

April 2026

National Women's
Council
Submission
to the Low Pay
Commission
on the National
Minimum Wage
Rate for 2027



Introduction

Founded in 1973, the National Women’s Council (NWC) is the leading representative organisation working for women’s rights and women’s equality on the island of Ireland. We represent and derive our mandate from our membership, which includes nearly 200 groups and organisations from a diversity of backgrounds, sectors and locations across Ireland, including organisations representing women in low-paid and precarious work. As a membership organisation, we are uniquely placed to represent and communicate the concerns of women in Ireland.

We welcome this opportunity to submit to the Low Pay Commission on the issue of the review of the National Minimum Wage in 2026. As a membership organisation we are not a direct service provider working directly with women on low wages, though many of our member organisations are. Therefore, this submission seeks to provide information at a broad policy level about the importance of the National Minimum Wage as a gender equality measure as well as an anti-poverty measure.

Summary of NWC recommendations

National Minimum Wage should be raised to meet the Living Wage in the upcoming Budget

Sub-minimum National Minimum Wages for younger people should be abolished

Context

Low pay, and pay inequality more generally, is a highly gendered issue. Women are more likely to be in low-paid and precarious work. They are also more likely to have lower incomes, as the persistent gender pay gap stands at nearly 10%.¹ Women also undertake the majority of unpaid caring work, doing twice as much as men.² As well as impacting women's abilities to afford during their working lives, this also impacts their pensions (the gender pension gap stands at around 35%³) and broader gendered wealth inequalities in society.

The National Minimum Wage is a vital measure for ensuring that the work done by women is not valued and remunerated below a level which allows them adequacy and dignity in work. This is particularly important in certain sectors like hospitality and retail, which has a large number of low-paid and precarious jobs. Employers in these sectors are also less likely to offer additional employment benefits such as top ups on Maternity and Parent's Benefit.⁴

Since 2020 the National Minimum Wage has risen from €10.10 to €14.15 per hour in 2026. These increases have been vitally important in supporting women in low paid employment. However, the National Minimum Wage is still below the rate of the Living Wage, which sits at €15.40 per hour in 2025/2026 per the Living Wage Technical Group.⁵ This Living Wage, which is formulated through costs and affordability based on the Minimum Essential Standard of Living research conducted by the MESL Research Centre, rather than the Government's usual formulation of setting at 60% of the median wage, outlines what hourly rate in paid employment is required to "provide employees with sufficient income to achieve an agreed acceptable minimum standard of living". NWC has consistently called this principle of adequacy to underpin both the Government's social protection policies, as well as employment policies.⁶

Recent research from the ESRI⁷ has demonstrated, based on data from 2015 to 2026, that increases in the National Minimum Wage don't necessarily result in job losses, despite rhetoric from industry and policymakers, cementing the case for further increases in the National Minimum Wage.

In 2026, NWC has two recommendations for the Low Pay Commission to consider as they prepare their report for this year.

¹ CSO (2023) [Structure of Earnings Survey 2022](#)

² IHREC/ESRI (2019) [Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland](#)

³ NWC/TASC (2024) [Still Stuck in the Gap: Pensions Auto-enrolment from a Gender and Care Lens](#)

⁴ ESRI (2025) [Child Related Leave: Usage and Implications for Gender Equality](#)

⁵ Living Wage Technical Group (2025) [Living Wage Update 2025/26](#)

⁶ For example in our most recent [Pre-Budget Submission for Budget 2026](#)

⁷ ESRI (2026) [The impact of a minimum wage increase on employment: Evidence from Ireland](#)

Recommendation 1: National Minimum Wage should be linked to the Living Wage in Budget 2027

The previous Programme for Government, agreed in 2020, committed to “Progress to a living wage over the lifetime of the Government.”⁸ Although that commitment was not met, there were indications that it was intended to be progressed by this year, 2026. However, last year the new Government declared that they were deferring this commitment until 2029, citing particular pressures in the retail and hospitality sectors and concerns about inflation.⁹ This was followed by a significant tax cut for the hospitality sector in Budget 2026.

The recent ESRI research outlined above calls this reasoning into question – as there is likely to be impact in terms of job losses in moving the National Minimum Wage to the Living Wage. Given this, the Government’s already committed support measures for the hospitality industry, and the need for balance in supporting employees in low paid and precarious work, the NWC recommends that the Low Pay Commission recommends to the Government to reverse their previous decision and raise the National Minimum Wage to the rate of the Living Wage in Budget 2027.

Recommendation 2: sub-minimum National Minimum Wage rates for young people should be abolished

The continued inclusion of sub-minimum wage rates for young people, where those under 20, 19 and 18 are entitled to minimum wage rates of 90%, 80% and 70% of the National Minimum Wage rate respectively, is blatantly discriminatory and undermines the principles of equal pay for equal work.

This affects many young women in a variety of sectors. As cost-of-living pressures related to housing and education continue to disproportionately affect younger generations, this compounds the challenges faced by young women.

NWC support the Low Pay Commission’s own recommendation¹⁰ that these rates be abolished immediately.

⁸ Government of Ireland (2020) [Programme for Government: Our Shared Future](#)

⁹ Irish Examiner (16/04/2025) [Government to delay introduction of living wage until 2029](#)

¹⁰ Low Pay Commission (2024) [Report on Sub-Minimum Rates of the National Minimum Wage](#)