

Budget 2021

A Feminist Recovery Plan

Table of Contents

10 Principles for a Feminist Economic Recovery	2
Introduction	4
Invest in an equal and sustainable future	4
Revenue raising choices	5
Embed Gender and Equality Budgeting	8
Create a new model of work and welfare	8
End the Gender Pensions Gap	12
Deliver Universal Basic Services	13
Change Ireland’s record on Violence Against Women	18
Ensure Access to Justice	19
Enable Women’s Participation and Decision Making	20
Deliver a Green New Deal	22

10 Principles for a Feminist Economic Recovery

1. Champion a new economic model that takes account of equality, human rights and environmental sustainability and guarantees a decent quality of life for all
2. Gender and equality proof all decisions on expenditure and revenue raising, recognising the reality of intersecting forms of discrimination on women's lives
3. Reject austerity and fund investment through progressive, gender sensitive taxation
4. Deliver Universal Basic Services on the basis of need, not ability to pay. Begin with investing in the care economy, health and in housing
5. Reform the welfare state so that it counts women in by recognising and rewarding all forms of participation and work and providing individual access to income and supports
6. Challenge low paid and precarious work. Transition to a flexible work model, including options such as a four-day week to bring a proper balance to our lives and protect our fragile environment.
7. Address the economic equalities experienced by working class women, lone parents, women of colour, Traveller women, Roma, women seeking asylum, disabled women and carers.
8. Care jobs are green jobs. Recognise the role that care plays in a just transition and reorient our economy away from environmentally damaging and unsustainable practices
9. Recognise the economic and social impact of domestic and sexual violence and end the scourge of violence against women
10. Improve decision making by ensuring women in all our diversity are at the table in decisions regarding social and economic policy

NWC Budget 2021 – Key priorities

Invest in an equal and sustainable future	Department
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce wealth tax, financial transaction tax and minimum effective corporate tax • Standard rate tax relief on pensions • Remove fossil fuel subsidies • Ensure supports to businesses are conditional on improvements for workers 	DOF DPER/DBEI/DSP
Embed gender and equality budgeting	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender and equality proof Budget 2021 & National Economic Plan • Publish an intersectional gender equality impact statement with the Budget • Establish a training fund for government depts & fund NWC & others to engage 	DPER/DOF DPER DPER/DCDEI
Create a new model of work and welfare	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver individualisation of social welfare payments • Increase investment in labour market programmes & in care as a key element • Introduce a Living Wage to promote decent work • Resource implementation of the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill • Increase maternity, paternity and parents benefit to €295 per week • Increasing paid parents leave to 12 weeks per parent • Resource a full Homecare Credit & six paid days of carers' leave • Benchmark social welfare payments to the MESL 	DSP
End the Gender Pensions Gap	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a universal State Pension system • Establish Commission on Pensions and work with Stop 67 Campaign on pension age • Ensure pensions reform, including auto-enrolment, is gender and equality proofed • Deliver a full Homecarers credit 	DSP
Deliver Universal Basic Services (Health, Care, Housing)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource the implementation of Sláintecare to deliver universal health • Fund the work of the Women's Health Taskforce • Fund mental health services, including perinatal services • Introduce universal contraception and progress abortion care services • Increase investment in ECEC to 1% of GDP over the next decade • Introduce a Living Wage for all Early Years Educators in 2020 • Increase funding for homecare and Personal Assistance Services • Increase public & affordable housing by delivering 100,000 homes on public land • Develop affordable cost rental housing and increase security of tenure • Gender proof policy & establish supports for women living in homelessness • Establish & resource a statutory Traveller Agency and end Direct Provision 	DOH DCDEI DCDEI DHPLG
Change Ireland's record on Violence Against Women	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a National Rapporteur on Sexual Domestic and Gender Based Violence • Provide funding to combat VAW and support women and frontline services • Resource Domestic Homicide Reviews and Divisional Protective Service Units 	DOJ
Ensure access to Justice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform family law system & structures and establish a statutory maintenance agency • Address historical abuse of women in care of the State 	DOJ/DSP DOJ/DCDEI
Enable women's participation and Decision Making	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase funding to NWC, NCCWN and the women's community sector • Fund the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, local caucuses & young women's leadership 	DCDEI/DRCD DHPLG/DCDEI
Deliver a Green New Deal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender, poverty and rural proof Just Transition, policy & investment • Reduce emissions by a minimum of 8% annually • Introduce 'polluter pays' environmental tax measures 	DCCA

Introduction

Budget 2021 is being implemented in the context of a global pandemic which has revealed and reinforced prevailing inequalities: our dependence on the underpaid and undervalued care labour of women and our continuing reliance on institutions to house those society positions as problematic, including disabled women, those seeking asylum, and homeless women and families.

The rapid response to effectively nationalise the healthcare and childcare sectors acknowledged the dangers and inefficiencies of privatised essential public services. The crisis has highlighted that for many, work is precarious and low paid and does not provide an adequate income. The introduction of the pandemic unemployment payments and wage subsidy highlighted that existing social welfare payments are insufficient to live on and that people can receive their incomes on an individualised basis.

Budget 2021 provides us with the opportunity to make policy choices and to allocate the additional resources required to “deliver a better quality of life for all, equality within society and a deeper sense of connection to the natural world around us, and each other” as outlined in the Programme for Government ‘Our Shared Future’. These ideals cannot be delivered on the basis of ‘business as usual’. We must fundamentally restructure our economy and society, away from a focus on economic growth as a goal in and of itself and towards the creation of sustainable and equal communities.

Investing in the care economy and in public services and social infrastructure must be a clear priority. Lack of investment will inevitably keep, or transfer back, personal, health and community care needs to the unpaid, undervalued and often invisible labour of women. To fund this investment, we must raise sufficient revenue in a fair and equitable way, and in doing so, seriously examine Ireland’s taxation system.

We cannot have a repeat of the last financial crash, where policy choices were made at the expense of our most vulnerable and marginalised citizens – women, young people, Travellers, disabled people, migrants - many have still not recovered from the effects of austerity imposed, post 2009.

We acknowledge that the scale of investment needed is enormous but we must make this investment, for the economic and social costs of not investing are far greater as the continuing impacts of the last austerity period continue to be felt in society.

While we must look to a recovery from COVID and at building a better economy and society, we must also take steps to ensure that women do not continue to be disproportionately impacted as we try to live with the pandemic over the next year.

We need a feminist economic recovery plan if we are to build a society that is better for both women and men- a plan that is based on public services, fair taxation, valuing the care economy, equality and sustainability.

Invest in an equal and sustainable future

The government’s July Stimulus package provides for a €7.4bn investment, aimed at building a jobs-led recovery. There are welcome measures contained in the package. However, whether it will provide the level of investment that is required remains to be seen. As it stands, there are key gaps in the plan, including the absence of a commitment to a universal, public model of Early Childhood Education and Care, despite childcare being an essential component of a functioning labour market. Also missing is any real ambition to push forward a just transition. These gaps must be addressed in the Budget and National Economic Plan.

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 COVID. The European Commission's MFF and Next Generation EU plans note the need for exceptional measures requiring massive public investment to support a resilient economy. Ireland must follow the EU through focusing on an investment led recovery with green investment a priority.¹ Ireland can take advantage of the flexibility offered by the European Commission on the fiscal rules on budget deficits² to invest in a green new deal, a public care infrastructure and universal health. This in turn will create healthier and more equal societies which will support sustainable productivity as well as additional tax revenue.

Investment must take priority over reducing the deficit and there are important lessons to be learned from the last financial crisis. Austerity measures taken in Budget 2009 and subsequent budgets have had a lasting impact, resulting in long term social harm from which many communities have still not recovered. Women bore the brunt of austerity measures, with the greatest impacts on the most marginalised women. The years 2008-2013 saw Traveller education budgets reduced by 86.6%, accommodation budgets by 80%³ as well as swingeing cuts to lone parent payments and disability budgets.

Austerity measures have also been cited as a factor in widespread discontent and the surge of right wing and anti-EU parties across the Europe.⁴ The IMF has advised that austerity can do more harm than good, and concluded that "simply living with high debt and allowing debt ratios to decline organically through growth is underappreciated".

The experience of the last financial crash also demonstrates the importance of ensuring supports for private enterprise are conditional on improving wages and terms and conditions of workers, such as addressing the gender pay gap, supporting collective bargaining rights and increasing wages to the Living Wage. In 2011, VAT cuts were granted to some of the worst affected sectors, including the hospitality and tourism industry. During 2012-2018, profits increased enormously in the sector, rising from 4% in 2012 to 24.6% in 2017. However, wages stagnated and rose only 3.7% during the same period.⁵ As well as the obvious lack of fairness, such failure to share the benefits with workers also has 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.

Recommendations

- Financial supports to businesses must be conditional on social clause conditions including addressing the Gender Pay Gap, commitment to the living wage and support for collective bargaining
- Budget 2021 and the National Economic Plan must be gender and equality proofed

Revenue raising choices

Borrowing does not negate the need to increase our tax take. The gendered impacts of taxation are often overlooked and taxation is often presented as gender neutral. However, as women and men's socio-economic status (labour force participation rate, income, wealth and so on) differs, our tax system affects men and women differently and can exacerbate gender inequalities and should be assessed for its gendered impacts accordingly.

¹ <https://www.businesspost.ie/columnists/aidan-regan-greens-must-avoid-falling-into-deficit-trap-87a3571a?auth=login>

² https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/summary-of-the-european-commission-s-response-to-corona-virus-covid-19-crisis-to-date_en

³ Murphy, M. & Cullen, P. (2018). Austerity, gender inequality and feminism after the crisis. Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung.

⁴ Kaczmarczyk, P. (2020). [Coronavirus crisis: There is no way back to business as usual in the EU](#). London School of Economics

⁵ <https://notesonthefront.typepad.com/politiceconomy/>

Tax plays a key role in shaping Irish society through funding our public services and social infrastructure, supporting economic activity and progressively redistributing resources. However, Ireland's tax take as a percentage of national income (GDP) is below average and is one of the lowest in the OECD. In 2018, Ireland had a tax-to-GDP ratio of 22% compared with the OECD average of 34%, placing us 34th out of 36 OECD countries.⁶ On a measure of tax collected per person, Ireland scores second lowest among an 11 country EU peer group. One of the key drivers of this difference is the much lower social contribution (i.e. PRSI) paid by employers in Ireland. Ireland would collect an additional €11 bn if tax was matched to EU norms.⁷

In its 2020 report on Ireland as part of the EU Semester process, the EU Commission notes limited progress made on its previous recommendations on broadening the tax base and addressing aggressive tax planning and it reiterates the need for Ireland to address these issues. If we are to have the resources required to create the society we want and the public services that are the norm in other EU countries, Ireland needs to increase its tax take by broadening the tax base in a fair, progressive, sustainable and gender sensitive way.

Corporate tax

Ireland's headline rate of corporation tax is currently 12.5%. However, some large corporations pay significantly less by availing of a variety of tax breaks and exemptions, resulting in significant loss of tax revenue for the state. When corporations fail to pay their fair share of tax, this burden is shifted onto citizens through a combination of increased taxes on labour or cuts to essential services. It is estimated that a minimum effective corporate tax rate of 6% on profit would yield in excess of €1,000m in 2020.⁸ As well as addressing the low effective rate paid by some large corporations, Government must reduce reliance on windfall corporation tax receipts that has built up in recent years.

Green taxes

In 2019, Ireland became the second country in the world to declare a climate and biodiversity emergency. Rather than COVID 19 setting back our efforts to address this emergency, Budget 2021 can ensure that spending and revenue raising advance us towards achieving our climate goals by shifting the burden of taxation towards environmentally damaging activities.

There is currently a misalignment between our climate goals and our tax policy. Supports to fossil fuel activities increased from €2.3 billion in 2012 to €2.5 billion in 2016.⁹ The majority of this is revenue foregone through exemptions to environmentally damaging fossil fuel, agriculture and transport activities. The lower rate of excise duty alone on Auto-diesel, Marked Gas Oil, Kerosene, Aviation fuel and fuel oil cost nearly €2bn in lost income in 2016.¹⁰ Households bear the burden of environmental taxes, paying 61% of the taxes while being responsible for 22.1% of emissions.¹¹ Increased revenue from green taxes should be ringfenced to ensure a just transition and that rural communities, households experiencing energy poverty or lower socio-economic groups do not experience further inequality and poverty.

Pensions

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 and 5% of the population are getting 50% of the tax

⁶ OECD (2019). Revenue Statistics 2019 – Ireland. <https://www.oecd.org/tax/revenue-statistics-ireland.pdf>

⁷ 11 country EU peer group. <https://www.nerinstitute.net/blog/rethinking-tax-republic-ireland-and-uk>

⁸ <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/time-reform-corporation-taxation-and-subsidies>

⁹ https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/rp/fossilfuelandsimilarsubsidies/Fossil_Fuel_and_Similar_Subsidies.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.nerinstitute.net/blog/harmful-fossil-fuel-subsidies-mistaken-policy>

¹¹ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/households-pay-most-green-taxes-but-emit-one-fifth-of-emissions-cso-1.3668172#:~:text=Irish%20households%20produce%20just%20over,taxes%2C%20new%20CSO%20figures%20show.&text=By%20comparison%2C%20environment%20taxes%20levied,per%20cent%20of%20the%20total.>

relief.¹² 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 first tier State pensions and a universal pension.

Financial transaction tax

Trillions of euro worth of financial transactions take place globally every day. A large number of these are speculative, meaning they make no real or worthwhile contribution to economies and societies beyond increasing risk and instability.¹³ In 2011 the European Commission outlined proposals for a Europe wide financial transaction tax (FTT). Research has indicated that the value of this to Ireland would be between €320 –€350 million per year.¹⁴ An FTT discourages speculative finance whilst simultaneously generating revenue for investment in social infrastructure. Ireland should also support calls for a progressive European FTT.

Wealth tax

Ireland has one of the highest levels of wealth inequality in the EU. We have a disproportionately high number of billionaires for the size of our population and rank fifth in the world after Hong Kong, Cyprus, Switzerland and Singapore in terms of relative number of billionaires.¹⁵ A wealth tax with a household threshold of €1 million would affect just 1% to 2% of the wealthiest households and would provide an estimate of at least €250 million for the exchequer annually.¹⁶

Recommendations

- The Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare must:
 - Carry out a review of all individual and sectoral tax expenditures, assessing their cost and gender and equality impacts
 - Examine how employers' PRSI can be increased to fund social infrastructure
- Implement a minimum effective corporate tax rate of 6% to bring in approx. €1000m in additional revenue¹⁷
- Introduce a wealth tax with a household threshold of €1 million to bring in an estimated €250 million annually, at least¹⁸
- Introduce an FTT to bring in €320m of additional revenue¹⁹
- Standard rate pension tax relief as a first step to bring in additional revenue of €483m²⁰
- End lower rate of excise duty for aviation, autodiesel, marked gas oil, fuel oil and kerosene to bring in additional revenue of €1.96bn²¹
- Increase carbon tax by €10 per tonne as interim measure to reach target of €80 per tonne by 2030. Ringfence for just transition and mitigation measures

¹² Collins, M.L. & Hughes, G. Supporting Pensions Contributions through the tax system. IEA Conference 2017

¹³ <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/time-government-support-financial-transactions-tax>

¹⁴ <https://www.nerinstitute.net/research/estimating-revenue-yield-fft>

¹⁵ Oxfam (2020). Time to care: Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis.

¹⁶ NERI (2018). A Household Net Wealth Tax in the Republic of Ireland: Some Considerations

¹⁷ <https://www.socialjustice.ie/sites/default/files/attach/publication/5860/budgetchoices2020.pdf?cs=true>

¹⁸ NERI (2018). A Household Net Wealth Tax in the Republic of Ireland: Some Considerations

¹⁹ <https://www.nerinstitute.net/research/estimating-revenue-yield-fft>

²⁰ <https://www.socialjustice.ie/sites/default/files/attach/publication/5860/budgetchoices2020.pdf?cs=true>

²¹ <https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/rp/fossilfuelandsimilarsubsidiessubsidies.pdf>

Embed Gender and Equality Budgeting

Proposals in the programme for government to measure progress using wellbeing indicators as well as economic ones, are welcome. GDP does not value the millions of hours of unpaid work carried out by women, work that is not paid for but is vital to sustaining the economy and society, nor does it consider the damage done to the environment through a policy focus on raising production and consumption of goods and it fails to consider inequality in society.

The disproportionate impact of previous austerity measures on women and discrimination in access to income supports during the pandemic²², 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.

Gender equality should be central to any wellbeing budget proposals with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), on gender equality, poverty, health, sustainability and education, among others, providing a useful framework to guide the selection of budget priorities.

Recommendations

- Publish a gender equality impact statement with Budget 2021 with disaggregated data on women Travellers, disabled women and other equality grounds
- Ensure that gender equality is a core element of wellbeing budget actions
- Establish a training fund for resources and staffing to support:
 - Cross dept. training on gender budgeting implementation
 - Development of disaggregated data collection and analysis
 - Development of expertise in the Parliamentary Budgetary Office to analyse and support Gender & Equality Budgeting work
- Ensure that all major capital infrastructure investment has been gender impact assessed
- Provide funding to support NWC & other civil society originations as recommended by the OECD and UN

Create a new model of work and welfare

Our work and welfare systems were built for a different era on a largely male breadwinner understanding of both the labour market and social welfare systems. Even before COVID struck, women were disadvantaged in the labour market with lone parents, disabled women, migrants and ethnic minorities, including Travellers, experiencing multiple barriers to employment. A return to 'normal' will not support women.

A participation income (PI) is an alternative to our current activation focused 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, voluntary work, participation in education and political participation, all forms of work that contribute to the common good.²³ Budget 2021 can take

²² 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

²³ <https://www.socialeurope.eu/reconfiguring-welfare-in-an-eco-social-state-participation-income-and-universal-services>

steps towards a more progressive model of welfare by relaxing access to income supports so that a wider range of women can access individual payments and supports in their own right.

A new model of welfare and work must:

- Ensure active labour market policy works for women, including through individualised access to income and supports
- Promote decent work
- Ensure work life balance and recognise care
- Address poverty, and in particular the increased poverty experienced by Travellers, people with disabilities and women parenting alone.

Gender and Equality proof Active Labour Market Policy

Eligibility for Jobseekers payments requires women with care responsibilities to prove that they can cover childcare needs, can work full time and are looking for full time work. As we go into a period with record unemployment rates, it is important to remember that the current system has not been as effective at lowering female unemployment as male unemployment, with more women on the Live Register in February 2020 than February 2007.

A recovery should focus on creating decent, sustainable well-paid jobs, not jobs at any cost. 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 addressing pressing unmet need for care, investment in the care economy would also help us to meet our commitments to a shift towards a low carbon economy. UK based research found that investing in care would create 2.7 times as many jobs as the same investment in construction.²⁴

Recommendations

- Establish individualised access to the social welfare system so women are paid in their own right and can access the supports that accompany an unemployment payment
 - Start by eliminating the limitation rule for Jobseekers Allowance so that both partners in couples have an individual payment and access to activation and educational supports
- Increase investment in ALMP to 2% of GDP
 - Invest in care as a key element of ALMP including development of training and national salary scales
- Develop a new gender and equality proofed labour market activation plan to address the challenges post COVID-19
 - Provide targeted supports to qualified adults, carer's and disabled women e.g embed Job Coaches in all Intreo offices to support disabled women to obtain and retain employment
 - Develop a gender proofed national Traveller employment strategy to take account of barriers to participation of Traveller women
 - Acknowledge care by allowing those working part time to be eligible for Jobseekers payments

²⁴ Women's Budget Group (2020). A care led recovery from Coronavirus. <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Care-led-recovery-final.pdf>

Promote decent work

For many women, paid work is no guarantee of income adequacy with women predominating in low paid and precarious work. The labour market is highly gender segregated with the proportion of women working in higher paid sectors like information and communications technology (ICT) in Ireland decreasing from 30% in 2004 to 21% in 2017.²⁵ While almost 70% of women are 'essential' workers, they are among the lowest paid in the economy. More than half of wholesale and retail workers²⁶ and 6 out of 10 childcare workers, predominantly women, earn less than the living wage.²⁷ Minimum Wage workers are more likely to be female, young, migrants and those working part time.²⁸ Even among young workers, there is a gender pay gap with female workers under 25 earning 19% less than comparable males in 2018.²⁹

The *Gender Pay Gap Information Bill* will require pay audits for some companies and technical assistance should be provided to ensure cost is not a barrier to improving pay transparency in Ireland. Collective bargaining is one of the most effective ways to reduce the gender pay gap and the state must support it as a key gender equality tool.³⁰

Recommendations

- Begin implementation of a Living Wage by introducing a Living Wage for all Early Years Educators in 2020 as a first step towards professional pay scales and recognition –€30m³¹
- Attach social criteria, clauses and conditionality, including living wage clauses to Employer incentive schemes and government procurement processes
- Resource the Programme for Government commitment to regularising the situation of migrant workers
- Provide resources for the implementation of the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill
 - Provide technical and financial assistance for SME's
 - Establish public pay audit website
- Support collective bargaining as a key mechanism to address the gender pay gap
- Fund school infrastructure in physics and maths so women and girls can access higher paid work in areas like IT, engineering and green technology

Improve Work life Balance

COVID-19 has highlighted the largely unpaid, unequal and invisible care economy in which women dominate. Women continue to provide the majority of unpaid work and the choices women can make with regard to employment are severely limited due to lack of a public early years and care infrastructure and men having not yet taken equal responsibility for care within families.

We must change the false narrative that working long hours is good for productivity, challenge the worst excesses of the 'work-first' culture, and instead champion the importance of family time, leisure time, caring work and community work. 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

²⁵ <https://witsireland.com/stem-resources/women-in-stem-in-ireland-by-numbers/>

²⁶ CSO (2020). LFS Minimum Wage Statistics. Q4 2019.

²⁷ Pobal (2019). Annual early years sector profile report 2018/2019.

²⁸ Redmond, P. (2020). Minimum wage policy in Ireland. ESRI.

²⁹ CSO (2019). Earnings analysis using administrative data 2018.

³⁰ SIPTU (2017). Submission to the consultation on tackling the gender pay gap

³¹ Dáil Eireann debate. Tuesday 28th July 2020. PQ18226/20. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2020-07-28/708/>

older family members. As well as the benefits to workers, the four-day week has benefits for both business and the environment.

Recommendations

- Increase the rate of maternity, paternity and parental benefit to €295 per week to bring more in line with EU norms
- Increase the duration of paid parents leave to 26 weeks per parent (or 52 weeks for lone parents), on a phased basis, to give parents choices in their child's first year
 - Increase to 12 weeks in Budget 2021 at increased rate of €295 per week - €190m³²
- Convert existing unpaid parental leave to paid leave
- Increase paid paternity leave to 4 weeks
- Resource a full & retrospective Homecare Credit that also acts as re-entry credit to access training
- Introduce six paid days of carers' leave
- Establish an All Party Oireachtas Committee to make recommendations on the reorganisation of work, reduced working time and the 4-day week
- Resource a time use survey to gather updated data on time spent on unpaid work - €240k

End Poverty

In 2018, 14% of the overall population was at risk of poverty with lone parents, predominantly women and disabled people being those most at risk of poverty. Among those aged 65 and over, 15% of men and 25% of women are at risk of poverty. 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

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.

Recommendations

- Establish the MESL as the benchmark for social welfare payments
 - Increase social welfare rates by €8 as an interim measure in Budget 2021
 - Increase Qualified Child payments by €3 for children under 12 and €10 for children aged 12 and above in Budget 2021³⁶
- Implement targeted supports to women most at risk of poverty:

³² Calculation based on DEASP data: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2020-05-13a.3384&s=paternity+leave+AND+cost#g3386.r>

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 These are interim increases for Budget 2021 in order to attain a MESL by 2025, in line with VPSJ evidence on MESL

- Allow lone parents to receive both the Jobseeker's Transitional payment and Working Family Payment
- Reduce requirement for Working Family Payment for lone parents to 15hrs
- Exclude Working Family Payment from income assessment for differential rental schemes
- Grant Child Benefit to all children irrespective of the immigration status of the parents
- Extend Free Travel Scheme to people in the international protection process
- Introduce special measures for particularly vulnerable Roma, who do not have income and do not meet the Habitual Residence Condition, to access social welfare payments
- Restore the full rate of Jobseekers Allowance for 18-24 year olds as a matter of urgency
- Deliver a non-means tested, cost of disability payment, minimum €20 per week pending the publication of DEASP's research on cost of disability
- 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^{37 38}

End the Gender Pensions Gap

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 are more likely to be reliant on the state non-contributory pension than men. Women, rural women in particular, are less likely to have an occupational or private pension.³⁹ Ireland's social insurance system defines many women who work on the family farm and spouses of business owners (mainly women) as 'relatives assisting'. They cannot make PRSI contributions, which would entitle them to old age contributory pension and are therefore, financially dependent on their husbands and reliant on a qualified adult state pension that is approximately 70% of the full amount.

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. 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 commitments in the programme for government to defer the increase in pension age and to establish a Commission on Pensions are welcome. So too is the commitment to developing a pension solution for carers that acknowledges the importance of their work. The best way to do this and to achieve equality for women is through a universal pension.⁴⁰

Recommendations

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

³⁷ <https://familycarers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Family-Carers-Ireland-A-Decade-Lost-Pre-Budget-Submission.pdf>

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ 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

⁴⁰ NWC (2008). Pensions: What women want - a model of pensions that guarantees independence.

- Establish the Commission on Pensions as set out in the Programme for Government and ensure key stakeholder involvement, including the Stop 67 Campaign
 - Resource a GIA on projected increases in state pension age & subsequent pension reforms
- Resource & publish a gender and equality impact assessment of TCA & Auto-enrolment
 - Ensure the Total Contributions Approach (TCA) is limited to 30 years for the maximum pension
- Deliver a full Homecarers credit that actively recognises the contribution of care and also serves as a re-entry credit.
 - Apply to women born before 1946

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.⁴¹ 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, some of the highest levels of unmet need for services in the EU; and an underdeveloped public transport system, especially in rural areas. 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'.⁴²

The provision of Universal Basic Services (UBS) is the most effective way to meet society's collective needs. In the context of a society with profound income and gender inequality, it would provide better value than a Universal Basic Income and more effectively tackle the underlying causes of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Global research has proven that the fastest way to tackle persistent gender inequalities & discriminations for women is sustained investment in public services and social infrastructure. Ireland has one of the highest rates of low pay in the OECD, and provision of UBS would lessen the impact of exorbitant rent and childcare costs in particular, for low paid workers and lone parents.

Universal Basic Services are not a cost, they are an investment in a properly functioning and equal society and economy, and indeed, essential assets when crises like COVID-19 strike. Lack of investment will inevitably keep, or transfer back, personal, health and community care needs to the unpaid, undervalued and often invisible labour of women. The priority for Budget 2021 should be to move towards a system of UBS by focusing on these key services:

- Universal health
- Care, including Early Childhood Education and Care and adult social care
- Housing

Universal Health

As a result of gender inequality in society, women experience particular inequalities in health outcomes and in their access to health services. Women generally live longer, but this also means women tend to have more years of ill-health with chronic diseases requiring more healthcare. Women are affected in greater numbers by depression and anxiety. Because women have lower incomes and provide the

⁴¹ Mary Murphy et al (2020). The High Road Back to Work.

⁴² <https://www.socialeurope.eu/the-four-worlds-of-the-social-ecological-state>

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 hospital capacity and in social care services. In response the Government strengthened public services, including a universal health system. We must build on these initiatives and Government must escalate the implementation of Sláintecare, making use of a range of measures to fund and deliver it. Funding measures should include continued borrowing at low interest rates, making use of the EU's recovery plan to boost capacity and mitigate against structural risks, and access to EIB funding to expand access to diagnostics.

The Programme for Government makes a commitment to support the work of the Women's Health Taskforce, including the development of a Women's Health Action Plan, and Budget 2021 must provide the resources to enable this work. Budget 2021 must also address key issues for women's mental health including increasing the overall mental health budget and developing and funding women specific mental health programmes. Likewise, action is needed on women's sexual and reproductive health, including a universal contraception scheme.

Recommendations

- Deliver Sláintecare
 - Establish once-off transitional fund for capital projects, new structures, new equipment, additional staff training capacity and new services - €3 billion over 6 years
 - Establish the National Health Fund to ensure a dedicated and independent source of funding for the health and social care system
 - Fund annual targets for expanding service entitlements, system capacity and public health
 - Resource and legislate for entitlements to high-quality, affordable services based on need rather than ability to pay
 - Resource the recommendations in the de Buitléir report to ensure that public hospitals are reserved for treating public patients

- Support women's health
 - Establish a funding line for implementation of Women's Health Taskforce priority actions in subsequent budgets
 - Fund a secretariat for the Taskforce
 - Resource the implementation of the Women's Health Action Plan
 - Increase Healthy Ireland fund by €4m, with €2m of this specifically for women's health through local authorities

- Support women's mental health
 - Move towards mental health being 10% of the overall health budget
 - Commit to the implementation of trauma informed services
 - Ensure gender sensitive mental health services including primary and community based (including women's sector) to acute and specialist services for women who need them

- Complete roll-out of perinatal mental health services nationally - €2.9m
- Establish the national perinatal mother and baby unit - €3m
- Reproductive and sexual health
 - Implement the National Maternity strategy - €5m per year
 - Introduce a universal State-funded contraception scheme - €80-100m
 - Invest in national cancer screening services to address backlog in screening since COVID-19 pause and to provide national HPV screening
 - Develop regional infertility hubs, including development of three public IVF centres at €2.5m per year per centre
 - Progress the provision of women-centred abortion care in hospitals and community services - €23m per year
 - Fund civil society engagement in the legislative review process of the Health (Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018
- Fund COVID-19 recovery
 - Invest additional funding in the Health Vote to fund social distancing requirements and new operational costs arising from COVID-19

Universal Care Services

COVID-19 has shown us the centrality of care to all of our lives. Care work is essential to the common good: it is vital for a functioning economy and society. However, the unpaid and paid labour of care is deeply gendered and extremely undervalued. In 2018, 94% of those whose principal economic status is 'looking after home and family' were women.⁴³ During the COVID crisis more women than men cared for a dependent family member or friend and women were more likely to report childcare issues or difficulty working from home because of family being around.⁴⁴ Older women are five times more likely than men to leave work to care for a family member.⁴⁵ 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 education and care system and universal adult social care.

Public early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Investing in high quality, public, affordable ECEC services has long term benefits for women, children, families, the economy and society. Ireland spends just 0.2% of GDP on ECEC compared to an EU average of 0.7% and well below the UNICEF recommended 1% of GDP. This insufficient level of funding has resulted in low pay, high staff turnover and the increasing cost of service delivery which are undermining the provision of accessible, affordable high-quality services and in turn the implementation of important government policy objectives.

Ireland has the most expensive ECEC fees in the European Union while ECEC professionals are some of the lowest paid in the economy, with 6 out of 10 workers earning less than the Living Wage.⁴⁶ 94% of Early Years Educators have difficulty or great difficulty making ends meet.⁴⁷ The high cost of childcare acts as an, often insurmountable, barrier to employment for women who are not high earners. Almost 60% of

⁴³ CSO (2020). Women and men in Ireland 2018

⁴⁴ CSO (2020). The Employment and Life effects of COVID-19.

⁴⁵ ESRI & HAS (2019). The ageing workforce in Ireland: Working conditions, health and extending working lives

⁴⁶ Pobal (2019). Annual early years sector profile report 2018/2019.

⁴⁷ SIPTU (2019). Early Years Professionals Survey 2019

lone parents cannot afford to access childcare services, three times the rate of two parent families.⁴⁸ Ireland is the worst performing country in the EU with regard to affordability for lone parents.

The response by the Government during the COVID crisis to subsidise the sector and the salaries of the workforce are key building blocks which must be further developed through Budget 2021 to create a fully developed, public, universal early childhood education and care service.

Recommendations

- Increase investment in early years to 1% of GDP over the next decade. In Budget 2021:
 - Establish a national programme for afterschool care
 - Establish Childcare Ireland as committed to in the programme for government
 - Establish an initial budget line of €2m for the recommendations of the Childminding Working Group Reports
- Introduce a Living Wage for all Early Years Educators in 2020 as a first step towards professional pay scales and recognition
- Monitor & allocate resources to ensure that women do not lose employment due to lack of childcare/schooling as a result of COVID-19, with specific supports for lone parents

Adult social care

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 unmet need for social care services is a fundamental barrier to the dignity and autonomy of the women who rely on those services, as well as to their inclusion in all aspects of their communities. Ireland has the second-highest level of unmet need for home care in the EU⁴⁹ and is reliant on the unpaid labour of women to provide much of this 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.

Disabled women are not passive recipients of care but individuals whose rights are intertwined with those, predominantly women, that provide care.⁵⁰ However, the absence of a sufficient state response to supporting people with disabilities to live independent lives, forces disabled women into a position of dependence and leaves family carers to provide often very high levels of care.

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.⁵¹

Investment in universal, social care services, such as homecare and Personal Assistance services, are vital

⁴⁸ SVP (2019). Working, parenting and struggling? An analysis of the employment and living conditions of one parent families in Ireland

⁴⁹ Privalko, I. et al (2019). Access to childcare and home care services across Europe: an analysis of the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), 2016. ESRI and DEASP.

⁵⁰ McDonagh, R. <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/disabled-people-have-been-made-to-believe-they-are-the-problem-1.3774721>

⁵¹ DOH (2012). VFMPR of disability services. DOH.

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.⁵²

Recommendations

- Resource a Commission on Care as outlined in the Programme for Government
- Provide a statutory right to home care and a budget for a person-centred home care scheme with equality of access and availability across the country-€123m in Budget 2021
- Provide a range of public care options for older people to enable people to live their older years with dignity
- Increases funding for Personal Assistance Services as a move towards providing a statutory right to a Personal Assistance Service for disabled people
- Resource the implementation of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017

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. Rebuilding Ireland has no formal gendered analysis of homelessness policy, no gendered disaggregation of homeless data or public housing waiting lists, and no gender proofing of policy or practice.⁵³ Women who are lone parents are one of the groups most at risk of house repossessions as the impact of COVID-19 continues and yet “despite legal obligations on equality, no State agency, including the Central Bank of Ireland, addresses gender in its reports.⁵⁴ A formal requirement to do so must be introduced immediately.

Lone parent families, the majority of whom are headed by women, 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 COVID 19 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.

Recommendations

- Increase public and affordable housing by delivering up to 100,000 new homes on public land over five years.
 - Increase public housing capital budgets across local authorities and approved housing bodies

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Murphy M (2017) Advancing human rights and equality proofing in Ireland

⁵⁴ <http://www.nuigalway.ie/about-us/news-and-events/news-archive/2020/may/new-research-shows-that-most-home-possessions-in-ireland-are-pursued-by-household-name-banks-not-vulture-funds.html>

- Review tax measures to dis-incentivise land hoarding
- Implement an immediate halt on any sale or disposal of public land to private housing developers
- Develop an Irish model of affordable cost rental housing
- Reinstate the 80% Windfall Tax on the sale of rezoned land that was abolished in 2015 and invest the proceeds in housing provision.
- Provide resources to gender proof all homeless and housing strategies & budgets
 - Establish gender sensitive support services for women living in homelessness
- Increase security of tenure
 - Introduce legislation to prevent evictions
 - Maintain the COVID 19 emergency rent freeze for three years
 - Bring housing assistance supports fully into line with market rents
 - Amend Part 4 Section 34 of the Private Rental Tenancies Act to ensure buy-to-let landlords cannot utilise exemptions
 - Introduce a minimum 5 year tenant protection/lease length of security for homeless HAP tenancies
- 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

Change Ireland's record on Violence Against Women

Violence against women goes to the heart of women's equality in our society. 1 in 4 women will experience domestic and/or sexual violence in Ireland. Women and girls with disabilities face greater risk of violence, with disability being the second most common risk factor for rape, after gender.⁵⁵ The economic cost to society of violence against women has been conservatively estimated at €2.2bn.⁵⁶

The full implementation of the Istanbul Convention with regard to measures and actions focused on prevention, prosecution and legislation must be a priority in Budget 2021. To meet these international obligations, significant reform of existing structures and systems is urgent. So too is the need for a substantial increase in investment in frontline services and comprehensive data collection procedures. A key infrastructural support to drive these transformational changes is the establishment of a National Rapporteur on Sexual, Domestic and Gender Based Violence. Their remit should include: collating information on violence against women, disaggregated data collection and addressing the causes and impacts of VAW.

While demand for frontline Violence Against Women (VAW) services is high and has continued to grow, only moderate increases are being provided in State-allocated funding from €22.1 million in 2017 to €23.8 million in 2018 to €25.3 in 2019.⁵⁷ Ireland has still not met the minimum requirement of having 1 refuge space per every 10,000 people. Ireland needs an additional 331 bed spaces at a minimum, not including additional capacity needed to allow for distancing due to COVID-19.

⁵⁵ Rape & Justice in Ireland: A National Study of Survivor, Prosecutor and Court Responses to Rape 2009

⁵⁶ The €2.2bn figure puts the cost of domestic violence at €555 per citizen. These figures have not been adjusted for inflation and is thus far from capturing the true economic cost.

⁵⁷ Parliamentary Question – Dept. Children and Youth Affairs, Child and Family Agency Data, 21st May 2019.

The current timeline of the new national sexual violence survey means that we will not have any updated information until 2024 at the earliest. There is no current proposal to begin research on the extent of sexual violence among vulnerable minority groups: like Travellers, members of the LGBTQI, disabled and migrant communities. Government urgently needs to commit resources to reduce this timeframe. Given the increased strains experienced by frontline services as a result of Covid-19 it is essential that the Government focuses on both infrastructural investment and service delivery to eliminate violence against women.

Recommendations

- Establish a National Rapporteur on Sexual Domestic and Gender Based Violence.
- Legislate for ring-fenced funding to combat and support women who experience gender-based violence
 - Provide appropriate refuge, housing and accommodation to meet the needs of women and families seeking safety in accordance with the Istanbul Convention, including services that can work with women in active addiction
 - Fund 331 additional refuge spaces
 - Legislate for a minimum of 10 days paid leave for abuse and violence.
 - Fully resource and fund exit services and supports for those who are in, or who wish to leave, prostitution
 - Resource VAW services to take additional measures to be inclusive of the needs of disabled women and girls
- Increase funding for frontline services
- Allocate resources for the development and implementation of Domestic Homicide Reviews
- Allocate resources for Higher & Further Education Sexual Violence and Harassment initiatives
- Allocate adequate resources for the full roll out of Divisional Protective Service Units

Ensure Access to Justice

Access to justice is a critical pathway for the achievement of gender equality. Women living in poverty are disproportionately impacted by barriers to accessing justice as they do not have alternative means of resolving disputes or resources to fall back on, and the impact of unresolved or unfairly resolved disputes on their livelihoods can be devastating for them and often their children.

Ensure access to justice for women who experience violence

Budget 2021 should provide the funding for a purpose-built family courts complex adjacent to the Four Courts in Dublin (Hammond Lane) as well as modernising the family court facilities nationwide. A dedicated and integrated family court within the existing court structures would allow for matters of personal trauma and sensitivity to be handled by specialised courts, with specialist judges specifically trained to adjudicate. A high-quality Court Welfare Service should also be established. This would include a range of legal and social services, in order to reduce the number of steps that a woman has to take to access justice.

Recommendations

- Develop a purpose-built family courts complex

- Establish a comprehensive Court Welfare Service
- Establish a national programme for supervised contact centres

Statutory Maintenance Agency

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. NWC welcomed the commitment in Budget 2020 to addressing the issue of child maintenance. 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.

Recommendations

- Establish a statutory maintenance agency

Historical Abuses of Women in the Care of the State

In 2013, the Magdalen Commission Report recommended that the State acquire, maintain and administer a garden, museum or other form of memorial. The Government accepted this proposal but it has failed to materialise. Action must be taken in a matter consistent with the principles of restorative justice.

Recommendations

- Provide full redress to all Magdalene survivors
- Resource a National Archive of Historical Institutional and Care-Related Records
- Review Adoption Act

Funding Access to Legal Services

A gender sensitive review of the civil legal aid scheme, to include, amongst other things, the gender division of the provision of legal aid, the current waiting times, the delays, the means test, the accommodation and child care allowances, the legal aid fees, and the areas of law covered, should be undertaken.

Recommendation

- Fund a review of the civil legal aid scheme

Enable Women's Participation and Decision Making

Women's Leadership

A lack of adequate funding is limiting women's development and engagement in civil society. This was noted by the CEDAW Committee in their Concluding observations in 2017 who urged Ireland "to take

appropriate measures to restore funding for non-governmental organisations working in the field of women's rights".⁵⁸

The role of community & rural women's groups is crucial in supporting the participation of women from different backgrounds, and in particular women most distant from decision making processes, into political and public life. At the national level there should be increased funding for NWC, recognised by Government as a key body advocating on women's concerns and perspectives, to continue to advance women's equality.

NWC welcomes the commitment in the programme for Government to report back on the recommendations in our *Women Beyond the Dáil: More Women in Local Government* report.⁵⁹ Women comprise just 24% of councillors and just 23% of TDs in Ireland. More investment is needed to support women to run for election and Budget 2021 is an opportunity to invest in women's leadership. Legislation and resources to support implementation is needed to ensure that maternity/adoptive leave is available for all women TDs and councillors.

NWC provides the secretariat to the Women's Parliamentary Caucus. It is vital that the Caucus is financially supported to continue providing a space for women to further women's issues in a cross-party manner.

Specific action is required to advance young women's leadership in Ireland and the next iteration of the National Strategy for Women and Girls should include a funding allocation to support young women's leadership, including initiatives such as NWC's FemFest

Recommendations

- Increase funding to NWC to support the achievement of full equality for women
- Provide funding for the Women's Parliamentary Caucus and for the development of local caucuses
- Commit to making funding available for young women's leadership programmes as part of the new NSWG
- Allocate adequate resources for organisations that are supporting marginalised women to participate in public and political life

Women's Community Sector

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the vital role that women's grassroots organisations play in providing essential services. Their work during COVID-19 has included reaching out to combat social isolation and mental health distress, moving programmes and supports online, organising and delivering vital supplies to many families across the country and providing emotional support to women.

Prior to COVID-19, the women's community sector was already underfunded and had not recovered from the most recent period of austerity. The National Collective of Community based Women's Networks (NCCWN) experienced a reduction of 38% in their funding since 2008 with only 4% being reinstated. A full reinstatement of their funding alongside increased investment is required.

Overall, Women's community organisations have been cut by 14.5% since 2008. The budget of Family Resource Centres, vital services for women and families across Ireland, is now 12% less than in 2008 but since the onset of COVID-19 restrictions, 83% of FRCs experienced an increase in demand for their

⁵⁸ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2017). Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland. CEDAW/C/IRL/CO/6-7.

⁵⁹ https://www.NWC.ie/images/uploads/NWC_Research_Report_WEB.pdf

services.⁶⁰ The Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme, the national social inclusion programme, had a budget of €81million in 2008 and now has a budget of €38 million and this is projected to remain the same until 2022.

The recent package of €40 million of supports for the sector is welcomed. However, a more substantial, flexible and ongoing package of support will be required to offset other factors such as decreases in income, increased demand for services such as counselling and new costs incurred in relation to space, signage and IT systems. Services and projects will need enhanced funding alongside protection of their core funding to adapt to new ways of working so that no woman is left behind as we recover from this crisis.

NWC notes the availability of funding for Women's Sheds, however we call for re-investment that is particularly focused on community development work with its social inclusion, anti-poverty and justice framework.

Recommendations

- Increase funding to the women's community sector and NCCWN and provide for their sustainability, including ensuring staff have adequate pay and conditions.
- Provide multi-annual funding for independent, non-profit community education and community development organisations working with communities experiencing poverty, inequality, discrimination and social exclusion.

Women in Rural Communities

Women in rural communities experience additional barriers to participation, including the lack of public transport. There is an urgent need for increased investment in rural transport solutions with a focus on disabled people, dispersed populations and women. Multi-annual funding for independent community development in rural communities is vital for the sustainability of these services and supports. Investment into rural communities should be monitored and reported on with gender and equality disaggregated data. Funding should also be allocated for a comprehensive gender audit of all local, rural and community decision-making structures.

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
- Require all investment into rural communities to be monitored and reported on with gender and equality disaggregated data

Deliver a Green New Deal

Ireland has become the second country in the world to declare a climate and biodiversity emergency. International research has established that as these climate impacts increase, existing inequalities, deprivation and exclusion will be worsened, with the worst impacts on women.⁶¹ Budget 2021 must lay the foundations for a low-carbon future and establish climate action, targeting emissions and protection

⁶⁰ <http://www.familyresource.ie/uploadedfiles/Survey%20Results%20Briefing%20Paper%20FINAL.pdf>

⁶¹ European parliament-The Gender Dimension of Climate Justice 2015

of biodiversity as a normative lens for analysing both expenditure outcomes and revenue raising targets. Our transition must be a just transition and all measures must incorporate mitigation and climate justice investments to ensure rural communities, households experiencing energy poverty or lower socio-economic groups do not experience further inequality and poverty.

The COVID-19 emergency has shown how a large-scale global crisis exacerbates existing inequalities and deprivation and that the social exclusion and poverty of the most marginalised is worsened, with the highest impacts on women. NWC believes that climate chaos and environmental degradation is having the same impact.

Recommendations

- Just Transition legislation policies & investment must be 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
- Divest from fossil fuel investment
- Establish no new fossil fuel exploration licenses
- Prioritise rural and urban public transport infrastructure, including cycling, over roads building
- Invest in our natural heritage & biodiversity
- Invest in a just transition plan for rural development including ending intensive livestock production