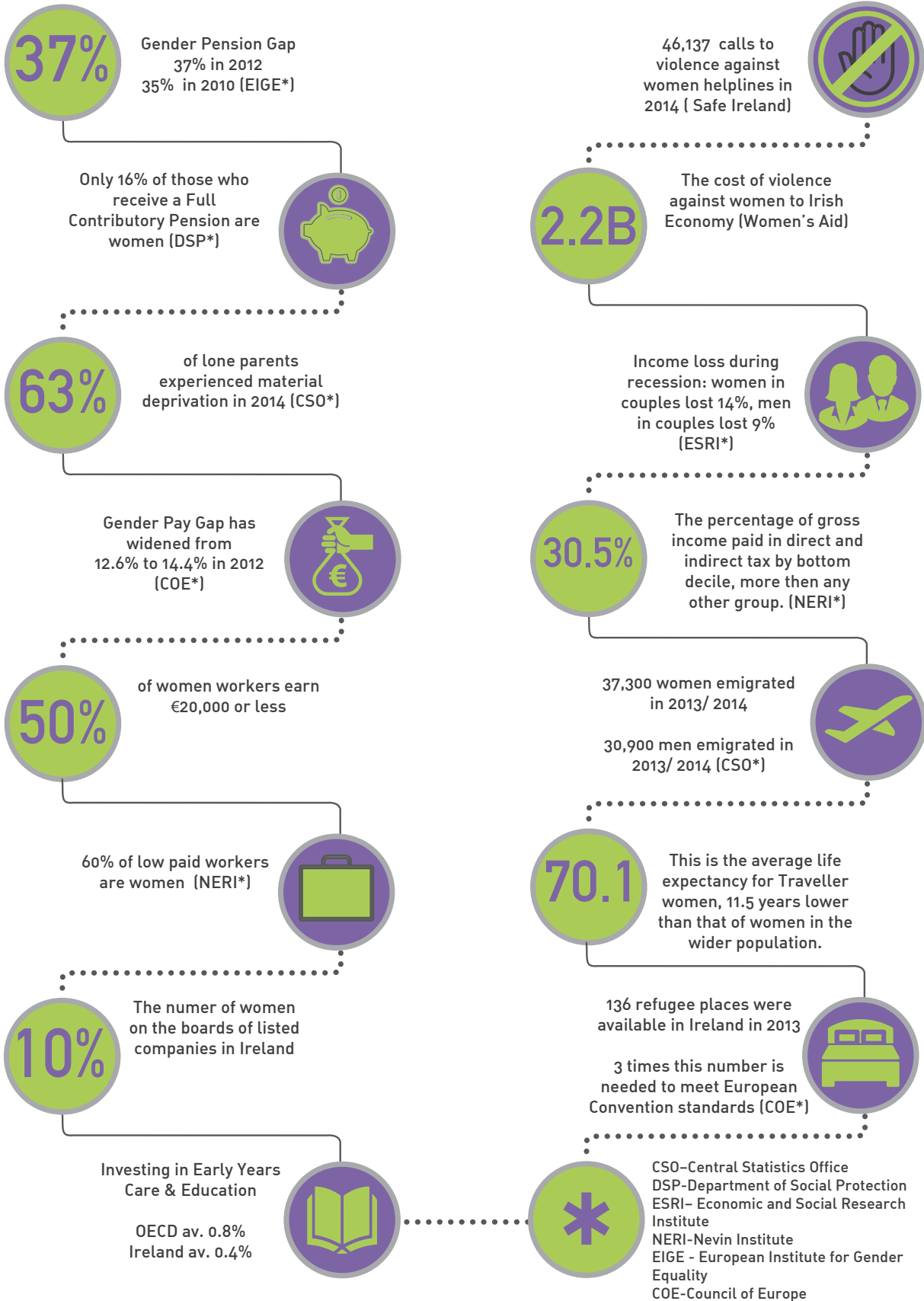




BUDGET 2016:
Turn It Around For Women

Key Facts



Introduction



National Women's Council of Ireland

Established in 1973, the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) is the leading national women's representative organisation in Ireland. NWCi seeks full equality between men and women and derive our mandate from a diverse membership of over 180 groups from across Ireland.

The Context

Recent years have seen a significant deterioration in the economic situation of women in Ireland. The Gender Pay Gap has widened from 12.6% to 14.4% while the Gender Pension Gap stands at 35%. Women in couples lost 14% of their income during the recession compared to 9% for men and 50% of women workers earn less than €20,000, far below the median wage of €28,500. 63% of Lone Parents, almost all women, suffer material deprivation. Moreover, many services addressing Violence Against Women teeter at the brink of closure and Ireland's childcare infrastructure continues to lag behind all of Europe. In addition, women through their unpaid care work, have had to bridge many of the gaps caused by cutbacks in public services and supports.

The Choices

Ireland simply cannot afford a budget which delivers more of the same or offers only small adjustment to our current course. Budget 2016 needs to radically turn things around for women and deliver real results for those on lower incomes who have suffered the worst impacts of the recession and who rely most on public services and national infrastructure.

The Government has previously indicated an intention to divide any additional resources in Budget 2016 50/50 between public expenditure and tax cuts. We believe that the way to improve net incomes for most citizens is not through tax cuts but through raising wages and taking real action against the spread of precarious, low paid work. It is important to note that two thirds of the population and the vast majority of women are on or below the standard tax rate.

A greater priority must be addressing the urgent task of repairing the damage done over the course of the recession, reversing unsustainable cutbacks and investing in the solid groundwork needed for a more equal and sustainable future, including an affordable, accessible childcare system and investment in quality public services.

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Priorities for Investment

Early Years

Ireland needs to invest in and deliver Early Years infrastructure that is of high quality, affordable and accessible. Not only is this important for children and parents, it is crucial for our growth and development as a nation. Ireland spends less than half the OECD average on early years care and education. Over the next five years, that investment needs to increase to the recommended level of 1% of GDP. The first step in this scaling up is to build on the popular free pre-school programme and extend access and increase availability in terms of both hours per week and weeks per year. There is also need for investment in quality, including quality terms and conditions for workers in this area.

Publicly subsidised childcare and universal pre-school provision are also essential aspects of early years infrastructure as is paid leave for parents. Budget 2016 must deliver promised paternity leave and take first steps towards paid parental leave.

Budget 2016

- Extend current Early Childhood Care and Education to children from age 3 to when they enter primary school. Increase available hours from 15 to 20 per week for 48 weeks per year. Deliver on quality, including secure contracts and pay-scales for staff.
- Cap childcare fees for parents. Introduce a public subsidisation scheme for children of 6-months to 3-years, reducing fees for all parents by at least 20% in this Budget and announce a phased reduction to 60% over subsequent two Budgets, with a greater reduction for those on lowest incomes.
- Deliver promised two weeks paid Paternity Leave for fathers when the child is born, protect 6-months Maternity leave and initiate delivery of 6-months paid Parental leave.

Violence Against Women

Research from the EU Fundamental Rights Agency found that one in five women experienced physical

or sexual abuse with higher than average 'ongoing feelings of vulnerability' amongst women who experienced violence in Ireland, pointing to a double failure by the State in neither preventing nor adequately responding.

Alongside the personal and social impacts of such violence there is also an economic impact, with violence against women in Ireland estimated, by Women's Aid, to cost €2.2 billion every year. Ireland's failure to adequately acknowledge or redress a legacy of institutional violence against women has been internationally recognised and has been highlighted and criticised by the UN. Budget 2016 needs to send a strong national and international signal that we are dedicating the necessary resources and political will to change the record on violence against women.

Some positive developments to combat violence against women include legislation such as the Victims Directive legislation, Sexual Offences Bill, and new Domestic Violence Bill and establishment of a Garda Victims Offices and new Garda National Protective Services Bureau, which includes a focus on domestic and sexual violence. These important measures will however only make a real difference to the lives of women if there are sufficient funds to ensure effective implementation.

Signing and ratifying the Istanbul Convention is urgently required and resources to meet its standards must be allocated in Budget 2016. Current data is also required to provide comprehensive information on the prevalence and extent of violence against women in Ireland.

Budget 2016

- Increase funding to effectively implement Victims Directive and meet international standards such as the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention.
- Restore funding for frontline and policy organisations to at least pre-recession levels, including €4 million to fund the Rape Crisis Centres and advocacy work.
- Allocate resources for Garda National Protective Services Bureau for effective delivery of its violence against women remit and establishment of specialist units.

- Fund government led awareness and prevention campaigns to create zero tolerance of violence against women.
- Resource and deliver a long-overdue SAVI 2 Report on Sexual Violence in Ireland.
- Implement Justice Quirke's 2013 restorative justice proposals and ensure all women affected by institutional violence in Ireland have access to entitlements and redress. Decent Work.

Decent Work

A majority of low paid and precarious workers in Ireland are women. Increasing pay for low income earners should be a priority in Budget 2016. IMF research shows a direct link between increasing income for the lowest earners to an increase in GDP and local spending. The Minimum Wage increase recommended by the Low Pay Commission, although it does not go far enough, must be implemented in Budget 2016 with due regard to the PRSI 'step effect'. Moreover, the Commission should be strengthened to reflect in-work poverty, the gender pay gap and minimum essential standards of living. Joint Labour Committees need to be extended and enforced, particularly in sectors benefiting from budgetary concessions

Recent years have seen aggressive casualisation within hospitality and retail sectors, where a majority of workers are women. including the spread of non-fixed hour contracts which demand full availability without security or predictability. Precarious schedules and income can make it difficult to plan care, limit educational opportunities and participation, inhibit spending and reduce access to credit .

Increasingly, many women workers rely on Family Income Supplement (FIS) which is highly effective in reducing in-work poverty. However, review or extension of in-work social protection supports should be accompanied by measures to improve pay and conditions,

including the quality of part-time employment.

The Government has a number of tools at its disposal. There is also a crucial role for stronger regulation and legislation in areas such as Banded Hour contracts. There is also potential for incentivisation, ensuring that all public spending comes with social clauses and criteria that require and reward quality employment standards, above and beyond the legal minimum. These standards, including secure contracts, gender equality targets and union recognition, should be attached to all public procurement or investment including any new capital expenditure programme.

Budget 2016

- Increase Minimum Wage and strengthen the Low Pay Commission in relation to the gender pay gap, in-work poverty and minimum essential standards of living.
- Promote Quality standards in part-time work and training.
- Maintain and widen Family Income Supplement, calculate unemployment by hours not days and ensure jobseekers are not being activated into insecure work.
- Strengthen regulation and legislation on precarious work, including limits to the use of non-fixed hour contracts.
- Attach Social Clauses and Criteria, including gender equality and decent work standards, to all employer incentive schemes, enterprise grants and public procurement contracts.



Gamechangers

Commit to Equality

Equality is a core foundation upon which any sustainable society and economy must be built. NWCi are calling for a Budget 2016 Equality Statement and gender and equality proofing along with strengthened Social Impact Assessment (SIA). As Ireland's National Women's Strategy comes towards an end, resources must be allocated to meet the targets set and develop the next strategy. Budget 2016 should also ensure that all Departments, Public Bodies and Local Authorities designate specific budget lines for implementation of the new 'Public Service Duty to Promote Equality and Human Rights'. This should begin with delivery of existing gender mainstreaming commitments and a full gender audit. Economic equality is also crucial and has been recognised by the IMF and OECD as a key component of sustainable growth.

Budget 2016

- Produce a Budget 2016 'Equality Statement' as a first step towards full Equality Budgeting. Strengthen gender dimension of SIA and apply across all departments. Designate a budget line within all departments, public bodies and local authorities for delivery of Gender Mainstreaming and new 'Public Service Duty to promote Equality and Human Rights'.
- Initiate a comprehensive gender audit across all Departments, and in areas of strategic policy change such as employment activation or local alignment.
- Make greater income equality an explicit goal of public policy and include targets in relation to the gender pay gap, in-work poverty or the Gini Coefficient in high-level economic strategy.
- Resource delivery of current National Women's Strategy and development of next strategy.

Build Intergenerational Solidarity

Ireland's social fabric is woven from the connections and interdependence between people of all ages and this should be reflected in a gender-sensitive,

lifecycle approach to Budget 2016. Ireland's widening 37% Gender Pension Gap must be reversed and NWCi believe that a Universal Pension is the best way to ensure security for all in older age. Meanwhile, Budget 2016 must deliver the long promised transition from 'Homemakers Disregard' to a 'Homemaker's Credit' that actively recognises the contribution of care and also serves as a 'Re-Entry Credit', opening up voluntary access to employment and training opportunities. Pension cuts which have disproportionately affected women must also be reversed. While the Full Contributory Pension has been protected, 84% of its recipients are men and the lower Reduced Rate Contributory Pension which many women rely on has been seriously eroded.

Steps should also be taken towards restoration of Jobseekers Allowance for those under 25 years. Since 2010, a majority of Ireland's emigrants under 24 years old have been women and NWCi research shows payment cuts and precarious work as key drivers. Recent years also saw significant cuts to Child Benefit and commitment to partially restore this critical payment is a welcome public recognition of the societal benefits of universal support for all children and a practical contribution towards the basic costs of raising a child.

Budget 2016


- Reverse cuts to lower bands of Reduced Rate Contributory State Pension.
- Take first step towards a Universal Pension which recognises care. Prioritise measures to address gender gap in first tier public pension system over second tier proposals or tax reliefs.
- Deliver promised Homemakers Credit, backdated to 1973 and also serving as a Re-Entry Credit.
- Begin restoration of Jobseekers Allowance for those under 25 and review impact of cuts.
- Continue partial restoration of Child Benefit and remove HRC as a condition for access.

Fight Poverty and Exclusion

An urgent priority in Budget 2016 should be ending the shocking 63% deprivation levels experienced by lone parents, the vast majority of whom are women. NWCi are concerned that recent policy developments may increase rather than relieve this crisis. A full review, in consultation with the lone parent families affected, is urgently needed. In the interim, significant investment is needed in affordable and flexible childcare and in education and training supports for women affected by these measures. Budget 2016 must also restore the Income Disregard for Lone Parents and extend it to those on Jobseekers Transitional Payment.

Traveller women already experiencing discrimination and poverty have been further excluded as a result of austerity measures. The Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy needs to be fully funded and implemented.

A particular concern in Budget 2016 must be the massive humanitarian crisis on the borders of Europe. Budget 2016 should allocate resources necessary to support humanitarian measures and massively increase the numbers being offered refuge in Ireland. Weekly payments for Asylum Seekers should be increased and other recommended reforms to Direct Provision delivered, although NWCi still favour full abolition of this system.



Removal of the category 'marginalised women and disadvantaged women' as a target group under key funding streams has denied essential community supports to many women, particularly those experiencing multiple disadvantage such as Traveller women or women with a disability. This target group should be recognised and designated funds provided to ensure grassroots organisations can work with marginalised women and support autonomous

community development.

Budget 2016

- Set firm targets to reduce deprivation for Lone Parents. Restore Income Disregard and extend to Jobseekers Transitional Payment pending a complete review of current policy.
- Support humanitarian response to current refugee crisis and greatly increase the numbers offered refuge in Ireland.
- Increase weekly payment for Asylum Seekers and deliver urgent reform of Direct Provision as a step towards abolition of this system.
- Improve statutory funding schemes for Community and Voluntary organisations through standardised multi-annual funding,
- Restore 'marginalised and disadvantaged women' as a target group in Social Inclusion Activation Programme and other local funding.
- Introduce a specific national funding line to support independent community work at local level, with explicit focus on gender equality.
- Restore funding to Traveller organisations and resource and implement National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy.

Support Women's Voices

Ireland performs poorly in the European Gender Equality Index in terms of power and participation with women still underrepresented across many areas of decision-making from the boardroom to the Oireachtas. Budget 2016 should resource a 'Women on Boards' review' and a full gender audit of the Oireachtas. Analysis of policies and practices and setting of gender sensitive benchmarks is also required at local government level, in light of new local alignment processes.

Support for women's voices at civil society level is another essential aspect of participatory democracy.

NWCi is the representative organisation for over 180 diverse member groups from across the country and plays a vital and unique role in promoting women's voices and perspectives. Despite funding cuts of 45%, NWCi membership has grown in recent years.



However lack of resources has made it difficult to fully respond to increasing and evolving demands and opportunities around gender equality. NWCI are seeking full restoration of funding over the next two years.

Sustainable funding for our member organisations is also crucial, including the grassroots women's groups crucial to community building. Local women's projects should be resourced within reformed local government structures and their role is supporting women's participation and empowerment recognised.

Budget 2016

- Fully restore funding for NWCI over the next two-years.
- Strengthen women's representation and participation within Local Government and community structures and deliver sustainable funding for local and grassroots women's groups.
- Fund a 'Women on Boards Review' to establish a national snapshot of gender balance in the boardroom and a baseline for improvement.
- Resource a Gender Audit of the Oireachtas in advance of the next General Elections.

Invest in Quality Public Services

NWCI believes that if we are to emerge from the economic crisis with a healthy, functioning, equal society we must renew investment in quality public services. Years of austerity and staffing reductions have reduced many public and community services to levels which are neither efficient nor effective. Our members have highlighted the negative impact of cuts in transport or health and the disenfranchisement of reduced information and community supports.

Nationally and at EU level, there is need for greater recognition of the huge dividends which Strategic Investment in Public Services and social infrastructure can deliver in terms of innovation, long

term savings, sustainable growth and job creation. Ireland needs to demonstrate commitment to the principle and practice of Public Service delivery and assert that commitment internationally. Public services are, also uniquely well placed to develop and deliver best practice standards in areas such as environment, ethics or gender equality. New EU Directives on Public Procurement come into law during 2016 and Ireland will need to reassert commitment to public delivery of public services in areas like health, transport, culture, social services or water supply.

Quality public services benefit everyone. There is a clear and immediate need for increased spending on social housing provision, education and public transport. New service areas such as childcare and social infrastructure are also of crucial importance to our shared future.

Budget 2016

- Demonstrate high level political and economic commitment to the principle and practice of Public Service delivery in national strategic planning and international negotiations including trade agreements such as TTIP.
- Prioritise a comprehensive programme of strategic investment in public services and social infrastructure including increased recruitment in key areas.
- Increase investment in Social Housing and strengthen housing and shelter supports for women and families affected by violence.
- Provide secure multi-annual funding to repair and develop community and social infrastructure.
- Affirm and resource the role of public services in setting and leading best practice in areas like gender mainstreaming, environmental responsibility and decent work.
- Set baselines, budgets and action plans to deliver 'Public Service Duty to promote Equality and Human Rights' within all Public Services.

Gender Proof Health

Pilots conducted by NWCI and the HSE have

confirmed that gender sensitive health policies and practices deliver better outcomes for both men and women. Resources should now be allocated to roll out gender mainstreaming on a far larger scale across all areas of health provision. Funding must also be allocated to integrate and mainstream ethnicity within our health system. Currently, Traveller women have a life expectancy that is 11.5 years less than women in the wider population.

Gender Mainstreaming means better, gender-sensitive, public information across areas such as cancer, osteoporosis, heart disease and reproductive health. Investment in both preventative measures and step-down or aftercare can greatly reduce costs and increase survival rates. Screening for osteoporosis is, for example, essential for women who can lose up to 30% of bone density during menopause. Fractures from this silent disease cost the State €535 million in 2013.

High-quality screening is also crucial to fighting breast cancer. Ireland has one of the highest mortality rates in the EU and implementation of commitments to extend BreastCheck to women aged 65-69 has been far too slow. Links have been shown between persistent gender inequalities and smoking for women and NWCI supports the Irish Cancer Society's call for more accessible nicotine replacement therapy products and community based smoking cessation

schemes. We also share their concerns around TTIP or other trade agreements which could threaten the 'right to regulate'.

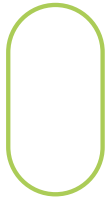
When NWCI discussed maternity services with women across Ireland, they emphasised the importance of locally available supports, including more midwives. They also expressed concern at the lack of information or support on reproductive rights.

Budget 2016

- Resource large scale

roll-out of Gender Mainstreaming across a range of areas within the HSE.

- Develop and fund a National Traveller Health Implementation Plan and Roma Primary Healthcare project.
- Invest in gender sensitive public health education for women in areas such as heart disease, cancer, mental health and reproductive rights.
- Ring fence funding to implement the forthcoming maternity strategy, ensure midwife ratios meet international standards and set a low, maximum, price for emergency contraception.
- Apply a 0% VAT rate to NRT and make it free for those in smoking cessation programmes.
- Speed up roll-out of BreastCheck extension all women aged 65-69 and make DXA scans for osteoporosis widely available and free of charge.
- Increase investment in step down and aftercare for survivors of illness and surgery.



Where To Say No

No Tax Cuts For The Top Third

NWCI believe that tax cuts, particularly those targeted at the top third of earners, are not a strategic use of public funds as they hollow out revenue at a time when investment is urgently needed to repair our decimated public services and social infrastructure. Moreover, IMF research shows that increasing the incomes of higher earners can actually damage development and crucially, the benefits do not trickle down.

Ireland has low taxation levels by EU standards and NWCI has consistently advocated for a wider, more progressive tax base. Basic principles of redistribution suggest that those who have the highest income or accumulated wealth should contribute more to the state finances. Yet those on higher incomes often have comparatively low effective tax rates.

Meanwhile, two thirds of workers have incomes on or below the standard rate of tax threshold and research from the Nevin Institute finds those in the lowest decile paying the largest actual share, 30.5%, of their gross income in direct or indirect taxation.

NWCI believe the social impact and progressivity of all indirect taxes should be reviewed, and a third higher rate of tax should be introduced. In addition a new wealth tax should be considered. In the absence of such a measure the higher rate of USC must not be cut.

Budget 2016

- Do not introduce tax cuts targeted at those in the top third of incomes.
- Maintain or improve progressivity in USC.
- Introduce a new top rate of tax for those on very high incomes. Introduce a wealth or capital tax and actively support an EU Financial Transaction Tax.
- Introduce a system of refundable tax credits.
- Review impact of indirect taxation and charges on gender and overall progressivity of Ireland's

tax system. Review VAT on the 'basket of goods' associated with a 'minimum essential standard of living.

No Marginal Rate Tax Reliefs

Tax Credits and Tax Reliefs are a form of public transfer and expenditure and should be subject to the same scrutiny as other forms of spending. Currently, many tax expenditures disproportionately benefit those on higher incomes and do not operate efficiently or effectively. This is most visible in the continued use of marginal rather than standardised rates in tax reliefs, including private pension reliefs.

Inequality is also evident where those on the lowest incomes, who pay tax in forms such as VAT and USC, are not in a position to benefit from tax expenditures they help fund. NWCI support proposals for refundable tax credits which would make a real difference to women and men in the bottom third of incomes, those most likely to spend that money in the local economy.

Budget 2016

- All marginal rate tax reliefs should be immediately replaced with standardised rates.
- Publish the cost/benefit and social impact analysis of all tax expenditure and include assessment of comparable benefits of direct expenditure or public investment.
- Introduce refundable tax credits.

No Major Public Expenditure Without Social Clauses

Ireland will bring new EU Directives on Public Procurement into law during 2016 and it is important that we reassert public delivery of essential public services. Review and reversal of the increasing reliance on outsourcing and contracting is needed in order to ensure that short term savings do not jeopardise long-term public control and the right to regulate.

However, in those areas where competitive tendering is appropriate, the new EU Directives does offer

some scope for Ireland to set out its own definition of 'Most Economically Advantageous Tender'. This could, for example, include gender equality, employment and environmental considerations.

The Government can and should incorporate strong Social Clauses, and Social Criteria including gender equality and employment standards, into every area of public spending or investment which may be subject to competitive tendering. Public procurement should be a point of leverage that both requires and rewards good practice. We need a joined-up approach which ensures that wherever public monies are spent, they reinforce rather than compromise national goals, such as gender equality on the workplace or reduced pressure on social transfers such as FIS. Similar strong social clauses and evaluation criteria should be attached to many public grants, corporate tax expenditures and employer incentive schemes. Crucially this should include any new programme of capital expenditure outlined in Budget 2016.

Ireland's changing procurement regime also holds a number of further implications for the non-profit and voluntary sector. It is important that grassroots and not-for-profit organisations be protected and supported rather than undermined. For example, there is a need for embedding of equality and community development principles within tendering for local community services and recognition of the

separate and empowering role of grant-giving. Budget 2016 should resource a wide public awareness and consultation initiative around this area.

Budget 2016

- Protect public delivery of core Public Services when transposing EU Public Procurement Directives.
- Review and reverse overall trend towards outsourcing of public service delivery and ensure that no measures are taken in

Budget 2016 which contribute to pressure for privatisation.

- Identify gender equality, employment and environmental standards as 'economically advantageous criteria' when transposing EU Public Procurement Directives.
- Attach strong social clauses and criteria, including gender equality, employment and environmental standards to public spending or competitive tendering arising from Budget 2016.
- Attach strong Social Clauses and criteria, including gender equality, quality employment and environmental standards to all Capital Expenditure arising from Budget 2016.
- Resource a wide public awareness and consultation initiative around public procurement.



Budget 2016: Turn It Around For Women

You can help turn it around for women in Budget 2016:

Take our e-action at www.nwci.ie & share it with your friends.

To learn more about our work, get involved or become a group or individual member of NWCI – contact us:

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