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National Women's Council

Pre-Budget  
Submission  
2025

# Budget 2025: A Feminist Budget

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*The National Women's Council (NWC) is the leading national representative organisation for women and women's groups in Ireland, founded in 1973. We have over 190 member groups and a large and growing community of individual supporters. The ambition of the NWC is an Ireland where every woman enjoys true equality and no woman is left behind.*

Next year, 2025, marks the halfway point through this decade. Budget 2025, as the last budget of this current Government, provides an opportunity to shape the next five years and lay the groundwork for significant advances in gender equality.

## **A Budget 2025 for inclusive, universal public services that support women**

Women are facing a housing and homelessness crisis, a cost-of-living crisis, a public services crisis in terms of access to essential services like childcare, health and social care – and the ongoing effects of the climate and biodiversity emergency. All of these crises have a greater impact on women, because women continue to have lower incomes, less wealth, fewer resources, all while shouldering the greater share of unpaid care responsibilities. There is an epidemic of violence against women, and the recent growth in far-right violence and hate, directed at many of the most marginalised in our society. Marginalised groups of women are particularly impacted by these inequalities. Budget 2025 can and must tackle the inequalities faced by women in Ireland head-on, and key to tackling structural gender inequalities is government investment in public services and social infrastructure – for a strong, resilient system of universal public services for all women.

## **A Budget 2025 that cares for people and planet**

2025 will be a pivotal year for the green transition. It will mark the end of the first Carbon Budget, and five years left for our international obligations under the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 – not just of meeting climate and biodiversity targets, but of eradicating poverty and violence against women, and of achieving real gender and social equality. We have a long way to go to meet these goals, and right now we are not on the right track for many of them. Budget 2025 presents a real opportunity to chart a course towards achieving these goals, and shifting to a new green economic model based on valuing care and support in our society. To do so, Budget 2025 must emphasise large-scale investment and structural reform of public services, and not tax cuts and minor tweaks.

## **A Budget 2025 that tackles all forms of gender inequality**

An all-of-Government, cross-departmental approach to tackling all forms of gender inequality is necessary. All budgeting decisions under each department must be gender and equality-proofed, and Budget 2025 should focus on the key issues facing women today, including:

- **Delivering a universal, accessible public system of Early Childhood Education + Care**
- **Ending women's homelessness and the housing and accommodation crisis**
- **Ensuring access to gender-sensitive healthcare services which meet women's needs**
- **Centring feminist climate justice in the transition to a caring, climate-friendly society**
- **Achieving an adequate level of income for all women**

Only with vision, ambition, and a commitment to gender equality can we achieve the Ireland we all want to see. Budget 2025 is an opportunity to take an important step on that journey.

# Key Recommendations

**Childcare:** deliver a universal, affordable, accessible public system of Early Childhood Education + Care

- **Deliver a fully public funded and provided system of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), including through increased investment in ECEC to 1% of national income by 2030 – with an additional €300m in Budget 2025, and €1.6bn by 2030**

**Housing:** end women’s homelessness and the housing + accommodation crisis

- **Build more homes by increasing investment in social, affordable + cost-rental provision**
- **Ensure access to housing for marginalised women, secure long-term options**

**Mental Health:** ensure access to gender-sensitive mental health services which meet women’s needs

- **An additional €115 million for mental healthcare, including:**
  - **A commitment to a long-term funding strategy which brings the mental health allocation to +10% of the overall health budget by 2030**
  - **Reinstatement of a national leadership role for mental health in the HSE**
  - **Deliver on gender-sensitive mental health services through full implementation of Sharing the Vision**
  - **Establishment of Ireland’s first Mother & Baby Unit**

**Climate/Environment:** centre feminist climate justice in the transition to a caring, climate-friendly society

- **Gender, equality and poverty-proof all climate policies and investment**
- **Tackle energy poverty by increased investment in retrofitting, prioritising marginalised groups and those affected by energy poverty; expand + increase the Fuel Allowance**
- **Reduce the cost of public transport for people who struggle to access it**

**Social Protection:** achieve an adequate level of income for all women

- **Raise base social protection rates by €20, and raise Increase for a Qualified Child rates by €6 for children under 12 and €15 for children 12 and over**
- **Benchmark social protection payments to the Minimum Essential Standard of Living**
- **Introduce a Universal State Pension**

# Care + Support

The National Women’s Council understanding of care and support is broad and acknowledges that across our lives we all both give and receive care and support. We understand care and support as the provision of a wide range of different kinds of support and assistance, in many different contexts and relationships, including within the home, family and the broader community, and across different groups of individuals, including children and young people, disabled people, older

Unpaid Care Work <sup>1</sup>	
Average time/week	16hrs
Women	21.3hrs
Men	10.6hrs

persons, and many others, in different ways and at different times. Care and support work, both paid and unpaid, is disproportionately carried out by women, and valuing this work is crucial for

addressing gender inequalities.

There is a crisis in care and support, with under-resourcing, lack of adequate provision, accessibility issues, and moves towards commodification and corporatisation affecting almost all aspects of care and support provision. Despite significant increases in funding for early years in recent budgets, affordability and lack of access for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is an issue for families across the country, and significant gaps exist in disability service provision. The commodification of home care services has led to expansion in presence of private, profit-driven providers. Increasing public investment in and provision of public care and support services is a vital component of advancing gender inequality. In countries with public care systems, they demonstrate greater affordability, accessibility, and quality in their services, with better pay, security and conditions for workers. Investment in a public system rather than dependence on the market to provide services is crucial.

**Care + Support**

We use **Care and Support** in a way that is inclusive, and that is focused on ensuring the autonomy, dignity, independence, decision-making capacity and control of the person receiving care or support. Care and support must be provided in a way which promotes these values for the individual, with a range of supports being provided across communities.

**Public Provision of ECEC**

Systems with public provision of Early Childhood Education and Care tend to be designed to ensure equitable access to all regardless of income or social status, with focus on the public good.

**Care + Support is Feminist:** the most effective way to tackle persistent gender inequalities in care and support is sustained investment in public services and social infrastructure, including a public ECEC system and universally accessible rights-based care and support services

**Care + Support is Green:** resulting in significantly less emissions than many other jobs and services, care and support jobs are green jobs; investment in care and support helps meet our climate goals, and they must be a key part of the transition to a new green economic model

**Care + Support is Economically beneficial:** investment in care and support has been shown to act as a better economic stimulus than investment in traditional economic recovery approaches, such as construction<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> IHREC/ESRI (2019) [Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland](#)

<sup>2</sup> Women’s Budget Group (2020) [A Care-Led Recovery from Coronavirus](#)

## A Public System of Early Childhood Education and Care

The current system of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is broken. It's not working for children, for women, for families, for educators or providers. Increasing costs and lack of places and provision, particularly in certain areas and among marginalised groups, is making access to ECEC increasingly difficult for many women. Lack of accessible and affordable childcare is the single biggest barrier to women's equal participation in society. Historically, women have shouldered the majority of care and support responsibilities, which often leads to career or education interruptions, lower wages, and limited opportunities for advancement – and curtails their ability to participate fully in political, social, economic and community life. Although recent Budgets have seen welcome additional investment in ECEC, structural reform of the system is essential to ensure accessibility. A **fully public-funded and public-delivered system of ECEC** is an absolute necessity to build a care sector that works for children, women, families, educators and providers.

- **Deliver a fully public funded and provided system of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), including through increased investment in ECEC to 1% of national income by 2030 – with an additional €300m in Budget 2025, and €1.6bn by 2030; begin this process by:**
  - Following last year's increases, increase investment in affordability measures to further reduce childcare costs, alongside targeted measures to ensure universal accessibility + affordability to all families and children
  - Pilot the rollout of publicly-run, affordable ECEC services, based on the not-for-profit community model, alongside existing private provision – prioritising areas and communities that are currently marginalised or underserved
  - Ring-fenced funding for educators' wages

## A Universal Right to Care + Support

The current care and support systems pose significant challenges for disabled people, older persons and their families in accessing care and supports, including long waiting lists and geographical blackspots in the availability of home support; a lack of respite support; under-investment in personal assistance supports; a continued over reliance on acute and residential care, including a growing privatisation of nursing home care; and a lack of alternative housing options for individuals to live independently and within the community. Universal homes and community care and support services which appropriately meet the needs of disabled people and older persons are essential. Supports must be rights-based, person-centred and promote autonomy, independence and dignity of the individual.

- **Deliver a rights-based Home Support Scheme with equality of access and availability across the country through appropriate ring-fenced funding**
- **Ensure the Commission on Care is funded to complete gender impact assessments and gender proofing of all research, data and potential recommendations**
- **Legislate for a statutory right to personal assistance for disabled people**
- **Prioritise investment in increasing and providing multiannual funding to support equal access to disability services that are essential to the right to independent living, including Personal Assistant Services, home supports, alternative forms of respite and personalised budgets**

# Women's Health

The provision of universal healthcare is a feminist issue due to the structural inequalities that women face, particularly disabled women, and women from ethnic minority groups in accessing healthcare that appropriately meets their needs. Marginalised women are more likely to face lifetime health problems and die younger because of systemic health inequalities. They are particularly reliant on the public healthcare system and face significant barriers to timely care in a privatised system.<sup>3</sup>

## What is Gender-Sensitive Health Care?

*"Gender-sensitive approaches to health care recognise how socio-political and cultural factors, in addition to biological factors, shape care needs, care delivery and impact of health outcomes. Gender sensitivity considers the impact of multiple marginalisations e.g. when gender intersects with race, ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic factors."<sup>4</sup>*

As a critical determinant of health, gender must be considered in the provision of health and social care in Ireland. Providing **gender-sensitive health services** allow for flexible and accessible services which respond equitably to the diverse needs of all women (in terms of mental health presentations, pathways to services and supports, access to and experiences of services).

While there has been progress in rolling out the HSE's Enhanced Community Care (ECC) programme, further prioritisation is required to increase community healthcare services and reduce pressure on hospital services. This would reduce waiting lists, enhance accessibility, benefiting women, including disabled women, older women, and women seeking mental health supports. This would also result in services being closer to where people live, allowing care to be managed locally where possible.

As a member of the Women's Health Taskforce, NWC welcomed further investment in women's health with the publication of a second Women's Health Action Plan (2024-2025). However, this Plan does not take **a social determinants approach to address gaps in women's health**, with no mention of the inequalities women face with respect to a lack of safe and accessible housing or the disproportionate impact of poverty and the climate crisis on women. This Plan does not go far enough to address the particular needs of marginalised women, or the gaps in certain areas of women's health, including the provision of gender-sensitive mental health services or the improvements required in abortion services in Ireland. Annual investment and robust monitoring and implementation of the Women's Health Action Plan is required to address these gaps, ensuring the experiences of marginalised women are at the centre of new developments in mental health, reproductive health, and the expansion of existing services like the specialist menopause clinics, endometriosis hubs, and the expansion of the Free Contraception Scheme beyond women aged 17-35 years.

## What are the Social Determinants of Health?

These are **non-medical factors** that influence our health outcomes. They relate to our gender, as well as the conditions we are born, grow, work and live in. Bridging health inequalities from a social determinants' perspective means addressing structural inequalities that lead to poor health, like **education, employment, housing, and racism.**

<sup>3</sup> NWC (2019) [Evidence Base for the Development of the Women's Health Action Plan](#)

<sup>4</sup> NWC (2023) [Gender-sensitive Mental Health](#), p. 7



## Universal Healthcare

The Sláintecare framework is a Department of Health and HSE strategy to move Ireland from a two-tier system to one where there is a universal health and social care system for everyone. The current reliance on private hospitals and health services impacts on women's timely access to care. It also creates an imbalance in the provision of health care within society, allowing some to access higher quality treatments and supports faster than others. This widens the health inequalities experienced by marginalised women, including Traveller and Roma women, migrant women, and disabled women. A basic principle of the Sláintecare framework is to change this so that everyone can access the care they need, when they need it, in their own communities, and without incurring undue financial hardship.<sup>5</sup>

Sláintecare acknowledges that population health and well-being involves more than just delivering on health services. By mapping population profiles, Sláintecare's implementation can provide a flexible life course approach to meet the needs of women of at all stages of life, prioritising the provision of high-quality services and health information within the community. Accelerating progress on Sláintecare is vital, as well-designed universal healthcare programmes have positive impacts on women's access to health services that meet their needs.<sup>6</sup>

- **Urgently progress the implementation of Sláintecare by allocating an additional 10% over last year's health budget to continue the delivery and expansion of universal healthcare, including:**
  - Publish 2024–2027 Sláintecare Framework and 2025 Action Plan by Q1 2025
  - Develop patient-centred care models to ensure better primary + community care
  - Expand GP visit cards to children 8-10 years and to households where the median household income is €55,149 or less
  - Extend the chronic disease management programme to women aged 18+ years who are diagnosed with gestational diabetes or pre-eclampsia

## Mental Health

A wealth of research has demonstrated that gender is a significant determinant of mental health difficulties.<sup>7</sup> Many of the risk factors for experiencing mental health difficulties – poverty, violence, low socioeconomic status, insecure employment, and responsibility for care of others – disproportionately impact women. Women also often have varying mental health presentations when compared to men, and their pathways to services and care and support preferences can be different. Gender has also been shown to affect our access to and experiences of health care, this is particularly true for marginalised women – like Traveller and Roma women – who face additional structural barriers to accessing care.<sup>8</sup> Despite the mental health crisis worsening in Ireland in recent years, this Government has not come close to meeting the Sláintecare target for mental health funding to be 10% of the overall health expenditure. Budget 2025 must rectify this, by resourcing a gender-sensitive implementation of Sharing the Vision to reform our mental health system and improve mental health outcomes for all women and girls living in Ireland.

<sup>5</sup> [HSE: Our Strategy for Improving Ireland's Healthcare](#)

<sup>6</sup> Quick, J. et al., (2014) Improving Women's Health through Universal Health Coverage, PLOS Medicine 11(1)

<sup>7</sup> NWC (2023) [Gender-sensitive Mental Health](#)

<sup>8</sup> [All Ireland Traveller Health Study, 2010.](#)

- **An additional €115 million to be allocated to mental health, including:**

- A commitment to a long-term funding strategy which brings the mental health allocation to +10% of the overall health budget by 2030
- Reinstatement of a national leadership role for mental health in the HSE to ensure oversight and leadership in service improvements including the delivery of gender sensitive mental health services
- Deliver on gender-sensitive mental health services through full implementation of Sharing the Vision, ensuring services and staff are resourced through training, education, policies and systems to promote gender sensitivity, complemented by cultural humility and trauma informed practices
- Establishment of Ireland's first Mother & Baby Unit to provide in-patient care and support for mothers experiencing very severe and complex perinatal mental health difficulties; this should be complemented with increased investment in the development and implementation of an updated Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Model of Care

## Women's Health Action Plan

NWC has supported the Department of Health for several years to develop the first ever Women's Health Action Plan (2023-2024) and the subsequent successor Plan (2024-2025). While positive steps have been taken, such as in relation to free contraception, and fertility treatments, more is needed to bridge the stark health inequalities experienced by marginalised women. This includes the health needs of migrant women, Traveller and Roma women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, disabled women, and women who have experienced homelessness, addiction, and gender-based violence. The principles of the new Women's Health Action Plan are to "Listen, Invest and Deliver". In doing so, the Department must adopt a targeted approach to ensure the experiences and perspectives of all women are included. Furthermore, the Department should consider how investment in women's health can tackle the social determinants of health, including how policies relating to housing, climate justice, poverty, and education are affecting women.

- **Ring-fence annual funding of €35 million in women's health services to support the implementation and further development of the Women's Health Action Plan, including:**

- Address the health inequalities experienced by marginalised women by developing targeted, and cultural humility practices in health services embedded with equality data collection
- Continue to roll out the free contraception scheme beyond women aged 17-35 years
- Implement the recommendations of the O'Shea abortion review by ensuring no woman must travel for essential reproductive health care
- Expand publicly funded fertility services with the establishment of a Public Assisted Human Reproductive Treatment Centre
- Support referrals pathways to Specialist Menopause Clinics and increase their capacity



# Zero Tolerance to Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

It is imperative that Budget 2025 addresses domestic, sexual and gender-based violence as a largescale social problem and commits to a strategic response by dedicating budget-lines across the 4 Pillars of the Zero Tolerance Strategy.

Despite policy and legislative progress, violence against women continues to be at epidemic levels. In 2023, Women's Aid<sup>10</sup> saw the highest disclosures of domestic violence ever recorded by the organisation in 50 years. In the same year, the Gardaí

## 'Sex for Rent' Exploitation

In May 2024, NWC published a report<sup>9</sup> on 'Sex for Rent' exploitation and sexual harassment in the private rental market. The report recommends a number of measures to tackle this issue including criminalisation of landlords engaging in or proposing sex-for-rent exploitation, and extending protections for renters. A new and specific named offence for 'Sex For Rent' must be created to clearly target predatory 'landlords'.

received a domestic abuse call every 10 minutes<sup>11</sup> and according to the Sexual Violence Survey published by the Central Statistics office in 2023<sup>12</sup>, 52% of women will experience sexual violence in their lifetime.

The publication of *Zero Tolerance Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*<sup>13</sup> in 2022 was welcomed by the National Women's Council, and crucially its commitment to establish an integrated all-of-government national response through the creation of a new statutory agency, Cuan, established in January 2024.

In 2023, the National Women's Council<sup>14</sup> and the Observatory on Violence Against Women<sup>15</sup> published key documents highlighting how victim-survivors' survivors experiences are not being sufficiently considered in the state response to gender-based

violence, in the justice system in particular and in the implementation of the Zero Tolerance Strategy in general. Both documents make vital recommendations to put the needs and voices of survivors at the centre of the response to gender-based violence and these must be urgently implemented and resourced.

Specialist services, key to the implementation of the Zero Tolerance Strategy providing vital supports for survivors have reported concerns regarding the uncertain and short-term nature of funds

## The Zero Tolerance Strategy & Cuan: co-design and survivor centred structures

The Zero Tolerance Strategy and the Implementation Plan 2024 recognise the need to embed a model of co-design and the key role that civil society organisations play in the delivery of the actions. It is also the Strategy's ambition to embed a survivor-centred approach, placing the needs and priorities of victims of DSGBV at the forefront of responses.

<sup>9</sup> NWC (2024) ['Sex for Rent' An NWC Report on Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment in the Rental Housing Market](#)

<sup>10</sup> Women's Aid (2024) [Annual Impact Report 2023](#)

<sup>11</sup> Mc Donagh, D. (2024) [Gardaí received a domestic abuse call every 10 minutes last year](#), Irish Mirror

<sup>12</sup> Central Statistics Office (2023) [Sexual Violence Survey - Disclosure of Experiences Key Findings](#)

<sup>13</sup> Department of Justice (2022) [Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence](#)

<sup>14</sup> Egan, N. and O'Malley Dunlop, E. (2023) [A Report on the Intersection of the Criminal Justice, Private Family Law and Public Law Childcare Processes in Relation to Domestic and Sexual Violence](#), Department of Justice and the National Women's Council

<sup>15</sup> Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women (2023) [Monitoring the Implementation of Zero Tolerance: The Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence](#)

allocated to combat DSGBV.<sup>16</sup> Given that organisations provide services to highly vulnerable, hard to reach, minority and minoritised women, funding shortages have a particularly consequential impact on communities that experience intersectional forms of violence. Specialised support organisations and civil society must be adequately resourced through Cuan to meet the increasing demand of services.

Government must ensure the availability of accessible, quality, specialist and community-based domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services so that all people who experience domestic, sexual and gender-based violence have access to integrated services in the short, medium and longer term. The Third National Strategy is ground-breaking in its recognition of the inherent violence and abuse of commercial sexual exploitation of women in the sex trade and the establishment of strategies to ensure those, primarily women, in prostitution have access to safety, health care, support and exit routes.

Budget 2025 must have strong budgetary commitments to fully implement the Strategy, including actions to ensure co-design with civil society and to put survivor voices at the centre of responses, and to properly resource Cuan in the provision of funding for frontline services, advocacy and research.

- **Resource Cuan, the new Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency, to provide appropriate, secure and multi-annual funding to:**
  - frontline services supporting victim-survivors of DSGBV
  - organisations working on advocacy, awareness and research, including the Observatory on Violence Against Women and Girls
- **Fully resource implementation with clear budget lines for each pillar of the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, including:**
  - Free legal advice for all victim-survivors of DSGBV, acknowledging the gendered nature of constraints experienced by them in accessing legal advice
  - Resource physical court environments for the provision of sufficient waiting/consultation rooms, and separate facilities for victim-survivors
  - Ensure comprehensive socio-economic supports, including a long-term housing approach, for victim-survivors of all forms of violence against women:
    - Resource an integrated gender-sensitive emergency accommodation response for victim-survivors fleeing violence, including the provision of more refuge units, especially in counties with no available refuges
    - Improve access to stable housing across all housing tenure types for victim-survivors, including supports for long-term housing through a clear pathway out of refuges
    - Fund comprehensive exit pathways for women in prostitution and sex trafficking, including health, employment, housing, legal, education and training supports

<sup>16</sup> Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women (2022) [Shadow Report to Greivio in respect of Ireland](#)

# End the Housing + Homelessness Crisis

The housing, homelessness and accommodation crisis continues to have a devastating impact on women and families. Ireland has one of the highest rates of female homelessness in the EU<sup>21</sup> even while many 'hidden homeless' are excluded from official statistics (including women in refuges and Traveller and Roma families forced to live on roadsides).<sup>22</sup>

**No. of people accessing emergency accommodation 20–26<sup>th</sup> May 2024<sup>20</sup>**

**3,810 women**

**4,316 children**

Particular groups of marginalised women are affected by crises in different ways. Traveller and Roma women, disabled women, migrant women, older women, victim-survivors of domestic,

sexual and gender-based violence, and lone parents all face significant barriers to accessing secure, affordable and safe housing. Domestic abuse is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. According to Safe Ireland, 180 women and 275 children seek emergency accommodation every month and in 2021 more than 3,000 requests for refuge could not be met by services.<sup>23</sup>

Older women are more likely to be living alone than men, and are more likely to live in low-quality housing<sup>26</sup>. Migrant women face a range of barriers, with migrant women from outside the EU more likely to live in overcrowded housing and experience homelessness<sup>27</sup>.

**Disability + homelessness**

**27%** of people who are homeless have a disability<sup>18</sup>

More than **1,200** disabled people under 65 are still living in nursing homes<sup>19</sup>

The recent publication of the Housing Commission's Report has laid out starkly the accommodation deficit that faces our society – up to a

quarter of a million homes.<sup>28</sup> Ireland's housing strategy remains over-reliant on the private sector to build homes and to provide housing through the private rented sector.

We need a housing policy that delivers secure, affordable accommodation for all and which ensures that housing strategy, policy and provision is gender-sensitive.

**Traveller and Roma accommodation + homelessness**

**46%** of Roma reported being homeless at some stage in their lives

**39%** of Travellers meet the European definition of homelessness compared to 6% of the general population<sup>17</sup>

**Lone parents + family homelessness**

**57%** of all families accessing emergency accommodation are one parent families<sup>24</sup>

This is despite the fact that one parent families make up only 17% of all families, per Census 2022<sup>25</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Pavee Point (2023) [List of Issues to UN CEDAW, September 2023](#)

<sup>18</sup> ESRI (2018) [Discrimination and Inequality in Housing in Ireland](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Parliamentary Question](#) response by Minister Anne Rabbitte to Violet-Anne Wynne TD, 20/03/2024

<sup>20</sup> Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (2024) [Monthly Homelessness Report May 2024](#)

<sup>21</sup> Bretheron, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) [Women's Homelessness \(European Evidence Review\)](#)

<sup>22</sup> Cork and Kerry RTAWG (2022) [Traveller Homelessness \(A Hidden Crisis\)](#)

<sup>23</sup> Safe Ireland (2021) [Women's Domestic Abuse Refuges: Submission to Oireachtas Justice Committee](#)

<sup>24</sup> Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (2024) [Monthly Homelessness Report May 2024](#)

<sup>25</sup> Central Statistics Office (2023) [Census 2022](#)

<sup>26</sup> Age Action (2023) [Spotlight on Income in Older Age](#)

<sup>27</sup> ESRI (2022) [The integration of non-EU migrant women in Ireland](#)

<sup>28</sup> Housing Commission (2024) [Housing Commission Report](#)

## Build more homes

The state must dramatically increase in its own direct provision of housing, focusing on the provision of social, cost-rental and affordable homes. Government should aim to increase housing provision towards a target of ownership of at least 20% of total housing by Approved Housing Bodies and Local Authorities.

- **Increase investment in state-led housing for provision of public, affordable and cost-rental homes, gender-proofing all housing and accommodation policies and investment**

## Strengthen rights for tenants

Ensuring women in private rental accommodation are protected from exploitation, able to live in secure and affordable housing of an adequate standard, and that further numbers entering homelessness are stopped, can only happen if the state takes a more active role in ensuring and strengthening the rights of tenants in both state and private rental accommodation.

- **Introduce a rent freeze and a new system of rent controls, while banning evictions to reduce numbers entering homelessness**
- **Broaden and strengthen the remit of the Residential Tenancies Board, and increase spending on tenant protections and private rent inspections**
- **Legislate to bring licensee arrangements under the Residential Tenancy Act**

## Ensure access to housing for marginalised women

Particular groups of women are affected differently by the crisis in housing, homelessness and accommodation, and targeted measures and supports are needed.

- **Traveller and Roma women:** full resourcing of the forthcoming National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, including actions related to accommodation
- **Disabled women:** full resourcing of National Housing Strategy for Disabled People Implementation Plan and sufficient funding for all areas of disability housing policy
- **Older women:** increase investment in housing supports for older people, including housing aid grants and home support grants
- **Victim-survivors of DSGBV:** Resource an integrated gender-sensitive emergency accommodation response for victim-survivors fleeing violence, including the provision of more refuge units, especially in counties with none available
- **Women leaving prison:** invest in measures to support the community reintegration of women leaving the criminal justice system and to counter recidivism, particularly those assessed to be low-risk to society, including step-down community-based facilities with supported accommodation and other support services
- **Lone parents:** reconvene the Family Homeless Prevention sub-group as part of the National Homeless Action Committee and develop a family homelessness action plan

# Feminist Climate Justice

Budget 2025 will arrive at a critical point for Ireland's dedication to people and planet. 2025 marks the end of the country's first Carbon Budget, and the start of the final five years to meet our first carbon emissions reductions target and to succeed in eliminating poverty, gender inequality other social inequalities set out in the Sustainable Development Goals. Action on climate and biodiversity must be at the core of all investment in Budget 2025.

Climate issues cannot be seen as separate to the other pressing issues in Irish society today, such as access to housing,

healthcare and the cost-of-living crisis. The climate crisis threatens to exacerbate the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis, the housing crisis, and the aftereffects of both COVID-19 and austerity – not only for women, but for other marginalised groups such as Travellers, disabled people, lone parents and migrants. Because of this, the climate crisis cannot be tackled effectively by siloing it away as a separate policy or budget area detached from all other sectors in Irish society. All policy now is and must be climate policy.

## What is Intersectional Feminist Climate Justice?

*“Experiences of climate change need to be understood both in relation to and adding to the experiences of inequality particular groups already encounter, including women and marginalised communities. Without this understanding, responses to climate change are highly likely to perpetuate and exacerbate existing inequalities.”<sup>31</sup>*

Investment in Budget 2025 and beyond must include the retrofitting of our housing stock, the electrification and expansion of our public transport fleet, the reduction of air pollution to improve public health, and women's participation in our green society and economy through universal childcare provision, and eradicating poverty and violence to ensure a truly Just Transition for all.

Data and research gaps on the impacts of climate and biodiversity issues for women and marginalised groups must also be tackled. The transition to a carbon-neutral, sustainable economy presents an opportunity to reduce social inequalities and to transform our society into one that is just, equitable, strong and caring.

Our **Feminist Communities for Climate Justice** project in collaboration with Community Work Ireland published a report in April of this year, the **Feminist Climate Justice Report**<sup>33</sup>, which reviews Irish climate and climate-adjacent policy to assess its impact on women and girls alongside other marginalised communities in Ireland. This report is the first of its kind, and we plan on further developing policy, advocacy and Budget work from its findings in pursuit of a net-zero transition that leaves no one behind.

## Women + Energy Poverty

**One in three households** in Ireland are classified as living in energy poverty<sup>29</sup>

Those most impacted by energy poverty are **lone parents renting private accommodation**<sup>30</sup>

## Women + safety on public transport

**55% of women** stated that they would not use public transport at night<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> ESRI (2022) [Energy Poverty and Deprivation in Ireland](#)

<sup>30</sup> Dukelow, F., Forde, C. and Busteed, E. (2024) [Feminist Climate Justice Report](#), p. 67

<sup>31</sup> Dukelow, F., Forde, C. and Busteed, E. (2024) [Feminist Climate Justice Report](#), p. 20

<sup>32</sup> Transport Infrastructure Ireland (2020) [Travelling in a Woman's Shoes](#), p. 3

<sup>33</sup> Dukelow, F., Forde, C. and Busteed, E. (2024) [Feminist Climate Justice Report](#)

## Gender-proof all climate policies and investment

Women are more likely to be hardest hit by the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, in Ireland and across the world.<sup>34</sup> Climate mitigation and adaptation policies have different impacts for men and women, and they can be powerful instruments for tackling social as well as environmental inequalities – only if they are gender, poverty and equality-proofed.

- **Gender, equality and poverty-proof all climate policies and investment**
- **Centre economic success on socio-economic and environmental equality and wellbeing**

## Care Work = Green Work

Investment in care and social infrastructure must be central to the green transition. Care work is green work, and must be a core part of a regenerative and distributive new economic model and society. We must reorient our economic policy towards a greater focus on state investment in care and support work, and on social infrastructure – work that simultaneously repairs and regenerates our environment, provides decent work, and tackles poverty and inequality.

- **Reform macro-economic state policy frameworks like the National Development Plan for greater focus to encourage and invest in economic diversification towards non-emissions-intensive activities, including social infrastructure such as care and support<sup>35</sup>**

## A Just Transition for Women

The voices of women must be central to the work of the newly-established statutory Just Transition Commission, not just in terms of transitioning to green employment and industry – but in recognising and valuing the role of women in public service provision, care work, and the fostering of social and community inclusion.

- **Ensure experiences of women are included within the Just Transition Commission, including on community, voluntary, care and support work and that the work of the Commission includes gender impact assessment and gender and equality proofing**

## Ensuring Food Justice

Recognising the specific issues experienced by women in the transition to a regenerative, distributive society is essential. Farmers, with rich knowledge and understanding of the land, must be supported and encouraged to conserve and restore biodiversity.

- **Expand approaches and incentives to diversify, care for and restore climate and biodiversity-friendly land use, farm practices and food production<sup>36</sup>**
- **Increase agency of women in agriculture to fully participate through increased funding and equal access to resources and schemes like TAMS and LEADER**

<sup>34</sup> European Parliament (2015) [The Gender Dimension of Climate Justice](#)

<sup>35</sup> As recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency: [Ireland's Climate Change Assessment Synthesis Report](#) (E.4, p. 5)

<sup>36</sup> Environmental Pillar, SCC and SWAN (2021) [Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland](#)



## Safe + accessible public/active transport infrastructure

Transport is not a gender-neutral issue. Understanding the different ways in which women use transport is essential to building inclusive transport infrastructure, where everyone feels comfortable and safe going to and from work, schools, college, creches, shops and leisure. We need an inclusive approach to transport infrastructure, ensuring that all needs are catered for – those of women, disabled people, people in rural Ireland and all members of marginalised communities.

- **Prioritise and increase investment in public and active travel infrastructure, focusing on rural transport and making transport safer and more accessible**
- **Reduce the cost of public transport for people who struggle to access it:**
  - Introduce a new integrated transport scheme for disabled people that meets the needs of the individual, and ensure all new transport spending incorporates the needs of disabled people
  - Expansion of the Free Travel Scheme (*see Social Protection section*)
  - Continue extending the Young Adult Travel Card in Budget 2025, and implement zero cost travel for children and teenagers
  - Keep the School Transport Scheme free for the 2024/2025 academic year

## Deliver Energy Justice

The enormous increase in energy costs since the Russian invasion of Ukraine has hit many of the most marginalised people in Ireland the hardest. Women are at greater risk of energy poverty due to their lower average incomes, and lone parents, older women living alone, disabled people and carers are particularly at risk.

- **Target and increase investment in retrofitting schemes and measures, prioritising marginalised groups and those affected by energy poverty including women; disabled people; migrants; people seeking refuge and international protection; Travellers and Roma; and lone parents**
- **Develop a measurement for energy poverty that is not solely expenditure-based, and move beyond the household as the sole unit of measurement for energy poverty**
- **Adopt targeted measures to ensure Travellers and Roma living in all types of accommodation can avail of energy upgrades and SEAI grants**
- **Develop a scheme similar to the Building Energy Rating Certificate (BER) for trailers, caravans and mobile homes**
- **Develop research capacity to analyse the gendered effects of energy poverty**
- **Expansion and increase of Fuel Allowance (*see Social Protection section*)**

# An Adequate Income for All Women

Our work and social protection systems were built for a different era and based on a largely 'male breadwinner' understanding of both the labour market and social protection systems – resulting in significant gender gaps in income, wealth, pensions, and access to supports.<sup>40</sup>

Women bore the brunt of decisions to cut social protection payments during the austerity years because women are

Deprivation rate (SILC 2023 <sup>41</sup> )	
Overall population	17.3%
Women	18.7%
Lone parents <sup>42</sup>	45.6%
Unable to work <sup>43</sup>	44.7%

more likely to be lone parents, to be outside the paid labour market

because of unpaid caring responsibilities, and to benefit more from child-related supports.<sup>44</sup> These structural inequalities are compounded further by the cost-of-living crisis, the pandemic, and the climate crisis, which all continue to impact women disproportionately hard.

Gender Pay/Pensions Gap <sup>37</sup>	
Overall (mean hourly)	9.6%
Private sector	17.5%
Public sector	-0.2%
Working Pattern Gap <sup>38</sup>	28.3%
Gender Pension Gap <sup>39</sup>	35%

We need significant structural reform of our social protection system to support all forms of social participation while ensuring that no one is left without the income they need to live.

## Benchmark social protection payments to MESL

Every year there is enormous uncertainty at Budget time for people depending on social protection and state pension payments – what will this Budget mean for me, and will my payment increase by enough to offset increases in my cost-of-living? Since January 2020, inflation has risen by a total of 20% – costs now are one-fifth higher than they were before the pandemic. Yet increases in social protection rates have not kept pace. The last two Budgets have relied on once-off expenditure to get people through the cost-of-living crisis – but prices have not returned to where they were four years ago, and are still going up. Budget 2025 must address income security and adequacy. To restore lost purchasing power of supports and to make a significant move towards income adequacy, base social protection rates should be increased by €20, and Increase for a Qualified Child by €6 for younger children and €15 for older children, as recommend by the *Vincentian Minimum Essential Standard of Living Research Centre*<sup>45</sup>.

- **Establish the MESL as the benchmark for social protection payments by 2026**
- **Increase base social protection rates by €20, and the Increase for a Qualified Child by €6 for children under 12, and €15 for children 12 and over**

<sup>37</sup> CSO (2023) [Structure of Earnings Survey](#), Table 3.1

<sup>38</sup> *Part-time mean hourly pay for women compared to full-time mean hourly pay for men*

<sup>39</sup> ESRI (2019) [Gender, pensions and income in retirement](#)

<sup>40</sup> National Economic and Social Council (2022) [Ireland's Social Welfare System: Gender, Family and Class](#)

<sup>41</sup> CSO (2024) [Survey on Income and Living Conditions](#), Table 5.1

<sup>42</sup> Household type: *Lone parent with at least one child aged less than 25*

<sup>43</sup> Principal Economic Status (aged 16 years and over): *Unable to work due to long-standing health problems*

<sup>44</sup> Doorley, K. at al (2018) [The Gender impact of Irish budgetary policy 2008-2018](#). Dublin: ESRI

<sup>45</sup> Vincentian MESL Centre (2024) [MESL 2024 Report and Pre-Budget Submission](#)

- **Adjust income disregards, means tests and eligibility thresholds to reflect changes in social protection rates and the Living Wage/National Minimum Wage**

## Introduce a Universal State Pension

As women are more likely to be in low paid, part-time jobs on precarious contracts, and are more likely to take time out of paid employment because of caring and supporting responsibilities, they are less likely to be eligible for the full State Pension (Contributory), less likely to be covered by occupational or private pension schemes, and more reliant upon the means-tested State Pension (Non-Contributory).<sup>46</sup> Older women have also faced structural barriers like the Marriage Bar and exclusion from new schemes to recognise care and support – and these issues should be rectified through a retrospective scheme.

Moving to a **Universal State Pension**, guaranteeing adequate income for all at pension age, is the best way to support women and those who encounter barriers to the labour market, incl. disabled people, carers and supporters, lone parents, Travellers and Roma.

- **Make concrete steps to move towards a Universal State Pension system for all<sup>47</sup>; and benchmark it to 34% of average earnings as called for by the Pension Promise Campaign<sup>48</sup>**

## Individualise the social protection system

Our social protection system continues to be rooted in a ‘male breadwinner’ approach to paid and unpaid work. This is evidenced by the ‘qualified adult’ system – where payments to two-parent families comprise a payment for the main claimant and a Qualified Adult (QA) payment to additional adults in the household. The available data shows that 90% of QAs are women.<sup>49</sup> This system creates a relationship of dependency, as QAs do not receive an income in their own right and are excluded from many active labour market programmes that require a core social protection payment.

The Roadmap for Social Inclusion has a commitment to examine individualisation, and the Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality also recommended it.<sup>50</sup> The Covid-19 income supports have demonstrated that it is possible to administer payments in an individualised way.<sup>51</sup>

We now have an opportunity to abolish the system of dependency and implement an individualised approach, based on equality with individual entitlements for all women.

- **Adopt a fully individualised social protection system so that women are treated as individuals, rather than dependents of their partners**

<sup>46</sup> National Women’s Council of Ireland (2021) [Submission to the Commission on Pensions](#)

<sup>47</sup> Per Social Justice Ireland ([Budget Choices: Pre-Budget Submission, Budget 2024](#)), cost of universalising the state pension and increasing it by €25 a week is €1.5bn.

<sup>48</sup> Pension Promise (2024) [Campaign website](#)

<sup>49</sup> NES (2021) [Background Paper 151/4, 2021 – Ireland’s Social Welfare System: Gender, Family and Class](#)

<sup>50</sup> [Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025](#), Recommendation 36; [Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality Report](#), Recommendation 13

<sup>51</sup> ERSI (2021) [COVID-19 and the Irish Welfare System](#)

# Supporting women's full participation

A woman's place is wherever she wants it to be. Our state investment in social protection, employment and education and training must take this into account, and support women wherever they are at every stage in their life.

These systems must recognise the diverse nature of women's lives, and that different women need different forms of support at different times. Women undertake the lion's share of paid and unpaid care and support, and they are more likely to be engaged in part-time employment. The work of women in community and voluntary structures across the country is vital to our society. Yet all of this work is undervalued and under-supported by the state.

We need an economy, and a social protection, employment and education system, that allows for flexibility and engagement in different forms of socially valuable activity – while guaranteeing an adequate income, access to public services, and the opportunity for paid employment with fair wages and decent conditions. Until we properly support and value all forms of important social participation, not just engagement with paid employment, we will not be able to dismantle many of the structural gender inequalities in our society and economy.

## Pilot a Participation Income

A **Participation Income (PI)** is an alternative to our current social protection system, which is overly focused on transitions from protection to work at the expense of other forms of participation. A Participation Income would recognise other meaningful social contributions such as care and support or voluntary work, and other forms of work that contribute to the common good. Countries like The Netherlands have taken steps towards a system that takes care and support and other socially useful forms of contribution into account.<sup>52</sup>

A Participation Income has been suggested by organisations like Family Carer's Ireland<sup>53</sup>, and the ongoing pilot of the Basic Income for Artists provides many clear learnings as to the impact that a form of Participation Income could have<sup>54</sup>. The National Economic and Social Council have proposed piloting a Participation Income<sup>55</sup>, and we believe that this should be done through a small number of local authorities initially.

- **Pilot a Participation Income (PI) which recognises meaningful social contributions such as care and support, voluntary and community work and includes a robust gender analysis and impact assessment**

## Reform and expand our family leave system

Reforming and expanding family leave entitlements is vital in supporting women, and it also plays an important role in helping redistribute unpaid care and support responsibilities more equally. Our leave system must also be linked to the availability of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, to avoid gaps in care provision. Payments for family leave in Ireland are much lower than EU norms, and there is a larger gap here between the end of paid leave and the start of Early

<sup>52</sup> Murphy, M + McGann, M (2020) [Reconfiguring Welfare in an Eco-Social State: Participation Income and Universal Services](#);

<sup>53</sup> Family Carers Ireland and Maynooth University (2023) [Towards a Participation Income for Family Carers](#)

<sup>54</sup> Government of Ireland (2024) [Basic Income for the Arts](#)

<sup>55</sup> NESCC (2020) [The Future of the Irish Social Welfare System: Participation and Protection](#)

Childhood Education and Care services.<sup>56</sup> Payments in most OECD countries offer at least 50% of average earnings – with many offering 100%<sup>57</sup> – while in Ireland less than a third of average earnings are replaced. Family leave payments must be increased and benchmarked to keep up with inflation, as well as beginning the process of bringing payments more in line with EU norms.

- **Increase Maternity, Adoptive, Paternity and Parent’s Benefit payments to an adequate benchmarked level, and examine the implementation of a percentage-of-earnings model of leave/benefit**
- **Convert existing unpaid Parental Leave to paid leave**
- **Ensure lone parents have access to the same leave entitlements as couples**
- **Implement the Government commitment to provide for deferral of maternity leave for new mothers/birthing parents during their treatment for serious illness<sup>58</sup>**

## Strengthen women’s employment conditions + opportunities

The Department of Social Protection has a key role in creating the conditions in which women can access decent, secure work that is compatible with care and support responsibilities. While lone parents, migrants and ethnic minority women, Traveller and Roma women, disabled women and young women already all experience heightened barriers to labour market participation, for many women paid work is no guarantee of income adequacy. Women predominate in sectors with low paid and precarious work; 6 out of 10 low paid workers are women.<sup>59</sup> It is essential that women can combine care and support, employment and other forms of social contribution in a way that facilitates them to obtain decent work and have a secure, alternative source of income so they have a realistic option of refusing work that does not pay. Investment and reform must include improving pay and conditions in all low paid work predominated by women, recognising the importance of collective bargaining in achieving that goal.

- **Legislate for collective bargaining rights**
- **Expand the Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021 to include organisations with more than 25 employees and set up a centralised database of this information**
  - Pursue active policies that enhance pay and conditions for women in paid employment, including through addressing the Gender Pay Gap
- **Ensure Qualified Adults can access a range of active labour market programmes**
- **Resource a national survey to ascertain skills, education, health, care/support and employment experience of Qualified Adults to address data gaps**
- **Ensure participation in advocacy/policy forums does not affect eligibility for social protection supports**
- **Develop supports for women returning to work from long-term illness**

<sup>56</sup> Oireachtas Library & Research Services (2021) [L&RS Bill Digest: Family Law Bill 2021](#)

<sup>57</sup> OECD (2021) [OECD Family Database: F2.1. Parental Leave Systems](#)

<sup>58</sup> Irish Cancer Society (2023) [Leave Our Leave Campaign](#)

<sup>59</sup> Eurostat (2023) [Wages and Labour costs](#)

- **Abolish mandatory retirement so older workers can continue in employment beyond the age of 65**
- **Fund a pilot of the four-day week model in the public sector, and implement policies for greater access to flexible work arrangements across all sectors**

## Support women in education

Ensuring fair and equal access to education for women is a vital driver for gender equality, along with ensuring fair and decent wages and conditions for women working in education. As with employment, the time and work needed to balance care and support responsibilities with attendance at classes and study can be prohibitive.

Financial barriers have a huge impact for many women, with one in five lone parents in Ireland unable to access formal education for financial reasons.<sup>60</sup> Many marginalised women, such as migrant women, Traveller and Roma women, disabled women and lone parents face significant barriers in accessing education.

Employment in education is also heavily gendered, with women making up 98% of early years educators<sup>61</sup>, and 85% of primary-level teachers, and 68% of secondary-level teachers.<sup>62</sup> There is a large gender divide in academia, with women holding 71% of part-time temporary academic jobs, while men hold 60% of permanent, full-time roles.<sup>63</sup>

- **Ensure the part-time SUSI pilot scheme to be rolled out in Sept 2024 is available and accessible across a broad range of courses and educational institutions**
- **Increase the Cost of Education payment for those receiving the Back to Education Allowance to assist lone parents and others returning to education**
- **Finalise and fully resource the *Traveller and Roma Education Strategy***
- **Support graduate students, including by:**
  - Raising the postgraduate stipend rate to a minimum of €25,000<sup>64</sup>
  - Introducing contractual terms through statute to guarantee maternity leave and other family leave and benefit entitlements for postgraduate students
- **Support refugees and international protection applicants in education:**
  - Providing an education stipend for food and transport specifically for people seeking international protection
  - Providing funding for higher and further educational institutions to increase their capacity to enrol refugees and international protection applications
  - Expand eligibility for Free Fees Initiative to all international protection applicants

<sup>60</sup> SVP (2019) [Working, Parenting, Struggling? An analysis of the employment and living conditions of one parent families in Ireland](#)

<sup>61</sup> Big Start Campaign (2019) [New research shows that Early Years is the lowest paid sector](#)

<sup>62</sup> CSO (2021) [Women and Men in Ireland Hub](#)

<sup>63</sup> Women in Research Ireland (2022) [Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education Opening Statement](#)

<sup>64</sup> In line with the [Independent Report on Supports for PhD Researchers in Ireland](#)



# Women's inclusion + leadership

## An inclusive + sustainable community sector

The women's sector in Ireland has been the key driver in highlighting and addressing issues of isolation, economic dependency, poverty, violence, and powerlessness among women in all their diversity. However, ongoing underinvestment in the community development sector and local women's organisations has exacerbated social exclusion across the island. Jobs in the community sector, predominantly held by women, continue to be insecure and low paid.

This has enormously impacted the capacity of women's groups for collective action, political analysis and for grassroots community development to address persistent inequalities in local communities and support women's representation, participation and inclusion. Funding for women's community organisations, and for community funding programmes like SICAP, remains well below 2008 levels – even before cost increases since then.<sup>6566</sup> Women in rural communities experience additional barriers to participation, due to underinvestment in social infrastructure.<sup>67</sup>

The community sector is particularly important in fostering inclusion and celebrating diversity within communities right across the island. With the growth of violence and hate in recent months directed at marginalised groups such as migrants and international protection applicants in particular, the community sector is more essential than ever in building inclusive communities that welcome and support everyone. The community sector cannot effectively do this work without adequate funding.

- **Increase funding, including multi-annual state funding, to properly resource women's community organisations, and the broader community sector**
- **Ensure funding for services and programmes provides meaningful employment with decent terms and conditions for workers, including:**
  - Pay scales commensurate and in alignment with public sector peers
  - Pension provision, paid sick leave, and paid maternity leave

## Supporting All-Island links

Women have contributed enormously to peacebuilding, reconciliation and all island development. Women through community development have brought a bottom-up approach to sustainable peacebuilding, building cross-community and cross-border relations and partnerships. Despite the important role played by women we have been historically underrepresented at the decision-making table.

The impact of Brexit continues to reveal itself and wreak havoc on the women's community and voluntary sector. The loss of EU funding to civil society organisations in the North has negatively impacted some of the most marginalised groups in our society. Community and women's groups are crucial in supporting the participation of women from different backgrounds, and in particular women most distant from decision-making processes, in political and public life including Traveller and Roma, migrant and refugee women, disabled women, young women and LGBTQ+ women.

<sup>65</sup> The Wheel (2023) [Family Resource Centre National Forum call for 3.34 million in core funding](#)

<sup>66</sup> Irish Local Development Work (2023) [Budget 2023: Protecting Communities & Promoting Social Inclusion](#)

<sup>67</sup> National Women's Council (2021) [Paper on Women in Rural Communities](#)

NWC's All-Island Women's Forum provides a space for women on an all-island basis for cross border cooperation and dialogue. The Women's Forum also builds sustainable North-South links, provides a space for marginalised communities, and builds better understanding and inter-community links. This unique project needs support as do the cross border relationships established through the Forum. This should take the form of a 'Women's Fund' which would be ring-fenced funding as part of the programme of work of the Shared Island Unit under the Dept of Taoiseach.

- **Increase core funding to the National Women's Council to advance full equality for women on an All-Island basis**
- **Ringfence specific funding in future Shared Island programmes in the form of a 'Women's Fund' for women's organisations working in the areas of peacebuilding, reconciliation, and North/South-cooperation on the island**

## Women in local and national government

Ensuring that the voices of women are included in decision-making forums and that their contribution is supported and resourced is key to tackling gender inequalities. At the national level, this should include increased funding for the National Women's Council, recognised by Government as a key body advocating on women's concerns and perspectives, to continue to advance women's equality.

With its proximity to the lived experience of women, local government is uniquely positioned to strengthen women's participation in decision making processes and improve the representation of their interests. However, there was no breakthrough for women in the Local Elections 2024, with women making up only 26% of Councillors.<sup>68</sup> Local political experience is also a key route to national office for women, significantly more so than for men. Measures must be introduced to adequately resource local authorities to support women's engagement in local government, including the implementation of gender quotas at local government level, and implementation of more family friendly policies and procedures.

Women Councillors have sought to increase their influence through the development of local and regional caucuses across Ireland, enabling women to transcend party lines to share their experiences, support one another in running for and assuming office, and secure progress on women's issues. Funding for these caucuses needs to be sustainable into 2025 and beyond.

Legislation and practical measures to ensure the inclusion of marginalised women, including Traveller and Roma women, working class women, disabled women, migrant women, the LGBTQ+ community and women in rural communities, must be introduced. These women often experience the impact of policy-making the most, and face additional barriers in achieving full and equal participation in public and political life.

- **Reform remuneration for Councillors by allowing childcare/care and support costs as an expenditure category for Councillors**
- **Introduce maternity leave provision for members of the Oireachtas**
- **Increase funding for development of local and regional Women's Caucuses**

<sup>68</sup> NWCI (2024) [No breakthrough for women in Local Elections 2024](#)

# A Just Taxation + Expenditure System

We need to move towards a tax system that is gender-sensitive, equitable, progressive, and both environmentally and socially sustainable. Income tax cuts for middle and higher earners like those introduced in the last two budgets disproportionately support men and should be avoided in favour of more spending on public service provision to tackle gender inequality.

<b>Standard rate pension tax relief</b>	<b>+€423m<sup>69</sup></b>
Private pension tax reliefs benefit higher earners, who are disproportionately men	
<b>End harmful direct and indirect fossil fuel subsidies<sup>70</sup></b>	
Fossil fuel subsidies (est. €2.2bn in 2020) should be reviewed and harmful subsidies discontinued	
<b>Introduce a wealth tax at graduated rates on wealth above €4.7m</b>	<b>+€8.2bn</b>
Research from Oxfam shows that a tax on individuals with assets above €4.7m in Ireland would raise €8.2bn annually, at graduated rates of 2%, 3% and 5% <sup>71</sup>	
<b>Examine how employers' PRSI can be increased to fund social infrastructure</b>	
Employers' PRSI is currently around half of the EU average, and recent increase are not enough to change this; a 1% increase in PRSI would increase revenue by €850m a year <sup>72</sup>	
<b>Introduce a Financial Transaction Tax (FTT)</b>	<b>+€350m<sup>73</sup></b>
An FTT discourages speculative finance whilst simultaneously generating revenue for investment in social infrastructure; the state should support a progressive European FTT too	
<b>Introduce a refundable tax credits system</b>	<b>-€140m<sup>74</sup></b>
Introduce a refundable income tax credits system to ensure that all those in the tax system fully benefit from tax, particularly benefiting those on low-paid and part-time employment	
<b>Minimum effective rate of Corporation Tax at 6%</b>	<b>+€1bn<sup>75</sup></b>
Ensure the adoption and implementation of a minimum effective corporation tax rate at 6%	
<b>Procurement process reform</b>	
Support a living wage, a reduced Gender Pay Gap and better pay + conditions by attaching social criteria to government procurement processes and employer incentive schemes	

<sup>69</sup> Revenue (2022) [Revenue Ready Reckoner – Post Budget 2023](#)

<sup>70</sup> Social Justice Ireland (2022) [Time to Review Fossil Fuel Subsidies](#)

<sup>71</sup> Oxfam International (2023) [Survival of the Richest: How we must tax the super-rich now to fight inequality](#)

<sup>72</sup> NERI (2021) [Submission to the Commission on Pensions](#); Dept of Finance (2019) [Letter to Brendan Howlin TD re budget costings \(2019\)](#)

<sup>73</sup> Social Justice Ireland (2023) [Budget Choices: Pre-Budget Submission, Budget 2024](#)

<sup>74</sup> Social Justice Ireland (2023) [Budget Choices: Pre-Budget Submission, Budget 2024](#)

<sup>75</sup> Social Justice Ireland (2023) [Budget Choices: Pre-Budget Submission, Budget 2024](#)

# Social Protection Reform

Base social protection rates	State Pension
<p>Restore all base social protection rates to their 2020 purchasing power levels, and increase towards adequacy as recommended MESL Research Centre</p> <p>This will help give households stability and certainty, and progress towards adequacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raise all base social protection rates by <b>€20</b></li> </ul>	<p>Introduce a Universal State Pension</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the interim, increase the state pension to a benchmark of 34% of average earnings<sup>76</sup></li> </ul> <p>Acknowledge the previous injustice of the 'marriage bar' with a once-off, ring-fenced retrospective scheme</p> <p>Include women born before 1<sup>st</sup> Sept 1946 in the Homemaker's and Homecaring Periods schemes</p>

## Disability

Cost-of-Disability Payment	Disability-related Social Protection Reform	Personal Assistance Support
<p>Provide a recurring cost of disability payment of €50 per week to those in receipt of a disability-related payment</p>	<p>Any reform of disability-related social protection payments should be done in a manner that is in line with our UNCRPD obligations and as part of a whole-of-Government approach to reform of disability matters</p>	<p>Provide a statutory right to Personal Assistance, ensuring necessary support for full, active participation of disabled people in society</p>

## Carers

Carer's Allowance means-test	Carer's Allowance disregard	Care work + part-time employment
<p>Abolish the Carer's Allowance means-test, moving towards incorporation of Carer's Allowance into a Participation Income model<sup>77</sup></p>	<p>In the interim while moving to abolish the means-test, following last year's increase further raise Carer's Allowance disregard to €1,000 (couple) and €500 (single)</p>	<p>Recognise care responsibilities so those working part-time do not have to prove they can work full time to be eligible for Jobseeker's Payments</p>

<sup>76</sup> As called for by the Pension Promise Campaign; Pension Promise (2024) [Campaign website](#)

<sup>77</sup> As outlined above, and similar to as called for by [Family Carers Ireland](#).

## Lone parents

Child maintenance	Jobseekers' Transition Payment (JST)	Living Alone Allowance + Household Benefits Package
Remove child maintenance as means for secondary benefits including housing benefits, as has been done for Department of Social Protection payments	<p>Extend JST to lone parents in education, training or employment until youngest child reaches the end of second level education<sup>78</sup></p> <p>Exclude JST and One Parent Family Payment from medical card assessments</p>	Extend the Living Alone Increase and Household Benefits Package to lone parents

## Children and families

Increase for a Qualified Child	Working Family Payment	Free Travel Scheme
<p>Increase IQC by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• €6 for children under 12</li> <li>• €15 for children 12+over</li> </ul>	<p>Increase the income thresholds for WFP</p> <p>Extend Fuel Allowance to those in receipt of WFP</p>	Extend the Free Travel Scheme to those fleeing DSGBV, as in Northern Ireland <sup>79</sup>

## Child Benefit

Make Child Benefit universal	Benchmarking + NCS
<p>Make Child Benefit a truly universal payment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grant Child Benefit to children whose parents are seeking asylum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reform the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) to ensure Roma children residing in the State are eligible for Child Benefit payments regardless of the legal or administrative status of their parents</li> </ul> <p>Benchmark increases in Child Benefit against inflation</p> <p>Remove Child Benefit from the National Childcare Scheme means-test</p>

<sup>78</sup> A lone parent working full time in minimum wage employment can lose €56 a week once their youngest child reaches the age of 14; Vincentian MESL Research Centre (2023) [Pre-Budget Submission 2024](#)

<sup>79</sup> NI Direct (2024) [Free Concessionary Bus and Rail Travel](#)

## Jobseekers

Young Jobseekers	Jobseeker's Allowance (JA)	Jobseeker's Allowance disregard
Increase the rate payable for young Jobseekers aged 18-24 years to equalise with Jobseekers aged >24 <sup>80</sup>	Reform Jobseeker's Allowance and the limitation rule so that it is reflective of changing work practices, based on hours worked rather than days worked	Increase the daily earnings income disregard for JA to €25 per day for both the main claimant and qualified adult equally

## International Protection Applicants

Child Benefit	Free Travel Scheme	Daily Expenses Allowance
Grant Child Benefit to children whose parents are seeking asylum	Extend the Free Travel Scheme to people in the international protection process	Increase Daily Expenses Allowance, at the very least in line with inflation

## Living Wage

Living Wage	Social Protection supports	Young workers
Introduce a Living Wage that reflects real costs for workers	Ensure Living Wage/National Minimum Wage increases do not affect eligibility for social protection supports, by altering means-tests and disregards as necessary	Bring sub-minimum rates of minimum wage for people aged under 20 in line with the full Living Wage/National Minimum Wage rate for those aged over 20

## Fuel Allowance

Fuel Allowance rates + period	Fuel Allowance eligibility	Fuel Allowance for Travellers + Roma
Increasing the payable period for the Fuel Allowance to 32 weeks, and increase the rate of payment	Extending eligibility to people in receipt of the Working Family Payment, and remove the wait period for people in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance	Ensure the living arrangements of Traveller and Roma families are properly covered by Fuel Allowance eligibility including Traveller and Roma families officially sharing

<sup>80</sup> As recommended by [Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection](#); SVP (2023) [Pre-Budget Submission 2024](#)