rural/urban divide

In a rural context, it has long been a concern that policies have focused predominantly on economic development in isolation from social development and have failed to recognise resource or support the diversity that, while now growing, has always been a part of rural society. Socially excluded members of rural populations are rarely targeted or prioritised in rural development policy and programmes. The White Paper on Rural Development Committee found that the problems of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas have a distinct impact on women. Economic dependency, isolation, unequal opportunity and participation are compounded by the problems of distance from services and amenities. The absence of an adequate transport service and affordable childcare services in many areas make it difficult for women to avail of training and education or to enter into or retain employment. There is a lack of reference to gender in the Rural Development Plan programme 2014 – 2020. Experience of rural poverty can manifest itself differently for women in terms of fuel poverty, lack of services and opportunities for economic dependence. There is a lack of recognition of the contribution of women to rural societies and the agricultural sector and also a lack of robust data on the women involved directly or indirectly. The Rural Development Programme recognises that the fact that men account for more than 90 per cent of farm holders may be ‘detrimental in terms of the human capital capacity of the sector and may also inhibit technology uptake and structural change.’¹

Ageing population and population increase

Life expectancy continues to increase for women in Ireland. In 2014 life expectancy at birth was 83.5 years compared to 78.6 years in 1994. While women live longer on average than men, the gender gap has narrowed, from 5.5 years in 1994 to 4.2 years in 2014. Although women may live longer, they spend many more years than men living with age-related ill-health and disability (Department of Health, 2016c). With a population ageing comes a great opportunity for the women’s equality agenda in terms of using the wisdom and experience brought by women who lived through change in women’s rights since the 1950s. There are several important issues at the interface of gender equality and population ageing. In particular, ensuring that income inequalities across the life course are not compounded in later life through unfair pension policies is of great importance. Similarly, women’s equality throughout the life course should be

¹Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (2014). Ireland’s Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 (2014), p. 29. The only reference to women in the Charter for Rural Ireland is in relation to the Rural Development Programme’s measures to address structural issues such as the age and gender profile of the sector. See: Department of Community, Environment and Local Government (2016). Charter for Rural Ireland. A statement of Government commitment to support Rural Ireland’s regeneration and to underpin the future sustainable development of Ireland’s rural communities. p. 13, available: http://test.ahg.gov.ie/app/uploads/1970/01/charter_for_rural_ireland-1.pdf.

considered including the support needs of older women made vulnerable by chronic illness, disability and ageist attitudes.²

Recommendations

NWCI's recommendations are:

1. We need to include the views of all women in all their diversity so all the talents and experiences can be valued and factored in providing solutions for the future development of Ireland. Decision-making processes informed by diversity have been found to be consistently more likely to find innovative solutions to foster inclusive growth.
2. A key constituent for consultation and engagement in the development of this framework is the community and voluntary sector, their views and participation should be actively sought and facilitated.
3. A commitment to gender and equality proof the framework which has the potential to ensure a fair and just economy and in order to meet the obligations of the Public Sector Duty.
4. There is a critical need for gender disaggregated data and to include data on progress for different groups of women including Travellers, migrant and disabled women.
5. Ensure that the community development sector, in particular local women's community groups are resourced and supported into the future.
6. Move towards a "living wage" and protection for workers against increasing casualization of labour.
7. The issue of Violence against women must be recognised in all housing and homeless policy and practise for the future.

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² Institute of Public Health, Submission to the National Strategy for Women and Girls
<https://www.publichealth.ie/document/consultation-response/iph-response-new-womens-strategy-roi>