

June 2021

Submission to the Department of Social Protection on Budget 2022

Introduction

Established in 1973, the National Women's Council (NWC) is the leading national women's membership organisation in Ireland. NWC seeks full equality between men and women and we draw our mandate from a membership of over 190 groups and organisations across a diversity of backgrounds, sectors and locations. We also have a growing, committed individual supporter base. NWC actively works to prioritise the needs of those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, the poorest social and economic outcomes.

Women entered the pandemic with fewer resources – less wealth, lower incomes, greater unpaid care responsibilities and a reliance on low paid and precarious work. Our Budget 2021 submission to DSP highlighted that the pandemic had reinforced many prevailing inequalities. A year on, it is clear that immediate gendered effects of the pandemic have been followed by a deepening of persistent gender inequalities including an increase in women's care roles, a disproportionate effect on women's employment, increased pressure on those who were already marginalised, including lone parents, disabled women, migrants and Travellers and other ethnic minorities.

At the beginning of the pandemic, government acted quickly to introduce enhanced Illness Benefit and PUP payments for those whose jobs were affected by the pandemic. These were welcome supports to help protect incomes and maintain living standards. However, Budget 2021 did not follow through with much needed measures to increase core social welfare rates and address longstanding gender inequalities in our welfare system and as a result, a two-tier system has prevailed whereby those on existing welfare payments, predominantly women, were treated in a less favorable manner and continued to receive a lesser level of income support.

NWC calls for investment in the care economy to be a hallmark of Budget 2022. Social protection is an important element of a caring economy, in that it protects living standards and supports social inclusion. DSP has an important role to play in developing a welfare state that facilitates women and men to play an equal role in caring and paid work. It can do so by ensuring that social welfare payments provide an adequate standard of living, that individuals receive payments in their own right and by acknowledging part time work as a legitimate choice.

This year's budget follows the report and recommendations of the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality, with its strong emphasis on care and social protection. In recommending a universal pension, an individualised social welfare system and increases in social welfare payments, the Citizens' have demonstrated an appetite for change. Budget 2022 must put us on a pathway to delivering this change. Investment in the care economy, in social infrastructure and social protection will, in turn, provide the foundation for our social and economic recovery as well as supporting our transition to a low carbon economy.

Economic Overview

Our submission to the Department of Finance outlines the broader macroeconomic framework that this submission takes as its context and also sets out our proposals on raising sufficient revenue to fund the required investment to deliver the proposals made here. As our submission to DOF sets out, NWC rejects a prioritisation of "balancing the budget". Attempts at reducing the deficit by cutting funding to public services or income supports represents austerity by another name and will have a negative impact on the economy, reducing economic demand and negatively affecting employment. We cannot have a repeat of the last financial crash, where policy choices were made at the expense of women, young people, lone parents, Travellers, disabled people, migrants and those on low incomes – many of whom have still not recovered from the effects of austerity imposed, post 2009.

Though DSP has seen unprecedented expenditure over the past year and a half, this has been vital to supporting incomes and ensuring people were cushioned from the worst economic impacts of the

pandemic. NWC urges the state to use all of the fiscal and monetary levers at its disposal, including borrowing at low interest rates and generating tax revenue through fair taxation, to build our social infrastructure and public services and fight the climate crisis. This in turn will create healthier and more equal societies which will support employment, sustainable productivity as well as additional tax revenue.

Reform our Model of Welfare and Work

Our work and welfare systems were built for a different era and based on a largely male breadwinner understanding of both the labour market and social welfare systems. Much debate has centred on the level of the PUP and for how long can it continue before we revert back to the regular system of welfare payments. However, a return to 'normal' will not support women.

Women bore the brunt of decisions to cut welfare payments during the austerity years due to the fact that women are more likely than men to be lone parents, to be "economically inactive" and to benefit more from child-related supports.¹ If we are to avoid the mistakes of the past in the pandemic recovery, we must reform our model of welfare and work so that it supports women.

Our model of welfare and work must:

- Ensure active labour market policy works for women and support transitions in and out of work
- Provide individualised access to payments and supports
- Promote decent work that's compatible with care
- Address poverty, and in particular the increased poverty experienced by Travellers, people with disabilities and women parenting alone
- Provide sufficient pension income to women in retirement

These issues are addressed in turn, below.

Gender and Equality Proof activation policy

The shutdown required to protect public health has impacted severely on workers. From the onset of the pandemic, evidence quickly emerged of the disproportionate impact on women, young and low paid workers and migrants.² While absolute unemployment increased more for men due to their greater labour market participation, the relative increase was higher for women. The impact has varied according to the level of restrictions in place. For example, unemployment among women increased by 54% at end of Q3 2020, more than double the increase in men's unemployment (23%).³ By Q4 2020, with restrictions easing during this period, women's unemployment situation had settled somewhat, increasing by 28% over the year to Q4 with men's unemployment increasing by 24%. The severest impact has been on young workers with 5/10 men and 7/10 women aged 15-24 being unemployed in April 2021.⁴

The numbers claiming the PUP have reduced dramatically as people return to work following the lifting of restrictions, from a peak of 598m in May 2020 to 310m at the beginning of June 2021.⁵ As sectors reopen, this will decrease further. However, some jobs may not return and it has been estimated that unemployment, post-pandemic, could reach 16%. A significant number of those whose employment was affected by the pandemic expect not to return to the same job with women more likely to report this

¹ Doorley, K. at al (2018). The Gender impact of Irish budgetary policy 2008-2018. Dublin: ESRI.

<https://www.esri.ie/system/files?file=media/file-uploads/2018-10/bkmnext367.pdf>

² Coates, D., Byrne, D., Brioscú, A., Corcoran, D., Cronin, H., Keenan, E. and McIndoe-Calder, T. (2020). The Initial Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Ireland's Labour Market. DEASP.

³ CSO (2020). Labour Force Survey Q3

⁴ CSO (2021). Monthly unemployment stats.

⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/136746/ba8c142b-4d9b-4396-98c3-4a311363188d.pdf#page=null>

than men (25% of women versus 17% of men). Young workers make up 44% of those who do not expect to return to the same job.⁶

As we go into a period with record unemployment rates, it is important to remember that the current system had already been less effective at lowering female unemployment than male unemployment with more women on the Live Register just before the pandemic in February 2020 (79,020) than in February 2007 (63,760).⁷ Overall figures hide important differences in labour market participation for different groups of women:

- Only 27% of mothers with lower secondary level education are in the labour market in Ireland compared to an EU average of 42%.⁸
- 21% of lone parent families in work are at risk of poverty⁹
- Migrants are more likely to experience unemployment. Ethnicity also plays a role with Black migrants experiencing higher unemployment than white migrants and working in lower skilled jobs, despite having higher educational attainment than those born in Ireland.¹⁰
- Traveller women are all but excluded from the workplace, with 80% of Traveller women unemployed.¹¹
- The labour force participation rate of disabled women is only 26% (compared to 35% for disabled men)¹² with disabled women experiencing multiple barriers to accessing employment including lack of workplace flexibility, discrimination and negative attitudes and stereotypes.
- Research on low work intensity households estimates that 150,000 qualified adults are either unemployed or under-employed and a significant proportion of these are women.¹³
- Before the pandemic, the unemployment rate was almost 3 times higher among 15-24 year old's as 25-74 year old's. The pandemic has dramatically affected young workers but it has also shifted the burden of unemployment towards young women with 7/10 women aged 15-24 unemployed in April 2021.¹⁴

Coping with the changes that the pandemic has brought could mean a reinforcement of traditional care roles whereby women who have responded to care and domestic needs and become unemployed outside the home will be counted as 'economically inactive'. Indeed, there is evidence from Europe that women have found it more challenging to get back into the labour market with men gaining more than twice as many jobs as women when employment rates started to rise after the first wave of the pandemic.¹⁵

Active labour market programmes

Women are much less likely to benefit from active labour market programmes than men; around 65% of those benefitting from a CE Scheme or TÚS place are men, less than 1 in 5 beneficiaries of the Rural Social Scheme are women.¹⁶ Though outside the remit of DSP, apprenticeships are an important bridge into the labour market but only 5% of beneficiaries of investment in apprenticeships were women in 2020.¹⁷

⁶ SJI (2021). Employment monitor: <https://www.socialjustice.ie/sites/default/files/attach/publication/6504/qem9.pdf?cs=true>

⁷ While this partly reflects more lone parents on the live register due to the changes in lone parents' payments, it also illustrates a slower decline in the number of women on the Live Register compared with men during the economic recovery. Murphy, M. et al (2020). the high road back to work: Developing a public employment eco-system for a post-COVID recovery. Maynooth University

⁸ NESI (2019). Gender, family and class issues in Ireland's social welfare system.

⁹ Eurostat: In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by household type - EU-SILC survey [ilc_iw02]

¹⁰ <https://www.esri.ie/news/migrant-groups-have-higher-levels-of-education-but-some-experience-higher-unemployment-than>

¹¹ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and Economic and Social Research Institute. Who experiences discrimination in Ireland?

¹² CSO (2017). Census 2016.

¹³ NESI (2018). Low Work Intensity Households and the Quality of Supportive Services

¹⁴ CSO monthly unemployment stats

¹⁵ <https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/economic-hardship-and-gender>

¹⁶ DSP (2020). Annual Statistics 2019. <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/02f594-annual-sws-statistical-information-report/>

¹⁷ Dept Higher Ed (2021). Action plan for apprenticeships. <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/132640/00c012f4-531c-4578-b8bb-179db4351939.pdf#page=null>

If we are to move into a recovery that is inclusive of all, our ALMP must address the needs of unemployed women but also all those women who are currently not counted in the Live Register statistics because they are not in receipt of a Jobseekers payment, including many disabled women and carers. Activation should support people into decent, sustainable well-paid jobs, not jobs at any cost. Proposed returnships to support women who have taken time out of work to raise their families, as committed to in the programme for government should not repeat the mistakes made by schemes such as JobBridge.

Some sectors may not fully recover post-pandemic. In addition, changes will be required in the transition to a low carbon economy and our ALMP needs to be responsive to this. The National Economic Recovery Plan notes that additional demands for skills related to the care economy will be needed for a resilient, jobs led recovery. As well as addressing pressing unmet need for care, investment in care jobs would help us to meet our commitments to a shift towards a low carbon economy. Investment in care must include improving the pay and working conditions of care workers and may help to shift the perception of care as 'women's work' and support better gender balance in the profession.

Equally, ALMP must address gender inequalities in access to emerging, higher paid and green jobs in STEM areas. As women are less likely to be trained and employed in STEM areas, they may not benefit from investment in green jobs if this investment is focused on industrial areas. Contrary to our policy aims, the proportion of women working in higher paid sectors like information and communications technology (ICT) in Ireland actually decreased from 30% in 2004 to 21% in 2017.¹⁸ Investment in addressing barriers for women must be addressed if women are to benefit from investment in STEM oriented training and upskilling schemes.

Supporting care in the social welfare system

One of the key failings in the current system is that it does not accommodate care. Eligibility for Jobseekers payments requires women with care responsibilities to prove they can work full time. Failure to satisfy this condition means that women cannot establish an individual right to payment or to access education, training and employment opportunities, reducing women's choices with regard to decent work and increasing poverty. Failure to recognise and value care impacts most negatively on lone parents. Changes to lone parent payments during austerity years have meant that lone parents care responsibilities are disregarded once their child turns fourteen.

Women predominate in part time work but part-time work is of little benefit for families trying to exit poverty, according to the ESRI who found that, currently, only full-time employment is effective in lifting families out of poverty.¹⁹ These findings are hugely problematic for lone parents who bear primary responsibility for care and often cannot reconcile full time work with care. More broadly, it must be possible for all women and men to combine paid work and caring.

DSP has a key role in creating the conditions in which women can access decent, secure work that is compatible with care responsibilities. DSP must ensure that people can combine care and work in a way that facilitates them to obtain decent work and that people have a secure, alternative source of income that gives them a realistic option of refusing work that does not pay.

A participation income (PI) is an alternative to our current welfare system which is overly focused on transitions from welfare to work at the expense of other forms of participation. A PI would recognise other meaningful contributions such as care or voluntary work, and other forms of work that contribute to the common good.²⁰ Countries like The Netherlands have taken steps towards a system that takes care and other socially useful forms of contribution into account. The Dutch system acknowledges part time

¹⁸ <https://witsireland.com/stem-resources/women-in-stem-in-ireland-by-numbers/>

¹⁹ Maître, B., Russel, H., Smyth, E. (2021). The Dynamics of Child Poverty in Ireland: Evidence from GUI. <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS121.pdf>

²⁰ Murphy, M & McGann, M (2020). Reconfiguring welfare in an eco-social state: participation income and universal services [here](#)

work as a legitimate choice and it also gives people who are caring for children under 12 the right to access unemployment benefit.²¹ NESC have recommended piloting a PI system.

NWC recommends

- Invest in care as a key element of ALMP including development of training and national salary scales
- Support women to access programmes in STEM areas
- Invest in targeted supports for young women
- Gender and equality proof new labour activation initiatives and review their gender impact before scaling up
 - Ensure a gender sensitive monitoring of the activation initiatives and ensure workers are not pressured to increase hours while maintaining care obligations
 - Ensure no-one is required to accept insecure, non-fixed hour jobs as 'reasonable offer of work'
 - Recognise atypical work patterns by calculating unemployment on hours rather than days per week
- Ensure the forthcoming 'Pathways to Work addresses challenges for women, post-pandemic'
 - Ensure it provides supports to those not currently in receipt of a jobseeker's payments, e.g qualified adults
 - Provide targeted supports to those furthest from the jobs market including carers and disabled women, e.g embed Job Coaches in all Intreo offices to support disabled people to obtain and retain employment
 - Develop a fully gender proofed national Traveller employment strategy as part of the mainstream strategy to take account of barriers to participation of Traveller women, such as access to culturally competent affordable childcare
- Move to a social welfare model that acknowledges and values care
 - Extend JST to lone parents in education, training or employment until the youngest child reaches the end of second level education
 - Allow those working part time to be eligible for Jobseekers payments
 - Pilot a Participation Income, as recommended by NESC
- Invest in targeted activation supports for lone parents, including support in accessing employment, financial supports, education and training and access to childcare
 - Move case officer ratio towards international best practice of 100-150 per case worker.

Individualisation

Further evidence of the 'male breadwinner' nature of our social welfare system is provided by the concept of the 'qualified adult' or adult dependent. Under this system, welfare payments to two parent families comprise a payment for the main claimant and a Qualified Adult payment to additional adults in the household. Child dependent payments are also payable to the main claimant. This system creates a relationship of dependency for Qualified Adults. They do not receive an income in their own right and are excluded from accessing many active labour market programmes that require a core SW payment as a condition of eligibility.

Data from DSP show that of the 124,521 people who received a top up for a Qualified Adult in April 2021, 83% are men. Women represent the vast majority of those who are dependent adults in our social welfare system. Though appearing to be 'gender neutral', the gendered effects of this system have clear implications for women's economic independence.

²¹ NESC (2020). The Future of the Irish Social Welfare System: Participation and Protection.

DEASP's Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 commits to examining the feasibility of individualising payments in Q2, 2020, through the provision of a direct payment to the second 'dependent' adult in a household, with a view to reducing co-dependency and improving employment and earnings outcomes. The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality also recommended that we adopt a fully individualised social protection system to reflect the diversity of today's lives and to promote an equal division of paid work and care.²²

The COVID 19 income supports have demonstrated that it is possible to administer payments in an individualised way. There is now an historic opportunity to abolish the system of dependency and implement an individualised approach, based on equality where women and men are paid in their own right and have individual entitlement to all of the benefits and supports that accompany an unemployment payment.

NWC recommends

- Adopt a fully individualised social welfare system so that women are treated as individuals, rather than dependents of their partners
 - Start by eliminating the limitation rule for Jobseekers Allowance in Budget 2021
- Change eligibility rules to enable qualified adults access a range of active labour market programmes (ALMPs)
- Resource a national survey to ascertain skills, education, health, care and employment experience of qualified adults to address the data gaps on QA's

Promote decent work that's compatible with care

For many women, paid work is no guarantee of income adequacy with women predominating in low paid and precarious work. Essential workers, 70% of them women, are among the lowest paid in the economy. More than half of wholesale and retail workers²³ and 5 out of 10 childcare workers earn less than the Living Wage.²⁴ Among undocumented workers, many of whom work in care and other essential sectors, 26% report earning less than the minimum wage.²⁵ Workers represent 14% of all those in poverty with lone parents overrepresented among these.

Paid parental leave schemes can help parents balance work and family life and to maintain their connection to the labour market. The income replacement rate of paid leave is a key factor in whether it is possible to take the leave, particularly for fathers. Where the payment is low, taking time off for work is more challenging and often unaffordable for fathers in low incomes families and is predominantly taken by fathers working in middle- to high-income jobs.²⁶ A higher income replacement rate is particularly important for lone parents who are solely responsible for their household income. While legislation on family leave sits with DCEDIY, DSP should work with DCEDIY to extend the duration and payment of family leave benefits.

Collective bargaining is one of the most effective ways to create more equal redistribution of wealth, reduce inequality and address low pay. Research has indicated that countries with a high coverage of collective bargaining tend to have shorter working hours for both women and men, more flexible work options under secure employment conditions, better protection for non-standard workers, as well as a reduced gender pay gap.²⁷ However, the proportion of employees covered by collective bargaining

²² <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/about-the-citizens-assembly/meetings/voting-results-citizens-assembly-on-gender-equality/full-list-of-recommendations11.pdf>

²³ CSO (2020). LFS Minimum Wage Statistics. Q4 2019.

²⁴ Pobal (2021). Annual early years sector profile report 2020/2021

²⁵ MRCI (2020). Live here, work here, belong here. A survey of over 1,000 undocumented people in Ireland

²⁶ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2021/2021-03-25_bill-digest-family-leave-bill-2021_en.pdf

²⁷ European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). Collective bargaining and gender equality. <https://www.etuc.org/en/collective-bargaining-and-gender-equality>

agreements in Ireland is low. Legislation is of particular necessity in Ireland, as our laws allow employers not to recognise unions in pay disputes. Unions are often not recognised and joint labour committees don't exist in many of the sectors women predominate. This department should proactively advocate for collective bargaining as a state strategy to tackle the gender pay gap and ensure adequate pay.

While responsibility for the Minimum Wage and Living Wage now sits with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, DSP can support advances towards the living wage. Public procurement can be a key lever in driving better terms and conditions for workers, given its significance in terms of government spending. Public procurement within the Public Service represents an estimated €15 billion a year.²⁸ DSP uses procurement for a broad range of services including facilities management such as cleaning services, security services and waste management as well as ICT services and equipment. Public procurement policies can promote decent work by making public contracts only available to those companies that pay decent wages, are addressing their GPG and respect workers' right to collective bargaining. We must ensure that public benefit is gained from public spending.

NWC recommends

- Increase the rate of maternity, paternity and parental benefit to €295 per week to bring more in line with EU norms - €65.3 million²⁹
- Resource a time use survey to gather updated data on time spent on unpaid work - €240k
- Resource a full & retrospective Homecare Credit that also acts as re-entry credit to access training
- Introduce five paid days of carers' leave, as per the EU Directive on Work Life Balance
- Support advancement of a living wage, reduced GPG and better conditions for workers by:
 - Attaching social criteria, clauses and conditionality to Employer incentive schemes
 - Advocating for government procurement processes to ensure living wage social clauses in key sectoral procurement processes in female dominated sectors
- DSP to support collective bargaining as evidence shows that it is one of the most effective ways to address the gender pay gap

End Poverty

The social welfare system plays an important role in protecting against poverty. While 13% of the overall population was at risk of poverty in 2019, this would rise to 41% if social welfare transfers were excluded.³⁰ Notwithstanding this, poverty remains unacceptably high. Overall levels mask differences in experience depending on family status, age, disability and employment status.

Lone parents, 86% of whom are women, continue to be among those most at risk of poverty and deprivation with 30% of families headed by a lone parent at risk of poverty and 17% living in consistent poverty in 2019. Disabled people also experience unacceptably high levels of poverty, with 38% at risk of poverty and 18% experiencing consistent poverty in 2019. This is before the additional costs of disability are taken into account. Among unemployed people, 35% are at risk of poverty and 1 in 5 live in consistent poverty.³¹ Among those aged 65 and over, 15% of men and 25% of women are at risk of poverty.³²

Data on the experience of poverty among the Traveller community, migrants, Black and ethnic minority communities is not systematically collected in annual poverty data. However, we know from alternative

²⁸ DPER (2020). DPER Briefing Note Public Procurement 21/05/20

²⁹ DSP (2021). Data provided by DSP in response to written question by CV Pillar

³⁰ CSO (2020). SILC 2019.

³¹ CSO (2020). SILC 2019

³² Based on 2018 date published in CSO (2020). Women and men in Ireland.

sources that non-EU nationals living in Ireland face a greater risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to Irish nationals (32% compared to 19%).³³ In families where the mother is from an ethnic minority, 42% are persistently economically vulnerable compared to 16% of the majority white group.³⁴

Women living in rural areas experience additional challenges to having an adequate income and the 'minimum essential standard of living' is higher for rural households compared with their urban counterparts.³⁵ Households containing a pensioner living alone have an income that is insufficient in terms of achieving a minimum standard of living; a fact that significantly and disproportionately impacts older women.³⁶ One-quarter of our older population live alone, two-thirds of which are women (87,455). Among the older age group - aged 85 and over – women accounted for almost three in every four of those living alone.³⁷

The European Commission predicts that the Covid-19 crisis will increase the levels of those at-risk of poverty, particularly for already at-risk groups unless policy measures are introduced to prevent this from happening. There is already evidence that this is the case with research showing that more than a third of lone parent families cut back on heating or had fallen behind on bills, and a quarter had cut back on food due to the cost. In addition, 42% of people out of work due to illness or disability had gone without heating due to the financial pressure of the pandemic.³⁸

While increases to the qualified child payments in Budget 2021 were welcome, there have been no increases to core social welfare payments for a number of years. While the commitment in the National Economic Recovery Plan to introduce pay related jobseekers' benefits is a welcome one, social assistance payments are a crucial support for women and must provide a decent standard of living rather than merely subsistence levels. The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality has recommended that social protection payments be set at a level that lifts people above the poverty line, prevents deprivation and supports an adequate standard of living.

NWC recommends

- Establish the MESL as the benchmark for social welfare payments by 2026
 - Increase social welfare rates by €10 as an interim measure in Budget 2022
 - Increase Qualified Child payments by €2.10 for children under 12 and €10 for children aged 12 and above in Budget 2022³⁹
- Link earning disregards, means-tests and income tests for supports to increases in the National Minimum Wage and core social welfare payments, maintaining the value of and access to these supports year on year.
- Implement targeted supports to women most at risk of poverty:

Lone parents

- Incorporate the Back to Work Family dividend payment into the WFP long term, supporting parents to remain on this payment and in employment
- Harmonise the income thresholds for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance for one-parent families to the same level of two-parent households.

Women seeking asylum

- Grant Child Benefit to children whose parents are seeking asylum - €2.68 million

³³ Eurostat (2020). People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by citizenship.

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4187653/10321587/Migrant_integration_AROPE_2018.jpg

³⁴ <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS121.pdf>

³⁵ VPSJ (2017). Minimum Essential Standard of Living: Update report 2017.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ CSO (2017). Census 2016

³⁸ SVP (2021). The Financial impact of COVID. <https://www.svp.ie/financialimpactofcovid19pr>

³⁹ These are interim increases for Budget 2022 in order to attain a MESL by 2026, in line with VPSJ evidence on MESL

- Extend Free Travel Scheme to people in the protection process

Traveller and Roma women

- Introduce special measures for particularly vulnerable Roma who do not have income and do not meet the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) to access social welfare payments
 - Make Child Benefit a truly universal payment that is not contingent on the fulfilment of the HRC as recommended by UN Committee on the Rights of the Child - €1.96m

Young women

- Restore the full rate of Jobseekers Allowance for 18-24 year olds as a matter of urgency -€67.5 million

Disabled women

- Deliver a non-means tested, cost of disability payment, minimum €20 per week pending the publication of DSP's research on cost of disability

Carers

- Increase the earnings disregard for Carer's Allowance from €332.50 to €450 (single) and €665 to €900 (couple) so that all those on average industrial incomes can qualify^{40 41}
- Increase the level of the Carer Support Grant as recommended by the Citizens' Assembly

End the Gender Pensions Gap

As women are more likely to be in low paid, part time jobs on precarious contracts, this makes it difficult to collect sufficient PRSI contributions to be eligible for the full State contributory pension. Women account for only 33% of those in receipt of a full State Contributory Pension⁴² even though women outnumber men among the over 65's.

Only 28% of women of pension age have an occupational or private pension compared to 55% of men. Among women workers, 35% say they can't afford to pay into an occupational pension and 6/10 part-time workers report that their employer doesn't offer a pension scheme.⁴³ Older rural women are even less likely to have an occupational or contributory pension.⁴⁴ Ireland's social insurance system defines many women who work on the family farm and spouses of business owners (mainly women) as 'relatives assisting'. Although working in the family business, 'relatives assisting' cannot make PRSI contributions, which would entitle them to old age contributory pension and maternity benefit.

Latest data on the gender pensions gap indicates that women, on average, have 29% less pension income than men.⁴⁵ Though this is driven primarily by differences in occupational and private pensions, rather than compensating for this, the State Pension upholds a narrative that those who paid contributions throughout their lifetime should be rewarded in retirement, thus perpetuating inequalities experienced over a lifetime. The inevitable effect of this is that women have reduced access to the State Pension and are more likely to experience poverty in older age.

Piecemeal reforms like the TCA and Homemaker's/HomeCaring Periods Schemes, while formally recognising the value of unpaid care work, are only available to those born after 1st Sept 1946 so only some women's unpaid care has been recognised. Qualifying conditions for a full contributory pension under the TCA still require women to have 20 years paid contributions, which may not be possible given

⁴⁰<https://familycarers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Family-Carers-Ireland-A-Decade-Lost-Pre-Budget-Submission.pdf>

⁴¹ Budget 2020 increased the hours carers could work and still qualify for a payment from 15 to 18.5 but didn't increase the earnings disregard so while carers can keep their payment, it will be reduced.

⁴² Data from DSP, November 2020. 83,847 women out of 255,001 recipients of full state contributory pension as at 31 October 2020

⁴³ CSO (2020). Pensions statistics. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pens/pensioncoverage2019/>

⁴⁴ Ní Léime, A. et al. Gender and Rural Ageing in Ireland: Profile and Key Issues. Irish Centre for Social Gerontology National University of Ireland, Galway

⁴⁵ Eurostat (2021). Gender pension gap data 2019. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210203-1>

all of the barriers to work that women experience. NWC believes that the State has a particular responsibility to remedy the inequality experienced by women affected by the marriage bar and by a system built on a patriarchal single “breadwinner” model.

NWC welcomed the removal of the pension age increase to 67 years as part of the Social Welfare Bill in December 2020. This was a key ask of the Stop 67 Campaign, of which NWC is a member. To date, there has been no gender, equality or poverty analysis of increases in age of eligibility for the State Pension. Proposals to extend working life have adopted a ‘one size- fits-all’ approach, and are based on the assumptions that people are healthy enough to earn a living from work and that work is easily available to those over 65.⁴⁶ Any measure that makes it harder for people to access a State Pension will disproportionately impact negatively on women who rely on the State Pension to a greater degree than men. An extended working life is likely to be difficult for people in physically demanding jobs, such as care work, workers in low paid or precarious jobs, most often women.⁴⁷

While the narrative of a pensions timebomb prevails, spending on social protection in Ireland is well below average, driven by much lower than average spending on ‘old-age’ compared with the European average.⁴⁸ Billions lost to the exchequer through expenditure on tax reliefs for private pensions should instead be invested in sustaining an adequate first tier State pension and a universal pension into the future. A universal pension and a scheme for those affected by the marriage bar are key recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality.

NWC recommends

- Introduce a universal, fair State Pension system paid for by ending tax relief on private pensions and investing the savings in a first-tier state pension
 - In Budget 2022, end the qualified adult system and provide fully individualised access to pensions for all men and women
- Deliver a full Homecarers credit that actively recognises the contribution of care and also serves as a re-entry credit
 - Remove the cap of 20 years caring contributions under the HomeCaring Periods Scheme
 - Ensure the Total Contributions Approach (TCA) is limited to 30 years for the maximum pension
 - Ensure women born before 1st Sept 1946 can benefit under all schemes
- Acknowledge the previous injustice of the ‘marriage bar’ with a once-off, ring-fenced retrospective scheme
- Resource & publish a gender and equality impact assessment of TCA & Auto-enrolment
- In advance of the publication of the report of the Commission on Pensions, ensure that the Commission conducts and publishes gender, equality and poverty analysis of projected increases in state pension age & subsequent pension reforms

Address Child Maintenance for Lone Parents

Child maintenance plays an important role in protecting against poverty. International experience indicates that where child maintenance is a reliable source of income, there was a 30 % reduction in the poverty gap.⁴⁹

Unlike other jurisdictions, child maintenance in Ireland is seen largely as a personal, parental obligation

⁴⁶ Ní Léime, Á. & Street, D. (2016). ‘Gender & age implications of extended working life policies in the US & Ireland’. *Critical Social Policy*, 37, 464–483.

⁴⁷ Mulligan, E., Wijeratne, D. and Maher, M. (2019) Pensions in Ireland: The Perspectives of Irish Citizens and Implications for Pensions Systems and Reforms in Ireland and other EU Member States. Institute for Lifecourse and Society, NUI Galway

⁴⁸ <https://assets.gov.ie/7322/262f606010344ca3adeba2c88087add6.pdf>

⁴⁹ Family Policy and Shared Parenting in Nordic Countries’, available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/138826271101300203>

and therefore, a matter of private family law. There is no state agency with responsibility for child maintenance payments and pursuit of maintenance is left up to the claiming parent. There is a significant rate of non-compliance with child maintenance orders, significant delays in the courts system and a high cost involved in engaging a litigious route. The interaction of maintenance with the social welfare system creates additional barriers to lone parents in receipt of social welfare payments.

A Statutory Maintenance Agency would take the issue of child maintenance out of the adversarial court system, reduce the burden on women to litigate for child maintenance orders and act as an anti-poverty measure. It has also been called for by the Joint Committee on Social Protection in its Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland (2017) and the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

NWC recommends

- Establish a statutory child maintenance agency that takes maintenance out of the private sphere and ensures the State is responsible for assessment and enforcement of child maintenance
- Where a parent does not pay or does not have sufficient income to pay the required maintenance payment, the State should take on the liability and ensure child maintenance is paid
 - Effective substitute maintenance mechanisms should be based on advance payment by the State
 - Responsibility for recouping payments from the liable parent should lie with the State, where applicable
- Child Maintenance should be a non-means tested, non-taxable income for children, as with Child Benefit, to support lone parents out of poverty

Embed Gender and Equality Budgeting

With a Budget 2021 package amounting to over €17.75bn, a €7.4bn July Stimulus package and almost €4bn under the National Economic Recovery and Resilience and Recovery Plans, Ireland is spending record amounts of public money. While Budget 2021 contained some welcome commitments that will support gender equality in the area of health and supports to combat violence against women, overall, NWC is concerned at the lack of attention to gender equality in economic decision making. The UNDP Covid-19 Global Gender Response Tracker shows that only a small number of countries tailored their policies to account for women's specific needs. Ireland is recorded as adopting only two gender sensitive measures in the area of social protection and unpaid care (increased Parent's Leave and opening childcare services for children of essential workers).⁵⁰

NWC welcomes that DSP will further engage with gender and equality budgeting through its membership of the inter-departmental group on Equality Budgeting as decisions as to how to address poverty, pensions and labour market activation, all under the remit of DSP, are particularly important ones to gender proof. NWC reiterates its recommendation that equality budgeting be put on a statutory footing as a mechanism to ensure its adoption. The Citizens' Assembly made a recommendation to legislate for equality budgeting across all Government bodies including local authorities as well as a requirement for gender impact assessment of all proposed legislation.

While under the remit of the Minister for Finance, DSP will play a key role in the work of the Commission on Taxation and Welfare and it is vital that the work of the Commission is gender and equality proofed and that gender and equality impact assessments are published,

Comprehensive gender budgeting must encompass equality for diverse groups of women and men and take into account how other aspects of a person's identity impact on their experience of a policy or budgetary decision.

⁵⁰ UNDP (2021). COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker. <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>

NWC recommends

- DSP to publish a gender equality impact statement with Budget 2021 with disaggregated data on Travellers, ethnicity, disability and other equality grounds
- Ensure the work of the Commission on Taxation and Welfare is gender and equality proofed
- Publish gender equality impact statements of proposed reforms to pensions, including the work of the Commission on Pensions
- Through its work with Interdepartmental Group on Equality Budgeting, DSP to work towards embedding gender and equality budgeting across all of its work
 - DSP to advocate for gender budgeting to be put on a statutory footing in line with the recommendation of the Citizens' Assembly