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Submission to
Department of the
Taoiseach on
Ireland's National
Recovery and
Resilience
Programme

Introduction

Founded in 1973, the National Women's Council (NWC) is the leading national women's membership organisation in Ireland. We represent and derive our mandate from our membership, which includes over 190 groups and organisations from a diversity of backgrounds, sectors and locations across Ireland. We also have a growing number of individual members who support the campaign for women's equality in Ireland. Our mission is to lead and to be a catalyst for change in the achievement of equality for women. Our vision is of an Ireland and of a world where women can achieve their full potential and there is full equality for women.

The Department of the Taoiseach is currently developing Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Programme (NRRP). Part of EU funding streams designed to mitigate the economic and social consequences of the pandemic, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RFF) provides funding for investment and structural reforms to support States to ensure that economies and societies are more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland and across Europe, women sustained our societies through their paid and unpaid care labour and their work in essential services across the country. They continue to do so as we manage the aftermath of the pandemic and as the social and economic consequences unfold. However, NWC is concerned about the lack of attention to gender equality in much of the economic decision making that has taken place since the onset of the pandemic.

The emphasis in the EU's Multi-financial Framework (MFF) and Next Generation EU (NGEU) funding, of which the RFF is a part, was on jobs in traditionally male dominated areas, despite the greater impact of the pandemic on female employment. While there were welcome commitments to extending income supports for workers in Budget 2021, government failed to make much needed investment in childcare in the Budget or in the July Stimulus package. Though government's stated aim is building a jobs-led recovery, childcare, an essential component of a functioning labour market, continues to be one of the most poorly funded systems in Europe.

The NRRP must lay the groundwork for a significant, sustainable and ongoing investment in public services and social infrastructure. It must ensure a balanced, inclusive and green recovery by shifting the focus from propping up low paid work to using public funding to support decent, well paid jobs. Crucially, policy and economic decisions must be gender and equality proofed to ensure that public spending delivers public good for all.

Priorities for Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan

Ireland's allocation of EU funding under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RFF) will be €853m for 2021/2022 with further funding available in 2023, depending on Ireland's economic performance at that time. Ireland's NRRP is required to address Country Specific Recommendations (CSR's) from 2019 and 2020's European Semester process which identify challenges for Ireland's economic and social cohesion and included recommendations on childcare, universal health, access to the labour market, taxation, climate and housing.

To draw down money from the RFF, States are also required to address a number of Pillars in their NRRP's. NWC's submission focuses on four of these pillars and sets out our recommendations as to how reform and investment through the NRRP could deliver a more equal and inclusive Ireland:

1. Health, economic, social and institutional resilience
 - Deliver Universal Basic Services; invest in the care economy, health and housing to create a society that values care, people and the planet
 - Create a fairer tax system so that we have sufficient resources to fund an equal and sustainable recovery
2. Smart sustainable and inclusive growth, including economic cohesion and jobs
 - Create a new model of work based on decent pay and workers' rights and use conditions attached to public funding to drive this change
 - Deliver an active labour market policy that works for women
3. Social and territorial cohesion
 - End poverty and the gender pensions gap to ensure that public funding supports an adequate standard of living for all, including those who were marginalised before the pandemic
 - Invest in rural communities with a focus on social development as well as economic development
4. Green transition
 - Deliver a feminist green new deal so that social justice and climate justice are central to the recovery

An overarching theme across all Pillars of the NRRP and indeed all policy and economic decision making should be the need to embed gender and equality proofing so that the allocation of resources tackles inequality.

In addition, the NRRP should also align with Ireland's commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDG's make a specific priority of achieving gender equality and the need to take deliberate actions to remove the barriers to women's equality across every sector in society.

Embed Gender and Equality Proofing

With a Budget 2021 package amounting to over €17.75bn, a €7.4bn July Stimulus package and €853m for 2021-2022 under the RRF, 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.

EU Guidelines on the RRF call for States to set out existing national challenges in terms of gender equality and equal opportunities, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights, and to explain how reforms and investments will contribute to overcoming these challenges. Gender and equality proofing is also a requirement of the National Strategy for Women and Girls.

NWC has previously raised concerns with the Taoiseach at the lack of attention to gender equality across the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the Next Generation EU (NGEU) funding schemes (of which the RRF is a part). Investments have been tended to focus on boosting jobs within male-dominated industries such as construction and energy, despite the stronger impact of COVID-19 on female dominated sectors and there has been an absence of funds directed to the care sector. On 15th September, Ireland published a draft Resilience and Recovery Plan aimed at managing risk and repairing the damage caused by COVID-19 over the next 6-9 months. However, there is no evidence that the Plan has been gender and equality proofed.

The disproportionate impact of previous austerity measures on women¹ and discrimination in access to income supports during the pandemic², underscores the need for gender and equality proofing.

Comprehensive gender budgeting must encompass equality for diverse groups of women and men and take into account how intersecting oppression and discrimination impacts on women's experiences of a policy or budgetary decision.

The need to develop plans at speed, in times of crisis does not negate the need to gender and equality proof those plans. If anything, COVID-19 has further reinforced the importance of gender and equality proofing. Ignoring gender issues can multiply the effect of the crisis if not addressed as part of the initial response.

Women need to be active partners in driving an equal recovery. Despite a commitment in *Our Shared Future* to create new models of sectoral engagement, there was no reference to social dialogue in Budget 2021. While the European Commission's guidelines on the RRF place an emphasis on how civil society organisations were involved in designing the reforms included in the plan, engagement with civil society was limited to a webinar on the National Economic Plan, which has yet to be published and a call for written submissions on the NRRP.

Effective social dialogue is an essential part of a functioning democracy. It should be transparent and accountable, focus on working collectively and ensuring participation of marginalised and excluded communities and with parity of esteem between civil society organisations and other sectors.³

NWC recommends:

- Ensure the NRRP is gender and equality proofed and include a section on this in the plan
 - Publish gender and equality disaggregated data on the beneficiaries of projects and investments.
 - Ensure that all major capital infrastructure investment has been gender impact assessed
- Ensure recovery measures benefit both society and the economy by developing new models of social dialogue and engagement that include civil society organisations

Health, economic, social and institutional resilience

Deliver Universal Basic Services

Ireland currently compensates for high market income inequality by significant redistribution through taxes and social transfers. This leads to reduced investment in quality, universal, public services.⁴ As a result, we have deficits in our public services, including; a housing crisis; a two-tier health system; a childcare system that was unaffordable and unsustainable even before the COVID crisis and some of the highest levels of unmet need for services in the EU. Actions taken during the crisis, to effectively nationalise the delivery of healthcare and childcare, shows an understanding that these essential services need to be placed outside the 'market place'.⁵

¹ The years 2008-2013 saw Traveller education budgets reduced by 86.6%, accommodation budgets by 80% as well as swingeing cuts to lone parent payments and disability budgets, the devastating effects of which are still being felt. The position of women has been set back, both economically and socially. Gendered impacts are compounded by class and racial factors which made lone parents and ethnic minority women the scapegoats for social problems. Murphy, M. & Cullen, P. Austerity, gender inequality and feminism after the crisis. Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung.

² Women returning from maternity leave were excluded from accessing the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme set up during the pandemic, necessitating a referral to IHREC by NWC

³ Community Platform (2020). Valuing social dialogue. <https://communityplatform.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Valuing-Social-Dialogue-1.pdf>

⁴ Mary Murphy et al (2020). The High Road Back to Work.

⁵ <https://www.socialeurope.eu/the-four-worlds-of-the-social-ecological-state>

The provision of Universal Basic Services (UBS) is the most effective way to meet society's collective needs. Investment in UBS is an investment in a properly functioning and equal society and economy, and indeed, these services are essential assets when crises like COVID-19 strike. The priority in the NRRP should be to move towards a system of UBS by focusing on:

- Investment in the care economy
- Universal health
- Housing

Invest in the Care Economy

The current crisis has reinforced the centrality of care to a functioning society and economy. However, women continue to bear primary responsibility for care. In 2019, 94% of those whose principal economic status is 'looking after home and family' were women.⁶ During the COVID crisis more women than men cared for a family member or friend and women were more likely to report childcare issues or difficulty working from home because of family being around.⁷ Older women are five times more likely than men to leave work to care for a family member.⁸ Early Years workers are predominantly women (98%) and are among the lowest paid workers in the economy, a key contributor to the gender pay gap. Childcare remains the single most significant barrier to women's equal participation in all aspects of society, but particularly employment, education and training.

The most effective and efficient way to tackle persistent gender inequalities in care is sustained investment in public services and social infrastructure, including a public early years and school age childcare system and universal adult social care.

Investment in care has been shown to act as a better post-pandemic economic stimulus than investment in traditional economic recovery approaches, such as construction. Producing significantly less emissions than construction, care jobs are also green jobs.⁹ With a requirement that a minimum of 37% of expenditure on investments and reforms in the NRRP should support climate objectives, investment in a public model of care could help to align our economic recovery with our climate goals.

Because the sector is comprised predominantly of low paid women workers, investing in care could reduce the gender pay gap significantly (by an estimated 5% in a UK context¹⁰), helping to address the requirement set out in the EU Guidelines that the NRRP address gender equality.

A public model of childcare

CSR no.2 (2019) included a recommendation that Ireland increase access to affordable and quality childcare. Ireland's Country Report (2020) notes that since the launch of the National Childcare Scheme (NCS), childcare costs have fallen substantially for low income households.¹¹ While the NCS has had largely positive impacts, the removal of targeted supports has disadvantaged some lone parent families who have specific additional childcare needs.

In addition, while the NCS is aimed at addressing the issue of affordability, it does little to address sustainability or workforce pay. According to the latest available data, 6 out of 10 childcare workers earn less than the living wage¹², Ireland has the most expensive childcare in the EU and investment in childcare, at 0.2% of GDP, is well below both the EU average of 0.8% and the UNICEF recommended 1%

⁶ CSO (2020). Women and men in Ireland 2018

⁷ CSO (2020). The Employment and Life effects of COVID-19.

⁸ ESRI & HAS (2019). The ageing workforce in Ireland: Working conditions, health and extending working lives

⁹ <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Care-led-recovery-final.pdf>

¹⁰ WBG (2020). A care led recovery from Coronavirus.

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-country-report-ireland_en.pdf

¹² <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2019/12/Annual-Early-Years-Sector-Profile-Report-AEYSPR-2018-19.pdf>

of GDP. These factors signify that there is an urgent need to develop a public, affordable and accessible early years and school age childcare infrastructure.

Investment in a **public** model is crucial. Countries with comprehensive public provision tend to have childcare services that are more affordable, accessible, and of higher quality than countries with private service provision.¹³ Across European countries, the single most important factor in lowering the pay and conditions of care workers is the extent to which it is marketised. Better pay and conditions can only come about through an increase in public resources.¹⁴ Delivering a public, universal model of childcare would also help Ireland to meet our requirements under the European Child Guarantee, which is expected to be included in the next EU budget (2021-2027).

Adult social care

Homecare has been progressively privatised in Ireland to a largely unregulated, home care industry, with high fees, varied quality and standards of homecare provision, and poor terms and conditions for workers. Domestic and personal care workers are often migrant women workers, and women of colour, subject to the most extreme instances of precarious work and exploitation. NWC is particularly concerned that we must not become dependent on the exploitation of some of the most vulnerable women workers to meet our personal, familial and community care needs.

NWC's feminist analysis of care includes not only the perspectives of the women who provide care but also the women who need such supports. The absence of a sufficient state response to supporting disabled people to live independent lives, forces them into a position of dependence and leaves family carers to provide often very high levels of care.

COVID has shown the inadequacy of our adult social care provision, highlighting the vulnerabilities of the sector and the need for an overhaul of the design and delivery of our care services. NWC are particularly concerned by any recourse to institutionalisation as a method for resolving resource issues for disabled and older people. The impact of the pandemic in residential settings has clearly revealed our need to move beyond such institutional settings. Huge public investment is made into institutions through the provision of tax breaks, capital grants and subsidies, and in the case of disability services, this model of service provision represents poor value and delivers poor outcomes for those living there.¹⁵

Investment in universal, social care services are vital to ensure older people and disabled people have the necessary supports to reduce dependence on family and friends and to maintain a private life with dignity.¹⁶

Recommendations

- Invest in a public, affordable and accessible care infrastructure to support people at all stages of the lifecycle
 - Invest in a public model of childcare - Increase investment in early years to 1% of GDP over the next decade, in line with UNICEF recommendations
 - Introduce a Living Wage for all Early Years Educators as a matter of urgency as a first step towards professional salary scales
 - Provide a statutory right to home care and social care supports for disabled and older people

¹³ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2020/2020-06-16_I-rs-note-public-provision-of-early-childhood-education-an-overview-of-the-international-evidence_en.pdf

¹⁴ TASC (2020). Cherishing All Equally – the Care Economy.

¹⁵ DOH (2012). VFMPR of disability services. DOH.

¹⁶ Ibid

Universal Health

As a result of gender inequality in society, women experience particular inequalities in health outcomes and in their access to health services. Because women have lower incomes and provide the majority of care, including to older members of their family, they are more reliant on public health services. Particular groups of women have poorer health outcomes and have less access to healthcare services, including lone parents, asylum seekers, homeless women, Traveller and Roma women, LGBTQI+ women and disabled women.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed significant gaps in our two-tier health service. In response, the Government strengthened public services, bringing private capacity under public control. The NRRP provides an opportunity to build on these initiatives and escalate the implementation of Sláintecare as well as health reforms that focus on women's health. Doing so would support Ireland to deliver on CSR no.1 (2020), recommending that Ireland improve accessibility of the health system, strengthen its resilience, including by responding to health workforce's needs and ensure universal coverage to primary care.

Women's mental health and wellbeing has also been adversely effected by the pandemic and it is imperative that Government undertake a gender sensitive approach in responding to the mental health impacts of the pandemic.

Recommendations

- Invest in health to escalate the implementation of Sláintecare
- Support women's health by establishing the national perinatal mother and baby unit (€3m), introduce a universal State-funded contraception scheme (€80-100m), and develop regional infertility hubs, including development of three public IVF centres (€2.5m per year per centre)
- Reform the provision of abortion services by retaining the current provision of remote access to early abortion services.
- Provide increased resources to the Women's Health Taskforce to ensure the roll out of a gender responsive health service
- Measure, monitor and report on the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic across the whole population in a way that includes disaggregated data on women and women from marginalised groups
- Provide access to mental health services and supports across a continuum of care from primary (including community-based counselling services, family resource centres and women's organisations), community, and acute and specialist services for women who need them
- Provide the funding to implement *Sharing the Vision* to support the development of gender sensitive mental health services.

Housing and accommodation

The housing and homelessness emergency continues to have a devastating impact on women and families throughout Ireland. Ireland now has the highest rate of female homelessness in the EU. Women who are lone parents are one of the groups most at risk of house repossessions and are the highest proportion of families living in emergency accommodation, the vast majority having been made homeless from the private rental sector. The use of family hubs has normalised family homelessness, which will lead to families being institutionalised and Ireland once again punishing women and children for poverty and inequality.

The current statistics do not provide an accurate picture of female homelessness as women living in refuge accommodation and direct provision are not included, nor are disabled people living in institutionalised settings. In addition, women with children are more likely to move around, staying with family and friends than going to homeless accommodation in the early stages of homelessness. Traveller families forced to live on roadsides are also excluded from official statistics.

Legislation introduced during the pandemic on a moratorium on rent freezes and evictions has shown what we can achieve in a crisis. NWC believes that our historically high rents, high levels of homelessness and precarious private rental sector must also be seen as a national crisis. Long term measures building on the supports introduced during the Covid-19 period must address this situation. CSR no.2 (2020) includes a recommendation that Ireland increase the provision of social and affordable housing.

Recommendations

- Increase public and affordable housing by delivering up to 100,000 new homes on public land over five years and developing an Irish model of affordable cost rental housing
- Provide resources to gender proof all homeless and housing strategies & budgets and establish gender sensitive support services for women living in homelessness
- Establish & fully resource a statutory Traveller Agency with powers to approve and enforce Local Authority accommodation
- End direct provision, through the development of an action plan for the overhaul of the direct provision system based on human rights standards and international best practice

Economic resilience: The resources to fund an equal and sustainable recovery

The historical agreement by the EU to borrow collectively to fund the COVID-19 recovery is a clear recognition of the need to invest to recover from the social and economic effects of the pandemic. EU funding from the MFF, Next Generation EU and RRF can help to drive an investment led recovery, with green investment a priority.

However, Ireland must go beyond emergency measures and set out a pathway to increase our resources over the long term to provide the public services and social infrastructure we need. Broadening the tax base, as has been recommended repeatedly in CSR's to Ireland as part of the European Semester process, provides a mechanism to support our economic resilience.

Tax plays a key role in shaping Irish society through funding our public services and social infrastructure, supporting economic activity and progressively redistributing resources. Ireland needs to increase its tax take in a fair, progressive, sustainable and gender sensitive way. A recently published study found that reforms that reduce taxes on the wealthy lead to higher income inequality, and do not result in improvements in economic growth or unemployment.¹⁷

We also need to examine Ireland's tax expenditures to determine whether they are the most effective way of delivering our goals. Previous CSR's have advised Ireland to limit the scope and number of tax expenditures. Tax expenditures in the area of pensions have a particularly regressive effect.

NWC strongly advocates against any move towards austerity measures. While acknowledging the need for investment in Budget 2021, Minister Paschal Donohoe also referred to moving "our national finances back to a balanced position", requiring "decisions in the future about how we reduce our deficit".¹⁸ Rather than reducing spending, the deficit can be reduced through economic growth. The IMF has

¹⁷ http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/107919/1/Hope_economic_consequences_of_major_tax_cuts_published.pdf

¹⁸ Minister Paschal Donohoe (2020). Budget day speech.

advised that austerity can do more harm than good, and that “simply living with high debt and allowing debt ratios to decline organically through growth is underappreciated”.

NWC’s Budget 2021 submission¹⁹ set out our proposals to fund a feminist, economic recovery which are summarised below:

NWC recommends:

- Fund investment in much needed public services and social infrastructure through borrowing while interest rates are low and increasing our tax take over the coming years
- Set out a pathway to increase tax take in a fair, progressive, sustainable and gender sensitive way by:
 - Introducing a wealth tax, a financial transaction tax and a minimum effective corporate tax rate
 - Standard rating tax relief on pensions
 - Removing fossil fuel subsidies and ensuring tax policy matches our goals on a low carbon economy
 - Reinstating the 80% Windfall Tax on the sale of rezoned land that was abolished in 2015 and investing the proceeds in housing provision.
 - Carrying out a review of all individual and sectoral tax expenditures, assessing their cost and gender and equality impacts
 - Including the cost of tax expenditures as part of the annual budgetary process
 - Examining how employers’ PRSI can be increased to fund social infrastructure

Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, including economic cohesion and jobs

Our work and welfare systems were built for a different era on a male breadwinner understanding of the labour market and social welfare systems. A return to ‘normal’ will not support women. A new approach must focus on creating decent, sustainable well-paid jobs, not jobs at any cost and should use public funding to drive improvements for workers.

Active labour market policy that works for women

From the onset of the pandemic, evidence quickly emerged of the disproportionate impact on women, young workers and migrants.²⁰ The latest Labour Force Survey demonstrates the impact of the pandemic on women workers. While there was an increase of 23% in unemployment among men to Q3 2020, women’s unemployment increased by 54% in the same period.²¹

Budget 2021 committed €200m for training, skills development, work placement schemes, recruitment subsidies, and job search and assistance measures. In 2018, there was clear gender bias in who benefits from investment in active labour market programmes - 73% of the beneficiaries were men with just 1% of women benefited from investment in apprenticeship schemes.²² Given that women have traditionally not benefitted from investment in ALMP, it will be essential that funding allocated to active labour market programmes in the National Economic Plan and NRRP is carefully monitored and targeted supports offered to women.

¹⁹ NWC (2020). A Feminist Recovery Plan. https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/National_Womens_Council_Pre-Budget_Submission_2021.pdf

²⁰ 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.

²¹ CSO (2020). Labour Force Survey Q3 2020. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lfs/labourforcesurvey/q3quarter32020/>

²² Murphy, M. (2018). No Feminist Budget: Analysis of Budget 2019 for NWCI.

Since many of the jobs lost, in sectors such as retail and hospitality, are unlikely to return soon, our ALMP should focus on skills development in alternative areas, such as care, which would represent a decent and green alternative for both women and men as well as helping to address unmet need for care services. Investment must include raising the pay and terms of conditions of the care workforce.

Equally, ALMP must address gender inequalities in access to emerging, higher paid and green jobs in STEM 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 2017.²³

The following actions would help us to address CSR no.2 (2019) which advises Ireland to provide personalised active integration support and facilitate upskilling for women and other vulnerable groups.

NWC recommends:

- Increase investment in active labour market programmes and supports
 - Invest in care as a key element of this, helping to make care a more attractive career and address unmet need in a 'green' way
 - Support women to access programmes in STEM areas
- Develop a gender and equality proofed labour market activation plan to address the challenges post- COVID-19 and provide targeted supports to those who experienced the greatest barriers, pre-pandemic - lone parents, Travellers, carers and disabled people
 - Publish gender and equality disaggregated data on beneficiaries of active labour market programmes

Decent work

For many women, paid work is no guarantee of income adequacy with women predominating in low paid and precarious work. While almost 70% of women are 'essential' workers, they are among the lowest paid in the economy. More than half of wholesale and retail workers²⁴ and 6 out of 10 childcare workers earn less than the Living Wage.²⁵ Among undocumented workers, many of whom work in care and other essential sectors, 26% report earning less than the minimum wage.²⁶

While there has been an annual increase in the minimum wage in recent years, it stagnated during austerity year with no increase between 2007-2015. If government is serious about closing the gap between the minimum wage and the living wage, we need to see greater increases in the minimum wage than the 10c per hour agreed in 2020. Addressing the inadequacy of the minimum wage contributes to gender equality, closing the gender pay and pension gap and elevates women out of poverty, according to the EU Commission who have estimated that Ireland's GPG could decline by almost 10% if the minimum wage were to reach 60% of median wages.²⁷

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.²⁸ However, the proportion of employees covered by collective bargaining agreements in Ireland is low. Legislation is of particular necessity in Ireland, as our laws allow employers

²³ <https://witsireland.com/stem-resources/women-in-stem-in-ireland-by-numbers/>

²⁴ CSO (2020). LFS Minimum Wage Statistics. Q4 2019.

²⁵ Pobal (2019). Annual early years sector profile report 2018/2019.

²⁶ MRCI (2020). Live here, work here, belong here. A survey of over 1,000 undocumented people in Ireland

²⁷ EU Commission. COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT IMPACT ASSESSMENT Accompanying the document Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on adequate minimum wages in the European Union SWD/2020/245 final. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=SWD:2020:245:FIN>

²⁸ European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). Collective bargaining and gender equality. <https://www.etuc.org/en/collective-bargaining-and-gender-equality>

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.

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, of which approximately €6.5 billion is on capital works and €8.5 billion is on goods and services.²⁹ 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.

Budget 2021 committed billions in public funds to supporting business, including VAT cuts to the hospitality sector, but failed to link supports for business to better terms and conditions for workers. The experience of the last financial crash demonstrates the importance of ensuring supports for private enterprise are conditional on improving wages and terms and conditions of workers. In 2011, VAT cuts were granted to the hospitality and tourism industry. During 2012-2017, profits rose from 4% to 24.6%, however, wages stagnated and rose only 3.7% during the same period.³⁰ Failure to share the benefits with workers impacts on the public purse through lower tax revenue and increased social welfare costs through the need for payments such as the Working Family Payment. It is essential that we learn from previous mistakes and ensure that public benefit is gained from public spending.

COVID-19 has provided us with a unique opportunity to reexamine our approach to work to ensure it is sustainable into the future. In this context, the NRRP should look at how reduced working time, such as a four-day week, would help to facilitate a more equal distribution of care between women and men, supporting both to play more of a role in child-rearing as well as care of older family members. As well as the benefits to workers, the four-day week has benefits for both business and the environment.

NWC recommends:

- Ensure work provides a Living Wage.
 - Refocus the work of the Low Pay Commission towards a Living Wage Commission, as committed to by Minister Varadkar following Budget 2021
- Ensure an equitable recovery by linking supports to businesses under the NRRP to conditions such as addressing the gender pay gap, supporting collective bargaining rights and the Living Wage
- Attach social criteria, clauses and conditionality, including living wage clauses government procurement processes
- Legislate for collective bargaining rights
- Fund school infrastructure in physics and maths so women and girls can access higher paid work in areas like IT, engineering and green technology
- Provide a €5m financial aid fund to support businesses to pilot the Four Day Week in Ireland

Social and territorial cohesion

End Poverty

The social welfare system should ensure that everyone, no matter what their stage of life, can live free from poverty. However, poverty remains unacceptably high. In 2019, 13% of the overall population was at risk of poverty with lone parents (86% of whom are women) and disabled people being those most at risk of poverty.³¹ Among those aged 65 and over, 15% of men and 25% of women are at risk of poverty.³²

²⁹ DPER (2020). DPER Briefing Note Public Procurement 21/05/20

³⁰ <https://notesonthefront.typepad.com/politicaconomy/>

³¹ CSO (2020). SILC 2019

³² CSO (2020). Women and men in Ireland.

Some migrants are more at risk of poverty with 32% of non-EU nationals living in Ireland at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to 19% of Irish nationals.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.

Ireland's 'Roadmap for Social Inclusion' re-commits to achieving the target of 2% consistent poverty that its predecessor, the 'National Action Plan for Social Inclusion' failed to deliver. The NRRP must invest in addressing poverty if Ireland is to meet its commitments under the Roadmap. Addressing poverty requires a whole of government approach which includes provision of universal basic services and decent work, as described previously. But it must also include providing adequate income supports to keep people out of poverty.

Ireland's expenditure on all types of social protection - pensions, unemployment, disability, housing supports and children - is one of the lowest in the EU.³⁵ The increases in illness benefit and the setting of the PUP at a higher rate to job seekers payment is an acknowledgement that social welfare rates are too low to maintain an adequate standard of living.

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.³⁶

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 work as a legitimate choice and it also gives people who are caring for children under 12 the right to access unemployment benefit.³⁷ NESC have recommended piloting a PI system. Taken together, a PI and provision of UBS such as health, housing and care, offer a chance to transform living standards in Ireland and greatly improve wellbeing.

Recommendations

- Establish the MESL as the benchmark for social welfare payments
- Implement targeted supports to women most at risk of poverty – lone parents, Travellers, disabled people and those living in Direct Provision, including establishment of a cost of disability payment
- Develop a Participation Income pilot

Pensions

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 and so women are more likely to be reliant on the State Non-Contributory Pension than men. Only 28% of women of pension age have an occupational or private pension compared to 55% of men and there is a gender pension gap of 35%.³⁸ 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.³⁹

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

³⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Social_protection_statistics

³⁶ Murphy, M & McGann, M (2020). Reconfiguring welfare in an eco-social state: participation income and universal services [here](#)

³⁷ NESC (2020). The Future of the Irish Social Welfare System: Participation and Protection.

³⁸ Nolan, A. et al (2019). Gender, pensions and income in retirement. Dublin: ESRI.

³⁹ CSO (2020). Pensions statistics. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pens/pensioncoverage2019/>

Older rural women are even less likely than older urban women to have an occupational or contributory pension.⁴⁰

The Homemaker's Scheme does not address the inequalities and discrimination experienced by older women who were expected by Irish society to shoulder the full burden of caring responsibilities but who were equally expected to do this work for nothing. 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 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. The state pension system requires reform to tackle these types of structural inequalities. The best way to do this and to achieve equality for women is through a universal pension.⁴¹

CSR's on the need to limit the scope and number of tax expenditures and to address the expected increase in age-related expenditure by implementing pension reform plans are particularly relevant here. The State spends approximately €2.39 billion per annum in private pension tax relief. In 2014, 72% of pension tax relief went to the top 20% of earners with 50% going to the top 5% of earners.⁴² As women tend to be lower earners, these tax reliefs also widen rather than narrow the gender pension gap. These tax reliefs should be ended and the expenditure should be invested in sustaining an adequate first tier State pension and a universal pension into the future.

Recommendations

- Introduce a universal, fair State Pension system which will guarantee income adequacy in older age, paid for by ending tax relief on private pension and investing the savings in a first tier state pension

Women in Rural Communities

It has long been a concern that rural development policies have focused predominantly on economic development in isolation from social development. Policies have failed to recognise, resource or support the diversity that, while now growing, has always been a part of rural society. There was no reference to women in the Charter for Rural Ireland published in 2016.

Women in rural communities experience additional barriers to participation. Economic dependency, isolation, unequal opportunity and participation are compounded by the problems of distance from services and amenities. The absence of an adequate transport service and affordable childcare services in many areas make it difficult for women to avail of training and education or to enter into or retain employment.

Women's community development organisations have played an important role in enabling, supporting and facilitating the participation and empowerment of marginalised women, in a way that focuses on collective strategies for addressing social, economic, cultural and political inequalities. Multi annual

⁴⁰ 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

⁴¹ NWC (2008). Pensions: What women want - a model of pensions that guarantees independence.

⁴² Collins, M.L. & Hughes, G. Supporting Pensions Contributions through the tax system. IEA Conference 2017

funding for independent community development in rural communities is vital for the sustainability of these services and supports.

Recommendations

- Invest in rural transport solutions with a focus on disabled people, dispersed populations and women
- Provide multi annual funding for independent community development in rural communities

Green transition

Deliver a Feminist Green New Deal

International research has established that as climate impacts increase, existing inequalities, deprivation and exclusion will be worsened, with the worst impacts on women.⁴³ It is therefore welcome that the NRRP must devote a minimum of 37% of expenditure to climate with the remaining 63% complying with the 'do no harm' principle.

CSR's from 2019 and 2020 have placed a particular emphasis on investment in a green transition, public transport and clean energy. Investment in high-quality social, physical and digital infrastructures, including public services, are a prerequisite for a shift to a greener economy that is capable of promoting decent and sustainable work.⁴⁴

Our transition to a greener economy must be a just transition and all measures must incorporate mitigation and climate justice investments to ensure rural communities, households experiencing energy poverty or those on low incomes do not experience further inequality and poverty. While there was some attempt to offset the effect of an increase in carbon tax on low income households in Budget 2021, eligibility criteria for fuel allowance means that many of those on low incomes will not be able to benefit and will be disproportionately affected by the increase.

NWC and partners in 56 coalitions, networks and organisations have put forward proposals for a just recovery, based on six key principles: protect and invest in public services, prioritising public health and wellbeing; invest in people; deliver faster and fairer climate action and restore and protect nature; build solidarity and community across borders; ensure inclusive and participatory decision-making; and redefine progress through a focus on wellbeing and sustainable development.⁴⁵ These principles would form a useful basis to guide commitments in the NRRP.

NWC recommends:

- Incorporate principles of a just recovery, set out by NWC, Stop Climate Chaos and partners, into the NRRP
- Ensure all just transition legislation policies & investment are gender & poverty proofed
- National planning must ensure Irelands climate polluting emissions reduce by a minimum of 8% annually
- Introduce 'polluter pays' environmental tax measures, remove fossil fuel subsidies and divest from fossil fuel investment
- Prioritise rural and urban public transport infrastructure, including cycling, over roads building
- Invest in a just transition plan for rural development including ending intensive livestock production

⁴³ European parliament-The Gender Dimension of Climate Justice 2015

⁴⁴ Global Commission on the Future of Work (2019). Work for a brighter future. ILO.

⁴⁵ https://www.stopclimatechaos.ie/assets/files/pdf/a_shared_vision_for_a_just_recovery.pdf