

May 2021

Paper on Women in Rural Communities

*“We want to live and work
where we are”*

NWC recommendations

Embedding gender equality across all programmes

- Ensure gender equality is embedded into all rural development policies and programmes including the National Planning Framework Project 2040 and the Rural Development Policy. Specific targeted measures should be developed to tackle the inequalities experienced by women. These should be cognisant of national commitments including the Public Sector Duty, Sustainable Development Goals, the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017 – 2020 and the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence.
- Explicitly name and target women from minority ethnic backgrounds, Traveller and Roma women and disabled women in all rural development programmes and initiatives and ensure that their rights are protected.
- Record and report gender and equality disaggregated data and a set of gender specific indicators in the monitoring and review of all rurally oriented strategies and programmes. This is critical to measuring impacts and outcomes for women to meet the obligations in the Istanbul Convention and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women.

Agriculture

- Recognise women involved in farming and develop specific measures to support women as successors, through addressing succession and inheritance barriers and support for joint partnerships.
- Promote farming as a career option for women through subject choice and positive measures in agricultural education programmes
- Develop practical supports to recognise women's work on farms including incentives for women's participation in knowledge transfer groups
- Promote women's involvement in decision-making and leadership in all parts of the agri-business sector, Dept of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Marine, state boards and co-operatives
- Commission a report into women in agriculture similar to the study carried out by the Scottish government in 2016¹

Universal Public Services

Investment in services is critical to enable the economic, social and cultural participation of all women in rural communities. This includes health, violence against women, accommodation, transport, care, broadband, education and employment opportunities.

Care

- Public model of childcare
- Improve statutory family leave
- Provide social care supports for disabled people and older people – personal assistance and homecare
- Gender and equality proof active labour market policy

Transport

- Gender proof transport plans and policies to protect and encourage use among women

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/women-farming-agriculture-sector/>

- All major capital infrastructure investment must be gender impact assessed, including a gender audit of all major transport initiatives
- Design to ensure accessibility for disabled people
- Ensure that the commitment to 20% of the 2020 Capital budget in the programme for government for cycling and walking benefits rural areas
- Develop a 'demand responsive' rural transport service to serve dispersed populations, citizens with mobility needs, and low demand that provides quality and coverage
- Expand Local Link services in rural Ireland to deliver more public transport services to all communities, to include new night services
- Ensure connectivity for onward journeys for commuters and students

Health

- Implement Slaintecare to ensure that gender inequities in current health and health care are considered and ameliorated in future service design
- Integrate the social determinants of women's health (including caring responsibilities, longer lives with chronic diseases and low incomes) into health service development to effectively address the health impact of sustained inequality on women.
- Introduce a scheme for universal, free access to contraception
- Ensure local access to abortion and provision in all maternity hospitals
- Ensure provision of outreach health services to remote and isolated communities including maternity care

Violence against Women

- Address violence against women through a combination of stronger legislation, increased effectiveness of the state's frontline services, community-based services and significant investment to ensure women's safety and protection.
- Address the links between domestic violence and homelessness
- Continue to provide rent supplement for victims of domestic violence
- Provide free transport for those fleeing domestic violence

Poverty and Womens Economic Independence

- Legislate for a right to flexible work
- Gender and equality proof active labour market policy. Effective and enabling employment activation measures to take account of caring responsibilities, transport, real progression and opportunities for decent, quality jobs in diverse sectors including Information Technology.
- Remove eligibility barriers for women accessing employment supports and programmes
- Include a travel allowance and childcare supports in all government active labour market programmes
- Introduce the living wage
- Ensure income adequacy and economic independence for women through individualisation of income supports and payments
- Maintain the current Government target to reduce consistent poverty to 2 per cent with clear actions to achieve this in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion
- Greater awareness of the invisibility of rural poverty and the gendered nature of poverty both in relation to causes, impacts and solutions for women's poverty.
- Legislate to benchmark social welfare rates to the Minimum Essential Standard of Living
- Introduce a universal, fair State Pension system which will guarantee income adequacy in older age

Womens participation and representation at local level

- Legislate for a quota system to be extended to local elections with an initial quota of 40% women's representation in the Local Elections 2024.

- Set additional targets to address diversity in representation for disabled women, Traveller and Roma women and women from minority ethnic backgrounds including a targeted geographical strategy to address all constituencies.
- Carry out a comprehensive gender audit across all local, community and rural decision-making structures
- Support and resource the women's community sector to advance equality for the most disadvantaged women in rural Ireland. This means effective and sustainable projects addressing women's inequality and building participation. The value of community development in rural areas needs to be reaffirmed through increased investment and prioritisation taking cognisance of the challenges of supporting disadvantage in rural areas

Tackling climate change

- Gender and poverty proof Just Transition legislation policies & investment
- Support for regional Social Environmental enterprises to enable communities find solutions and address waste materials, upskill in the area and create sustainable jobs.
- Ensure national planning reduces Irelands climate polluting emissions by a minimum of 8% annually
- Introduce 'polluter pays' environmental tax measures
- Remove fossil fuel subsidies and divest from fossil fuel investment
- Establish no new fossil fuel exploration licenses
- Prioritise rural public transport infrastructure, including cycling, over roads building
- Invest in a just transition plan for rural development including ending intensive livestock production
- Ensure that decisions on climate action are participatory, transparent and accountable

Women from minority ethnic backgrounds

- Name and target minority ethnic women across all rural development programmes
- 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
- Support for locally based responses that promote belonging, welcoming and inclusion and that provide opportunities for local communities to show solidarity and support to those seeking refuge and safety on our island

Introduction

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

This work is kindly supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development through the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) administered through Pobal.

This paper is informed by the perspectives of our members and the lived experience of women. NWC has many rurally based organisations in its membership. It seeks to analyse women's equality and human rights issues from a rural perspective and makes recommendations for the advancement of women's equality in rural communities. The draft paper was shared with our members and we held a discussion with our members and other relevant stakeholders to include their feedback. A particular thanks to Maureen Basset who reviewed the paper and provided valuable feedback and to Sinead Mercier who shared her insights on gender and climate justice.

Context

In a rural context, it has long been a concern that policies have focused predominantly on economic development in isolation from social development. These policies have failed to recognise, resource or support the diversity that, while now growing, has always been a part of rural society. This diversity has always been and continues to be a strength in rural communities. 36.6% of the female population live in rural areas.² Women want to continue to be part of rural Ireland and be valued for their contribution to the economic and social fabric of rural communities. Our work has identified an undervaluing of the contribution of women to rural communities and a lack of access to power and resources. Gains and progress for women have not been shared equally. The development of rural policies and programmes must reflect the realities of women's experience; women are more likely to be poor, to parent alone, to be the main provider of unpaid care work, to be in precarious employment, to earn low wages and to be at risk of domestic or sexual violence.

Women's experiences, their role and contribution to families, communities and businesses including on farms often goes unacknowledged and unrecognised in the social protection system and in rural development strategies. Our members, who are working in rural communities, have made huge contributions to the advancement of equality for women especially those most marginalised such as disabled women, Traveller and Roma women, women who are parenting alone and migrant women. Resourcing and supporting the engagement and participation of women in all their diversity, is essential to the sustainability and viability of rural communities.

² CSO 2016 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp3oy/cp3/urr/>

The diversity which exists amongst women in rural communities, as well as multiple and crosscutting layers of discrimination, is not always acknowledged in policy making or in representation. Womens lives are diverse in rural communities:

- LGBTQI women,
- older women living on their own,
- farmers, farm widows, farm spouses,
- women who have spent their entire adult lives caring for their families or are currently doing so,
- working class women
- lone parents,
- women seeking international protection,
- migrant workers,
- women from minority ethnic groups,
- women operating small businesses,
- women in full-time, part-time or seasonal employment,
- Traveller and Roma women
- Disabled women;

They all have different experiences of living in rural Ireland. Women may belong to a number of these categories simultaneously and policy makers need to take account of this diversity when developing rural development policies, it is essential that we present and include the complex interests of women from a wide range of diverse and multiple identity groups.³

Poverty and social exclusion; demographic change; migration, lack of educational and employment opportunities and a lack of services and facilities such as broadband, are challenges for all rural dwellers. There has been a decline in long-term and youth unemployment, however regional disparities continue to be present. Gaeltacht and Island communities continue to experience challenges.⁴ The overall social fabric of rural Ireland has been in decline for a generation, mirroring global trends. 18% of Ireland still has no broadband connection.⁵ 139 Garda stations have closed, 500 post offices have been deemed

³ Maureen Bassett (2008) Gender Governance and Rural Development

⁴ Dr Brendan O Keeffe and Dr Shane O Sullivan 2017 Gaeltacht Uíbh Ráthaigh – Próifíl Dhéimeagrafach agus Socheacnamaíochta Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile.

⁵ CSO(2016)

economically unsustainable by the state, and there has been a general closure of banking services over the last decade.⁶

Irish Rural Link and Longford Womens Link carried out research in 2016 which identified the particular disadvantages experienced by women in rural communities.⁷ These included:

- Lack of transport
- Fuel poverty
- Access to and availability of public services
- Access and cost of childcare
- Eligibility for activation and employment supports
- Stigma associated with accessing supports around mental health and domestic violence (if and when these services are available)⁸

Impact of Covid - 19

In March 2020, as the country went into a state of emergency, the women's sector and NWC's grassroots member groups across the country were mobilised into action. It was immediately clear that the pandemic would have serious and disproportionate implications for women. Women are disproportionately represented as frontline workers in health, retail and domestic roles. School and childcare closures put extra pressure on many women to look after their families and loved ones, especially challenging for women parenting alone. Many women in precarious jobs before the pandemic were losing their jobs. Women in abusive relationships were under lockdown with their abusers. Older women living alone were cocooning and isolated, while women living in nursing homes were becoming particularly concerned about their health.

The pandemic has further exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities in our society, including those disproportionately impacting on minority ethnic groups, including Travellers and Roma, on people who are homeless and people living in overcrowded and unsuitable Direct Provision accommodation. Many of those who are hardest hit by Covid-19, were already struggling with the impact of ten years of cuts to public services and social welfare and have existing debt and low or no savings. In a pandemic, women and girls are most likely to take on the extra caring. Even if you aren't a healthcare worker, caring for others (whether it's in your own family or at a community level) is a job that generally falls to women. Again, this increases the risk of exposure and makes social distancing impossible. It

⁶ Joint committee on Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht: Sustaining Viable Rural Communities Report November 2017

⁷ Irish Rural Link (2016) Poverty and Social Inclusion: the case for Rural Ireland

⁸ Women in Monaghan have to travel 165 miles to their nearest refuge.

<https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2017/02/What-is-life-like-for-women-in-Ireland-in-2016.pdf>

also reduces a woman's ability to earn an income. It means that women are left to pick up the slack, can leave paid employment and take on additional domestic and care duties. A recent CSO survey⁹ highlighted that women's well-being was being more adversely affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

Concerns exist over the impact of prolonged unemployment and emigration, hospitality and tourism sectors finding it difficult to recover and particular rural and coastal counties bearing significant social and economic impacts.¹⁰ Those who have lost their jobs as a result of Covid-19 are more likely to be young, low-paid, women workers who were previously in part-time employment.¹¹ The longer-term socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to exacerbate existing gender inequalities and intensify the socio-economic disparities faced by women in areas such as income and employment.

Isolation and loneliness have posed significant challenges for many people during this pandemic including: those living alone, in abusive situations, women from migrant backgrounds, lone parents and those with mental health problems who are living in rural areas. Opportunities for socialisation have been severely curtailed in order to adhere to public health guidelines. Combatting the social isolation experienced by women must be considered in all post pandemic responses. Fears were compounded around security and safety – many especially older women in rural isolated areas were fearful especially now callers and visitors are limited, they continue to feel very vulnerable.

For women living with addiction, it was a challenge to support the continuation of treatment and recovery programmes including access to Methadone during Covid-19 in rural areas.¹² It has been extremely challenging for women experiencing domestic violence in seeking supports and safety. Phone calls to Women's Aid increased by 39% and website hits increased by 74%.¹³ According to Garda reports, domestic violence increased by almost 25% since the coronavirus lockdown period began, with higher spikes in some geographical

⁹ Central Statistics Office. (2020, May, 19). Social Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Men: April 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/sic19wm/socialimpactofcovid-19onwomenandmenapril2020/>.

¹⁰ <http://www.southernassembly.ie/uploads/general-files/CV19-Regional-Economic-Analysis.pdf>

¹¹ Coates, D., Byrne, D., Brioscú, A., Corcoran, D., Cronin, H., Keenan, E. and McIndoe-Calder, T. (2020). The Initial Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Ireland's Labour Market. DEASP.

¹² Covid 19 NGO Group (2020) A joint Submission https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Covid_19_NGO_Group_Joint_Submission.pdf

¹³ Mary Murphy (14th July 2020) 'Gender Impacts of Covid-19 towards a gender sensitive recovery' <https://www.tasc.ie/blog/2020/07/14/gender-impacts-of-covid19/>

areas.¹⁴ Longford Womens Link reported a five-fold increase in domestic violence orders sought and a huge increase in contacts from women living in rural communities.¹⁵

There was the challenge of providing care in rural areas, whereas some hospitals in some cities could be designated COVID-19 hospitals, this was not feasible in rural areas. Separate areas within hospital sites are being designated for COVID-19 and non COVID-19 patients. Prenatal and postnatal care continues to be disrupted with ongoing restrictions on partners attending with women during labour and childbirth. This is a vital time for expecting mothers who require support.

Women continue to be the backbone of informal social care provision – care in the home for older people, adults and children with disabilities – they have very significant expertise to give about how best to move to a universal social care system, how best to move care to the community and the lowest level of complexity. Without universal social care, women will continue to take on a heavy load of unpaid care, and those receiving care will not have access to guaranteed supports. While women will step in to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the unpaid labour they provide is not infinitely elastic. Without adequate support, the long-term costs of stretching women’s work to patch up the holes in social protection and public services provision can be enormous. The digital divide has become more evident during this crisis. We are now more reliant on accessing services, working and connecting virtually in order to protect ourselves.

Old and familiar problems require new solutions. There have been innovations during this crisis; where technology has been employed in new ways, including for remote medical appointments and e-prescribing, including abortion care, which have provided good access for women in rural and marginalised populations. Efforts have also been made to maintain access to contraception during lock-down. Unplanned pregnancy counselling services shifted to phone or remote support. These were important protections for women’s health. Government need to consider how these innovations can be built into future delivery.¹⁶ The COVID 19 income supports have demonstrated that it is possible to administer payments in an individualised way. There is now an historic opportunity to abolish the system of dependency and implement an individualised approach. An approach based on equality,

¹⁴ Lally, C. (2020, April, 27). Domestic violence reports up 30% in some areas since lockdown, says Garda. The Irish Times. Retrieved from <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/domestic-violence-reports-up-30-in-some-areas-since-lockdown-says-garda-1.4238362>.

¹⁵ <https://www.shannonside.ie/news/local/longford/domestic-violence-incidents-increase-confinement-adds-pressure-longford-womens-link/>

¹⁶ https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/FINAL_Letter_remote_consultation_post-COVID_-_280720.pdf

where women and men are paid in their own right and have individual entitlement to all of the benefits and supports that accompany an unemployment payment.

Remote working could offer new opportunities to revitalise and reinvigorate rural communities if planned in a structured way.¹⁷ In the second phase of the National remote working survey, 23% of respondents said they would consider relocating within Ireland based on their experience of remote working since COVID-19. A further 7% said they had already moved and the West (Galway, Mayo, Roscommon), the South-west (Cork and Kerry) and the Mid-West (Clare, Limerick, Tipperary) were the top regions respondents have relocated to.¹⁸

The Covid 19 pandemic and the response by women's community organisations clearly shows the importance of their role. Many of our member organisations have responded in innovative ways to a multitude of complex and increasing needs including the welfare of staff. 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.¹⁹ They have contributed to local planning and development of responses in a robust and effective manner in partnership with state agencies. As we move through different stages, our public policies for recovery must be based on economic, environmental and social justice.

Poverty and Economic Independence

The nature of poverty in rural communities is that it is often much more hidden.²⁰ Research undertaken by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) demonstrated that the cost of a 'minimum essential standard of living' (MESL) was higher for rural households compared with their urban counterparts.²¹ Households headed by one parent families, mainly women, are at significant risk of poverty. Childcare remains the single most significant barrier to women's

¹⁷ https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Remote_work_submission_NWC.pdf

¹⁸ <http://whitakerinstitute.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Remote-Working-National-Survey-Phase-II-Report-Oct-2020-Final.pdf>

¹⁹ NWC (2020) Impact of Covid 19 on Womens Community Sector Survey Results https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Survey_Results_June_2020.pdf

²⁰ Irish Rural Link (2016) Poverty and Social Inclusion: the case for Rural Ireland <http://www.irishrurallink.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/IRISH-RURAL-LINK-Poverty-and-Social-Inclusion-The-Case-for-Rural-Ireland-FINAL-REVISED-241016.pdf>

²¹ VPSJ (2019) Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2019 Update Report https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2019_update_report.pdf

equal participation in all aspects of society, particularly employment, education and training. While affordability is an issue for most parents, the high cost of childcare acts as an, often insurmountable, barrier to employment for women who are not high earners. Recent research found that almost 60% of lone parents could not afford to access childcare services, three times the rate of two parent families.²² Ireland is the worst performing country in the EU with regard to affordability for lone parents.

There is hidden unemployment of women in rural communities. Women's work on family farms and family business has not always been paid or officially counted. Women's employment rates are 56% compared to 68% of men.²³ There is a significant proportion of women in atypical, insecure and part-time employment and who are in the system as "qualified adults" (QA). Further evidence of the 'male breadwinner' nature of our social welfare system is provided by this concept of the 'qualified adult' or adult dependent. Around 90% of QA's are women.²⁴ Under this system, welfare payments to two parent families comprise a payment for the main claimant and a QA payment to additional adults in the household. Child dependent payments are also payable to the main claimant. This system creates a relationship of dependency for QAs. Women do not receive an income in their own right and are excluded from accessing many of the support schemes and services, such as Intreo activation and training services.

Despite the patriarchal norms operating within rural Ireland, women have continued to exercise agency in numerous ways. Women are often involved in alternative or diversified farm or rural enterprises. Due to the many challenges facing women setting up enterprises, they tend to favour smaller businesses in gendered, often seasonal and precarious sectors such as craft, hospitality and catering.²⁵ NWC welcomes the state support for women entrepreneurs pioneering and innovating through the Accelerating the Creation of Rural Nascent Start-ups (ACORNS), a programme developed to assist start-up female entrepreneurs residing in a rural area programme. It has supported 250 women entrepreneurs over the course of previous rural development strategy.

Supporting enterprise and employment through the development of incubation spaces and innovation hubs could have benefits for women and others experiencing barriers accessing

²² SVP (2019). Working, parenting and struggling? An analysis of the employment and living conditions of one parent families in Ireland

²³ CSO(2019) Women and Men in Ireland

²⁴ NESC (2019). Gender, family and class issues in Ireland's social welfare system.

²⁵ Unravelling the strands of 'patriarchy' in rural innovation: A study of female innovators and their contribution to rural Connemara Aoife M. Ní Fhlatharta*, Maura Farrell

the labour market. They have the potential to foster access for women to flexible and decent employment opportunities in other sectors such as information technology. There are opportunities for greater investment in Digi hubs with onsite childcare that would be accessible for parents and provide greater flexibility among employers.

Women must be benefitting from rurally based schemes and investment such as the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS), fisheries or rural social scheme places.²⁶ GLAS is the agri-environment scheme under the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020. Priority is given to farmers with priority environmental assets and who undertake specific priority actions. The numbers of women participating in GLAS are much lower. 20% of participants on the Rural Social Scheme are women.

The European Social Fund Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020 funded the Department of Justice and Equality to run operate a positive action measure for 2014-2020, entitled “Training for Women Returning to the Workforce and Women’s Entrepreneurship”. Funding of €4.5 million over three years is being made available under the European Social Fund for initiatives targeted at women who are currently detached from the labour market, but wish to take up paid employment. €1 million is being made available for projects to support women’s entrepreneurship. However, the ability to take up full time paid employment, is directly related to the availability of childcare, eldercare, transport including domestic and family responsibilities. Supports for disabled workers need to include accessible transport, reasonable accommodation in the workplace and personal assistance supports.

Older women living alone, disabled women and women parenting alone have increased costs such as fuel and food. Families on low income need to spend up to one third of their take home income to afford a basic food basket that is acceptable and meets nutritional needs. Those households with children, in particular with teenagers, and those living in rural areas need to spend more.²⁷ One-quarter of our older population live alone, among the older age group - aged 85 and over – women accounted for almost three in every four of those living alone.²⁸ Further research from the VPSJ consistently shows that households containing a pensioner living alone have an inadequate income in terms of achieving a MESL; a fact that significantly and disproportionately impacts older women. Older women are more likely to be reliant on the state non-contributory pension than men, who are more likely to receive

²⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/b13c5f-progress-reports-action-plan-for-rural-development/>

²⁷ Safefood. What is the cost of a healthy food basket in the Republic of Ireland in 2018?

²⁸ CSO(2016)

contributory or occupational pensions. The income from the non-contributory pension meets only 83% of MESL expenditure need.²⁹ Older rural women are even less likely than older urban women to have an occupational pension.³⁰

The use of the 'household' rather than the individual as the primary unit of analysis is problematic - this prevailing model assumes that all resources of the household are shared equally and that all individuals within the household have equal access to those resources. It discounts the prevalence of financial abuse that exists as part of the spectrum of domestic violence. Therefore, many women working in agricultural areas are financially dependent on their husbands and rely on a qualified adult state pension that is approximately 70% of the full amount. The lack of data adds to the invisibility of the experience of women living in poverty.

		Relative Poverty			Living in Deprivation			Consistent Poverty		
		2008	2017	2018	2008	2017	2018	2008	2017	2018
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Urban/Rural location	Urban	11.9	15.1	13.6	14.3	20.2	16	4.2	7.4	5.5
	Rural	18.7	17.2	14.7	13.0	15.9	13.4	4.3	5.3	5.8

The new Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025³¹ is weak on specific targets to address women's experience of poverty in rural communities.

Table of selected relative, deprivation and consistent poverty statistics for 2008, 2017 and 2018³²

Income Inadequacies for Households on Social Welfare Payments³³

Household Type	Rural	Urban
One Parent with 2 Children (1 pre-school, 1 primary)	-€73.58	€2.86
One Parent with 2 Children (1 primary, 1 secondary)	-€141.53	-€69.60
Pensioner Living alone	€51.39	€10.64

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ Áine Ní Léime, Caroline Finn, Ronan Healy and Padraic Ward (2013), Irish Centre for Social Gerontology National University of Ireland, Galway, Rural Ageing Observatory Working Paper 4 - http://www.icsg.ie/sites/www.icsg.ie/files/rural_age_paper_4_-_gender_and_rural_ageing_2.pdf

³¹ <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/46557/bf7011904ede4562b925f98b15c4f1b5.pdf#page=1>

³² CSO - Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2018

³³ VPSJ (2019) Minimum Essential Standard of Living

Recommendations

Poverty and Women's economic independence

- Legislate for a right to flexible work
- Gender and equality proof active labour market policy. Effective and enabling employment activation measures to take account of caring responsibilities, transport, real progression and opportunities for decent, quality jobs in diverse sectors including Information Technology.
- Remove eligibility barriers for women accessing employment supports and programmes
- Include a travel allowance and childcare supports in all government active labour market programmes
- Introduce the living wage
- Ensure income adequacy and economic independence for women through individualisation of income supports and payments
- Maintain the current Government target to reduce consistent poverty to 2 per cent with clear actions to achieve this in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion
- Greater awareness of the invisibility of rural poverty and the gendered nature of poverty both in relation to causes, impacts and solutions for women's poverty.
- Legislate to benchmark social welfare rates to the Minimum Essential Standard of Living
- Introduce a universal, fair State Pension system which will guarantee income adequacy in older age

Rural development programmes and strategies

Rural Development Policy

The Action Plan on Rural Development (APRD) 2014 – 2020 was the key government policy on realising the potential of rural Ireland.³⁴ There was a significant lack of gender analysis and mainstreaming in the previous plan. The successor to this “Our Rural Future” – Rural Development Policy 2021 – 2025³⁵ must take gender equality into account in its implementation and monitoring as committed to in the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017 – 2020(NSWG). It is imperative that in any rural development strategy, women are counted as being part of rural Ireland and specifically that women who experience poverty and social exclusion are named and targeted to benefit from the development and investment that will result from the strategy's implementation. It is crucial that gender expertise is included on the monitoring and implementation group for the new plan and that gender specific indicators are developed. NWC believes that it is necessary to monitor the extent to which this key national programme impacts on equality for women in rural areas and to monitor the distribution of resources and outcomes for women. If the majority of

³⁴ <http://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/162404-rural-ireland-action-plan-web-2-1.pdf>

³⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4c236-our-rural-future-vision-and-policy-context/>

targeted resources are directed towards traditional agricultural activities rather than broader rural social & economic development, it will be men that continue to directly benefit.

LEADER

Since its launch in 1991, LEADER has provided rural communities, across the EU, with the resources to enable local partners to actively engage and direct the local development of their area, through community-led local development (CLLD). In the Irish context, LEADER is included under priority 6 of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP): "*promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.*"³⁶ The current LEADER budget allocated to Ireland provides €250 million in financial grant aid up to the year 2020. Over 2,600 projects and €96m in funding approved to date. Decisions on LEADER funding are made at a local level by a Local Action Group (LAG), through the framework of a Local Development Strategy (LDS). A LAG is made up of people from the local community as well as from the local public and private sector. Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) in many instances have taken on the role of LAGs for the drawdown and appropriation of resources of the Leader programme.

In the LEADER operating rules, it is stated that the LAG should also aim to achieve balanced gender representation. NWC is concerned that a purely voluntary commitment to gender balance on LCDC's and LAGs is not enough, as it is the primary participative and oversight structure for local development and community development work and particular funding programmes. Only eighteen out of thirty-one LCDCs have achieved a 40% or greater gender balance. Policies and programmes designed to support women's engagement in rural development programmes and decision-making structures need to take account of the demands on women's time and create the conditions for equal participation. All of these structures should be required to publicise and make available data on women's representation. Where a deficit exists, an action plan needs to be developed to address the imbalance within an agreed timeframe.

It is vital that the needs and interests of marginalised and excluded women are supported through schemes such as the Leader programme. Women are named as a particular group who may be at risk of social exclusion under Theme 2, Social Inclusion and Provision of

³⁶ The LEADER Programme 2014 – 2020 Rural Development Policy is a core element of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy, delivered through national Rural Development Programmes RDPs. LEADER is a key funding pillar supporting the implementation of RDPs through the delivery of local development actions in rural communities.

Services to hard to reach communities, and any allocation of resources should be based on seeking equal outcomes and impacts for men and women.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme 2018 – 2022

The Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP 1) was established in 2015. It replaced the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) 2010-2014, which itself had replaced the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) and the Community Development Programme. The vision of SICAP is to improve the life chances and opportunities of those who are marginalised in society, living in poverty or in unemployment through community development approaches, targeted supports and interagency collaboration, where the values of equality and inclusion are promoted, and human rights are respected.³⁷

Marginalised women and disadvantaged women had been removed as a target group under SICAP 1, and this significantly reduced essential supports to many women, particularly those experiencing multiple disadvantage such as Traveller women or disabled women. Through sustained advocacy by NWC, our member organisations and partners, disadvantaged women have been reinstated as a target group in the most recent iteration of the programme. Gender equality continues to be named as a cross cutting horizontal theme in the new programme. Local Development Companies (LDC), independent not for profit companies, were commissioned through a competitive tendering process to deliver SICAP 2. There are 49 LDCs across the country, many based in rural areas. They operate and deliver a number of programmes including Local Employment Services, Jobs Clubs, Tus and the Rural Social Scheme. As the national social inclusion programme they must show strong leadership in meeting and exceeding the target for gender balance on their boards, supporting women in leadership roles as well as championing women's equality across all their programmes. In 2020, 54% of the overall SICAP caseload were women, and women's groups were 9% of the total local community groups supported. A higher proportion of women receive lifelong learning supports compared to men who receive more employment supports.³⁸

Other research identified variances across different companies. Marked variation is found across LDCs in the gender breakdown of individuals receiving support. Women formed more

³⁷ <https://www.pobal.ie/programmes/social-inclusion-and-community-activation-programme-sicap-2018-2022/>

³⁸ Pobal(2018) SICAP Annual Report

than half of participants in eight areas, most notably, Dublin Inner City and the area covered by IRD Duhallow. On the other hand, women made up only around a third of beneficiaries in Monaghan, Roscommon and Longford as well as Dublin North West.³⁹ 29% of chairpersons of LDCs are women. A third of LCDs saw SICAP as effective or very effective in relation to gender equality. 35% of respondents felt they could not say how effective SICAP had been, particularly in relation to promoting gender equality and countering discrimination.⁴⁰

Recommendations

Embedding gender equality across all programmes

- Ensure gender equality is embedded into all rural development policies and programmes including the National Planning Framework Project 2040 and the Rural Development Policy. Specific targeted measures should be developed to tackle the inequalities experienced by women. These should be cognisant of national commitments including the Public Sector Duty, Sustainable Development Goals, the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017 – 2020 and the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence.
- Explicitly name and target women from minority ethnic backgrounds, Traveller and Roma women and disabled women in all rural development programmes and initiatives and ensure that their rights are protected.
- Record and report gender and equality disaggregated data and a set of gender specific indicators in the monitoring and review of all rurally oriented strategies and programmes. This is critical to measuring impacts and outcomes for women to meet the obligations in the Istanbul Convention and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women.

Climate Action

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.⁴¹ We are facing a global climate crisis for which we have a window of less than 10 years to act. This sense of urgency should be reflected in all Government policy and strategy. Our transition must be just and all measures must incorporate mitigation and climate justice investments to ensure that those who have contributed least to this crisis; rural communities, households experiencing energy poverty or lower socio-economic groups do not experience further inequality and poverty and do not bear the burnt. The crisis provides us with a real opportunity to transform our society and economy into one that works for everyone.

³⁹ ESRI (2018) The goals and governance of the social inclusion and community activation programme (SICAP) 2015-2017: a mixed methods study

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ European parliament-The Gender Dimension of Climate Justice 2015

Any just transition programmes in rural areas must be gender proofed and factor in the experience of women working in industries that are closing down and the women who are part of the families that will be affected. When policy makers are considering and developing schemes for retraining workers in the midlands or in other areas where industries are being closed down, it must also be considered how to create decent and better paid employment opportunities for women.

We need a strategic mix of policy and financial incentives for operations and/or infrastructure that ensures prevention and preparation for reuse are better designed, more accessible, more affordable, more viable and more attractive than the alternative. To make this happen support is needed for regional Social Environmental enterprises to enable communities find solutions and address waste materials, upskill in the area and create sustainable jobs. With the right support, the circular economy has huge potential to provide opportunities for women in rural communities for example upskilling in new creative areas to provide flexible employment opportunities. Our group member, Roscommon Womens Network are already doing it with support from the Environmental Protection Agency but for the work to be sustainable and grow we need an all of government approach to this community development and feminist model of tackling climate change and promoting the circular economy.⁴²

More research is needed to develop our understanding of where poorer families are living and the particular vulnerabilities they will experience in implementing climate mitigation strategies. We know that a third of children living in lone parent households suffer from respiratory illness linked to poor housing and accommodation. Families on low incomes are more likely to live in poorer land quality areas, areas more subject to flooding. Air pollution is a public health concern caused by fossil fuels. The ban on smoky coal has been extended to all towns with a population of over 10,000, no nationwide ban exists and peat is still burned widely.

Government must 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 year between 2012-2016 from €2.3 billion in 2012

⁴² <https://rwn.ie/textile-upcycling-pilot-project/>

to €2.5 billion in 2016.⁴³ 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 2016.⁴⁴ Households bear the burden of environmental taxes, paying 61% of the taxes while being responsible for 22.1% of emissions.⁴⁵ Increased revenue from green taxes should be ringfenced to support those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. 31% of lone parent households, the majority of whom are women experience fuel poverty.⁴⁶ We do not have comprehensive data on the experience of fuel poverty among Travellers and migrants and disabled people. Increases in costs to fuel and heating your home could disproportionately impact on already disadvantaged groups

As well as addressing pressing unmet need for care, investment in care jobs would also help to meet our commitments to a shift towards a low carbon economy. Investment in decent terms and conditions for those working in care is required. We must recognise the role that care plays in a just transition and reorient our economy away from environmentally damaging and unsustainable practices.

Recommendations

Tackling climate change

- Gender and poverty proof just transition legislation policies & investment.
- Support for regional Social Environmental enterprises to enable communities find solutions and address waste materials, upskill in the area and create sustainable jobs.
- Ensure national planning reduces Irelands climate polluting emissions 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 public transport infrastructure, including cycling, over roads building.
- Invest in a just transition plan for rural development including ending intensive livestock production.
- Ensure that decisions on climate action are participatory, transparent and accountable.

⁴³https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releatsespublications/documents/rp/fossilfuelandsimilarsubsidies/Fossil_Fuel_and_Similar_Subsidies.pdf

⁴⁴ <https://www.nerinstitute.net/blog/harmful-fossil-fuel-subsidies-mistaken-policy>

⁴⁵ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/households-pay-most-green-taxes-but-emit-one-fifth-of-emissionscso1.3668172#:~:text=Irish%20households%20produce%20just%20over,taxes%2C%20new%20CSO%20figures%20show.&text=By%20comparison%2C%20environment%20taxes%20levied,per%20cent%20of%20the%20total.>

⁴⁶ SVP (2019) Growing up in the Cold: A Policy Briefing of the Nature and Impact of Energy Poverty in Households with Children. <https://www.svp.ie/getattachment/2cb10388-e3ca-41ef-9911-a17f252ce09c/Growing-up-in-the-Cold.aspx>

Transport

Viewing public transport as a universal good, means shifting priorities to increasing capital investment and public spending. Some public transport services and routes would not necessarily be profitable in the purely monetary sense, but the benefits of a demand responsive⁴⁷ service would mean a better quality of life, meeting our climate action targets and improving the life opportunities for many women in rural communities. Between 1990 and 2017, Green House Gas from transport in Ireland increased by 133.2% (NESC, 2019). Our transport policy is a key area where we can deliver on our commitments to the planet but also to addressing economic and social inequalities experienced by women. Gender is a significant factor in accounting for differences in mobility and travel behaviour.

The Irish state subsidises a Rural Transport Programme, and through Local Link delivers up to 250,000 rural transport service trips nationally. Passenger numbers continued to increase with an estimated 2 million passengers accessing rural transport services provided by the Rural Transport Programme in 2018.⁴⁸ The seventeen Local Link offices manage approximately 1,000 Public Bus Services in local and rural areas of Ireland. The increasing numbers of passengers demonstrate that *“the freedom, flexibility and safety access to transport provides, cannot be underestimated.”*⁴⁹

In rural areas, there are many roads where no safe walking infrastructure is provided, resulting in limited options for those who wish to move on foot or need to use the footpath to access bus stops. Improved accessibility of bus stops would facilitate uptake of the service. Women have reported feeling uncomfortable waiting at bus stops and this needs to be addressed.⁵⁰

The public transport service is under resourced and does not provide universal coverage and there is a high dependency on car usage in order to travel for work or study, shopping or accessing services. 91% of rural households own a car, 54% owning two.⁵¹ This is clearly an unsustainable situation in the face of declining fossil fuel reserves and national

⁴⁷ This is a door to door service responding to requests for services and operates by making specific trips to pick up and drop off passengers at their own door.

<https://www.irishrurallink.ie/rural-transport-network/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.nationaltransport.ie/public-transport-services/rural-transport-programme/>

⁴⁹ Quote from West Cork Women Against Violence

⁵⁰ https://www.tii.ie/technical-services/research/TII-Travelling-in-a-Womans-Shoes-Report_Issue.pdf

⁵¹ http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/newsevents/documents/census2016summaryresultspart2/Chapter_8_Travel_patterns_and_car_ownership.pdf

commitments to reducing carbon emissions. While car dependency is likely to remain an inevitability for many in rural areas for the foreseeable future, innovation is taking place. In Clare, a Rural Uber type service in the Loop Head peninsula is being piloted, seeing those with cars in rural parts link up with those who have no access to transport, to offer them a lift.

Older people and disabled people who have a free transport pass experience limitations dependant on the frequency and accessibility of routes available in their area. Jobseekers and other people on low incomes do not have access to the transport pass. For many disabled women living in rural or isolated communities, the free travel pass may not cover transport to and from HSE services, which are vital.⁵² Accessible and affordable transport is vital to ensure dignity and autonomy for disabled women. There is an extra cost to having a disability.⁵³ The National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 commits to improving the accessibility and availability of public transport in rural areas for disabled people.

The cost of public transport can be high. Minimum essential transport needs per year for a single adult living alone is over €4,000 (including insurance) per year in a rural area, according to the MESL data for 2019.⁵⁴ It is even more expensive for women parenting alone. Additional transport costs preventing socialising with friends and family can cause isolation. 58% of adults aged 50 and over living in rural areas rate the public transport services in their area as poor or very poor.⁵⁵ Physical isolation and poor access to services can be linked in part to poor public transport.

“Public transport provides an example of a universal service where lack of capital investment and a weak level of public spending can result in significant economic inequalities being experienced.”⁵⁶

Investment in infrastructure needs to factor in how men and women use transport differently and for various purposes. Women often have more complex journeys, which can include getting groceries and dropping and picking up children and visiting elderly parents.⁵⁷ The resulting dependency and high usage is a consequence of being time poor, lack of confidence in the safety of other modes of transport and the costs associated with public

⁵² <https://www.disabledwomenireland.org/press>

⁵³ <http://nda.ie/publications/social-welfare/cost-of-living/>

⁵⁴ VPSJ (2019) Minimum Essential Standard of Living <https://www.budgeting.ie/rural-budgets/>

⁵⁵ https://tilda.tcd.ie/publications/reports/pdf/Report_TransportPatterns.pdf

⁵⁶ Nat O'Connor and Cormac Staunton Tasc 2017 Cherishing All Equally: Economic Inequality in Ireland https://www.tasc.ie/download/pdf/tasc_cherishing_all_equally_web.pdf

⁵⁷ <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2019/0920/1077145-irish-women-driving-to-work-cars/>

transport in some parts of the country. A recent report found younger women who grew up in rural areas feeling vulnerable and unprepared for using public transport for the first time when moving to a city.⁵⁸ The combination of transport and childcare costs can prove too costly for women participating in the labour market. Longford Womens Link has reported that public transport options do not coincide with crèche/school times to support women wishing to access education and employment. Ensuring connectivity for onward journeys to enable passengers to access education and employment is critical as investment increases. For every 10km of travel, the likelihood that individuals participate in higher education decreases by 2.7% - students living 50km from higher education institutions are 13.5% less likely to take up a course.⁵⁹ The ability to get to a training location was six times more likely to be an issue for people in border regions, than for people living in Dublin.⁶⁰

“The fact that we live in a very rural area and many of the women don’t drive so this coupled with inadequate public transport makes it difficult for women to progress. A Bus Eireann service operates from Newmarket to Mallow with 3 services leaving Newmarket a day 7.00am, 10. 10a.m and 1.40pm. Even if women were to get to Newmarket for these services, the first service misses the early train to Cork so it’s not a solution for those wishing to access education.” (Quote from member in North Cork)

“If you don’t drive, have access to a car, it can be difficult to go to that evening course you would like to do, get together with people or to get to a job.” (Quote from member)

The average distance for the supermarket, pharmacy and a GP are about seven times longer for rural households. We are concerned that transport facilities and active travel options fall short of an inclusive approach and neglect the needs of women from minority ethnic groups, women living on low incomes and disabled women. There is a need for ambitious action to develop a more diverse and inclusive transport infrastructure.⁶¹

Recommendations

Transport

- Gender proof transport plans and policies to protect and encourage use among women
- All major capital infrastructure investment must be gender impact assessed, including a gender audit of all major transport initiatives

⁵⁸ https://www.tii.ie/technical-services/research/TII-Travelling-in-a-Womans-Shoes-Report_Issue.pdf

⁵⁹ J.Cullinan et al, 2013 Distance Effects, Social Class and the Decision to Participate in Higher Education in Ireland

⁶⁰ Central Statistics Office. Adult Education Survey 2017.

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/aes/adulteducationsurvey2017/>

⁶¹ Western Development Commission (2020) Making the transition to a Low Carbon Society in the Western Region: Key issues for rural dwellers <https://westerndevelopment.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Transition-to-a-Low-Carbon-Region-WDC-Final-summary-August-2020-1.pdf>

- Design to ensure accessibility for disabled people
- Ensure that the commitment to 20% of the 2020 Capital budget in the programme for government for cycling and walking benefits rural areas
- Develop a 'demand responsive' rural transport service to serve dispersed populations, citizens with mobility needs, and low demand that provides quality and coverage
- Expand Local Link services in rural Ireland to deliver more public transport services to all communities, to include new night services
- Ensure connectivity for onward journeys for commuters and students

Women in agriculture

Land Ownership



Source: IFA Diversity Strategy Towards 2025

Women's contribution to farming can go largely unnoticed and unrecognised in statistics and policies.⁶² Particularly in terms of farm ownership or registration of family farms in the names of both spouses. The Central Statistical Office (CSO) figures from 2018 reported that the number of family farms owned by women in Ireland was at a very low rate at 11.7%.⁶³ Only 10% of the land in women's ownership is eligible for basic payments. There has been no increase in women's ownership of land since 2010. By way of contrast, in Austria, 33% of women are farm owners. In Norway, to increase access to land for women; they introduced a law in 1974 where the eldest child is the legal heir. Inheritance is usually not based on ability or interest but on gender. A 2017 study undertaken by Macra supported by the Irish Farming

⁶² Anne Byrne, Nata Duvvury, Áine Macken-Walsh, Tanya Watson (2013) Gender, Power and Property: In my own right. The Rural Economy Development Programme (REDP) Working Paper Series. Working Paper

⁶³ https://pdf.cso.ie/www/pdf/20180524124500_Press_Statement_Farm_Structure_Survey_2016_full.pdf

Association (IFA) on Land Mobility and Succession, shows that this imbalance is unlikely to change in the short to medium term, as only 11% of those identified in the report as successors, are women.⁶⁴ In another study, 57% of all men responded to say gender did not influence succession plans, however only 35% of all women respondents agreed with this. 63% of women said gender does influence succession plans.⁶⁵ Issues of succession, joint partnership and inheritance continue to be based on patriarchal norms. Irish farms are still transferred to sons. Most women enter farming through marriage. Transferring the family farm remains a highly emotive issue.⁶⁶

In 2014, Tanya Watson, NUI Galway reported in her study, that state subsidised training and knowledge transfer is mainly directed at the land owner, which despite the reality of farm living being a household process, typically remains male. Women were slightly older than their male counterparts, with an average age of 62 compared to 56 for men. 31% of female farmers are over 80 years of age.⁶⁷ The age of women farmers suggested many come to inherit farms when they become widowed and are not being actively considered for succession. Only 3.8% of farms are registered in joint female/male names.⁶⁸ The Rural Development Programme recognises that men account for more than 90 per cent of farm holders and this could be '*detrimental in terms of the human capital capacity of the sector and may also inhibit technology uptake and structural change.*'⁶⁹

Women & the Agricultural Workforce

*Women on Irish farms have always been employed, but this employment has not always been paid or counted in official statistics.*⁷⁰

The CSO Labour Force Survey (LFS) shows that in 2018, 16.4% of workers in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector were female. The trend since 2000 is increasing slightly, with the proportion rising from an average of 14.2% from 2000- 2009 to 16.2% over the period 2010- 2018.

⁶⁴ IFA Submission to the National Strategy on Women and Girls 2017 - 2020

⁶⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/cmef/farmers-and-farming/pilot-project-exchange-programmes-young-farmers_en

⁶⁶ Conway, S.F., McDonagh, J., Farrell, M. and Kinsella, A. (2016). Cease agricultural activity forever? Underestimating the importance of symbolic capital, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 44: 164–176.

⁶⁷ <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/publications/2017/AnnualReviewandOutlookFinal270717.pdf>

⁶⁸ 2017 Women in AgriFood Sector briefing paper for National Strategy for Women and Girls

⁶⁹ Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (2014). Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 (2014), p. 29.

⁷⁰ Shortall, S. (2017) Changing Gender Roles in Irish Farm Households: Continuity and Change *Irish Geography*, 50(2), 175–191, DOI: 10.2014/igj.v50i1.1321

Over one quarter (27%) of regular family workers were women, providing 19% of total Annual Work Units.⁷¹ However, less than one quarter (16,100) are holders of the farms on which they worked. Spouses involved in farming are increasing their workloads on farms. Women are contributing a huge amount of labour but are not getting the recognition. The farm owner who receives the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) payment is the public face, where just eight percent of the €1.2 billion of Ireland's EU CAP Single Farm Payments went to women farmers in 2012.⁷² Further analysis reveals further inequalities in payment amounts; on the top and bottom 60 CAP payments across 5 counties in the North/West Irish women farmers make up on average 3% of the top payments while making up on average 20% of the lowest payments.⁷³ There are very few areas of public expenditure, where 90% of public funding is going to one gender. Data from a publication on direct payments, broken down by age and gender from the Ministry for Agriculture in Spain show that 36% of Spanish farmers were women and that they received 27% of total Single Farm Payments.⁷⁴

Farms in receipt of Basic Payment Scheme payments by Gender, 2015⁷⁵

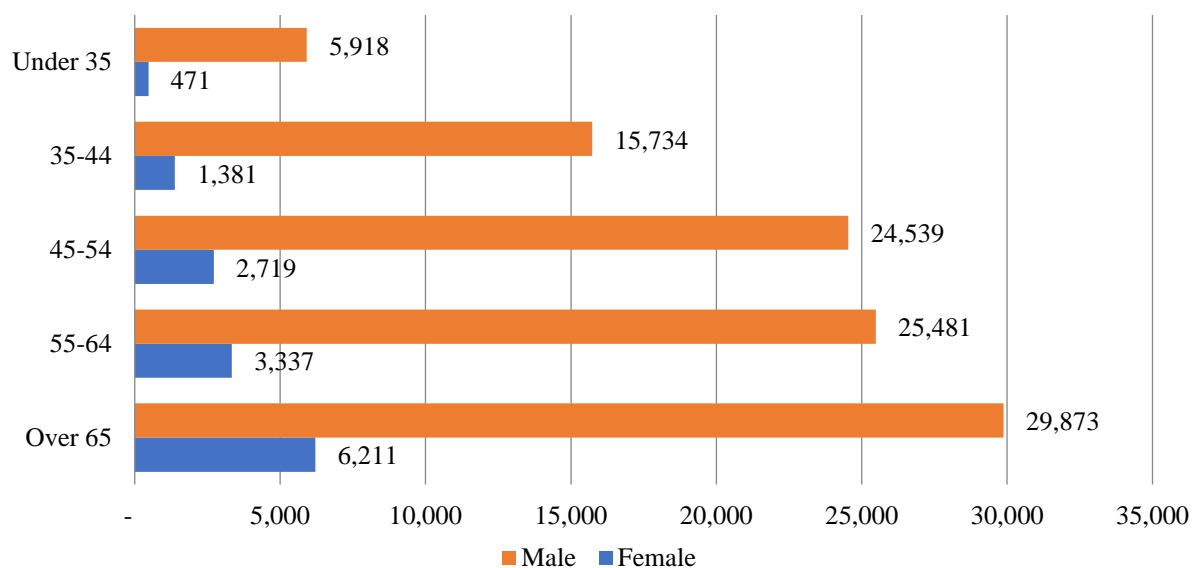
⁷¹ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-fss/farmstructuresurvey2016/da/fofi/>

⁷² Anne Byrne, Nata Duvvury, Áine Macken-Walsh, Tanya Watson (2013) Gender, Power and Property: In my own right. The Rural Economy Development Programme (REDP) Working Paper Series. Working Paper

⁷³ Research courtesy of Bridget Murphy

⁷⁴ <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/publications/2015/AROFinalVersion2015Amended210915.pdf>

⁷⁵ Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.



It is estimated that there 3,000 joint herd numbers. Women generally experience difficulties accessing a herd number and cannot qualify for other schemes, subsidies and supports without a herd number. Information from the Young Farmer Scheme shows that only 819 out of 4213 participants in 2018 were women.

Women's off farm work is as important in sustaining the farm enterprise as the male farmer's farm income generating activity.

"the off-farm employment was sustaining the farm income, the farm household and the farm family, and without it that farm was in trouble and a lot of farms in this country are in trouble without that additional income from females in particular,"⁷⁶

Under half of farm households are only sustainable due to the off-farm income of the spouse/partner. It is women's off farm work that keeps farming male which also goes a long way towards explaining why farming organisations are male dominated. Women tend to downplay their professional roles and contributions and thereby reinforce the identity of the farmer and decision maker as male.⁷⁷ The CAP post 2020 offers an opportunity to review the role of women in agriculture and their contribution to farm viability. Generation renewal will be one of the main objectives for CAP post 2020. CSO figures published in 2018 showed that over half of Irish farmers are over 55 years of age, with 30 per cent of farmers over the retirement age. From 2013 to 2018, the number of farmers under 35 fell from 8,200 to 7,100. The agri-taxation working group identified barriers to greater participation of women in

⁷⁶ <https://www.independent.ie/business/farming/rural-life/women-call-for-recognition-for-doing-a-quarter-of-the-workload-on-irish-farms-36543053.html>

⁷⁷ Shortall, S. (2017) Changing Gender Roles in Irish Farm Households: Continuity and Change Irish Geography, 50(2), 175–191, DOI: 10.2014/igj.v50i1.1321

agriculture.⁷⁸ Supporting women in agriculture in the context of generational renewal is a named commitment in Our Rural Future. Incentives and specific measures for girls and young women must be prioritised including seats at the decision-making tables.

*“The family nature of most farming businesses in Ireland is recognised but not adequately supported in terms of ensuring the visibility and voice of women on farms. Many aspects of farm productivity and profitability as well as health and safety could be more effectively supported through engagement of advisory and support services with farm women”.*⁷⁹

Migrant workers are employed in many agri food sectors in Ireland, many were deeply concerned for their own health and safety working during the pandemic. Workers in this sector must not be made vulnerable by risky and unsafe practises. Women migrant workers in rural areas are often in unregulated and precarious employment experiencing low pay, poor working conditions, with precarious immigration status.

Retrospective Partnerships

Ireland’s social insurance protocols define many farm women who work on the family farm and spouses of business owners (mainly women) as ‘relatives assisting’. Although working in the family business, ‘relatives assisting’ cannot make PRSI contributions, which would entitle them to old age contributory pension and maternity benefit. Therefore, many women working in agricultural areas are financially dependent on their husbands and rely on a qualified adult state pension that is approximately 70% of the full amount. Many women who worked on family farms do not have social insurance coverage. There is a scheme operated by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection where you can seek to have their contribution to the farm recognised retrospectively. From 2009 to March 2019, the Department’s Scope section has made 2,553 farm partnership decisions. The department is contacted primarily by women, who are or had been working on the family farm (or other business) with their spouse/partner, seeking a decision on the social insurance Class that should apply to them. If it is deemed that a partnership does exist (or has existed in the past), the income between the spouses/partners will be split and their social insurance records are updated with Class S contributions if the income is sufficient.

Womens representation in Agri business and Co-operatives

⁷⁸ <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/agri-foodindustry/agri-foodandtheeconomy/agri-foodbusiness/agri-taxation/>

⁷⁹ UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science Submission on Review of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Post-2020

Traditional perceptions of women in farming organisations still hold. Currently 5 out of 29 chairpersons of Irish Farming Association (IFA) branches are women. We have seen the emergence of women farmers networks such as the West Women in Farming Network and South East Women in Farming Network on a provincial basis, however they do not have seats at the decision-making tables. Women's participation across the IFA predominates in the Farm families committee as opposed to across the whole work of the organisation. Five chairs of the forty-one committees are women and there is only one woman on the National Council. They have recently launched their diversity strategy towards 2025.⁸⁰ They have carried out a valuable gender audit of all these structures and committees and have put forward a number of recommendations to address the underrepresentation of women at all levels of the organisation. CERES (The Women in Agribusiness Leadership Network) have consistently highlighted the lack of women's representation on boards. Lakeland Dairies, an Irish Dairy Co-operative, continues to have an all-male board.⁸¹

Table from Women in Agri-Food Sector Briefing Paper to contribute to the National Women's Strategy 2017-2020 March 2017

State Body	Total Number of Members Including the Chairperson	Total number of members where appointments are made by the Minister on the basis of nominations from third-party organisations	Total Number of Women Members	Percentage of board members who are female
Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board (ALAB)	7	6	1	14%
Bord Bia	15	5	4	27%
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	6	-	1	17%
Bord na gCon	7	-	1	14%
Coillte	9	-	2	22%
Horse Racing Ireland	14	11	3	21%
Irish National Stud	7	-	2	29%
Marine Institute	9	-	2	22%
National Milk Agency	14	13	0	0%
Sea Fisheries Protection Authority	3	-	1	33%
Teagasc	11	5	2	18%
Veterinary Council of Ireland	19	14	6	32%

⁸⁰ <https://www.ifa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/IFA-Diversity-Report-A4-Sep19-FINALWeb.pdf>

⁸¹ <https://www.lakeland.ie/about-us/our-board>

Recommendations

Women in agriculture

- Recognise the women involved in farming and develop specific measures to encourage women and girls into agriculture, through addressing succession and inheritance barriers.
- Promote farming as a career option for women through subject choice and positive measures in agricultural education programmes
- Develop practical supports to recognise women's work on farms. Develop practical supports to recognise women's work on farms including incentives for women's participation in knowledge transfer groups
- Promote and report on women's representation in decision-making and leadership in all parts of the agri-business sector, Dept of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Marine, state boards and co-operatives.
- Commission a report into women in agriculture similar to the study carried out by the Scottish government in 2016⁸²

Care

NWC's understanding of care is broad and acknowledges that across the lifespan, we all both give and receive care, and that this is a deeply fulfilling and necessary human experience. It still remains primarily an issue for women, not considered a societal or familial issue that we all have responsibility for. Care or unpaid work in the home encompasses a broad range of duties such as housework and preparing meals, the unpaid work that many women in rural areas do on family farms and small businesses, care for children, older family members, friends or neighbours and disabled people. NWC acknowledges that disabled women are not passive recipients of care, but individuals whose rights are intertwined with those, predominantly women that provide care.⁸³ Disabled women living in rural communities often do not have choice in organising how their supports for independent living are delivered. Women perform just under 20 hours of housework per week compared to 7 hours for men. Having a partner resulted in women spending more time on housework, regardless of whether the partner was employed or not.⁸⁴ Traveller women are almost twice as likely to be looking after home and family as the general population.⁸⁵

⁸² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/women-farming-agriculture-sector/>

⁸³ McDonagh, R. <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/disabled-people-have-been-made-to-believe-they-are-the-problem-1.3774721>

⁸⁴ Russell, H., Grotti, R., McGinnity, F. & Privalko, I. (2019). Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland. IHREC & ESRI

⁸⁵ Ibid

The overall decline in rural infrastructure, lack of services, long distances and lack of public transport means that women in rural communities experience a very significant additional burden of care and time spent organising and delivering care. A key structural barrier to women achieving economic equality is the unequal distribution of caring responsibilities. The most effective and efficient way to tackle these persistent gender inequalities is sustained investment in public services and social infrastructure. This will mitigate historical and ongoing economic inequality and address unpaid and undervalued care labour. Despite the centrality of their labour to ensuring the sustainability of the family farm or enterprise, both on and off farm, women in agriculture are usually categorised vocationally in terms of their relationship to male farmers and as non-paid family members. Along with farm work and off-farm employment, women are actively engaged in non-paid activities including care of children and home.⁸⁶ 61% of carers are women and there is a particular caring demand on women in the 40 to 59 age group.⁸⁷

“I am in my 50s and responsible for three ageing parents, mine and my husband’s. We need to think about the consequences of dementia for people in middle age who are providing care” (Quote from women in a rural women’s group)⁸⁸

The previously noted decline in rural infrastructure and lack of public health and care services requires women to fill these gaps. In many rural communities, there is a lack of outreach services and care for elderly and sick people or disabled people. There continues to be inadequate provision of childcare in rural communities and unequal responsibility for family and home.⁸⁹ Often women will neglect their own health and wellbeing needs when prioritising the care of others. The impact of caring can be detrimental to women’s participation in paid employment, poverty in older age and access to health and social services.⁹⁰

The lack of affordable and accessible childcare services makes it difficult for women to avail of training and education or to enter or retain employment. For example, in some labour market programmes there are childcare supports to enable the participation of women. However, the department sets out rules that the childcare facility or childminder must be Tusla registered,

⁸⁶ CSO (2019) Women and Men in Ireland. Nearly all of the people (94.3%) who were looking after home or family in 2019 were women.

⁸⁷ CSO(2019) Women and Men in Ireland

⁸⁸ NWCI (2018), Out of Silence Womens Mental health in their own words
https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Out_of_Silence_Report_-_NWCI_-_2018.pdf

⁸⁹ July 2008 Maureen Bassett Gender Governance and Rural Development

⁹⁰ Walsh K. (2019) Womens Health in Ireland: Evidence base for the development of a Womens Health Action Plan. Commissioned by NWCI & HSE

this can prove difficult for many of the women using more informal arrangements and can prevent some from participating.

76% of the individuals in receipt of the means tested carers allowance are women.⁹¹ The payment requires that the individual cannot take part in employment, self-employment, training or education courses outside the home for more than 18.5 hours a week. This policy can constrain carers ability to fully engage in the workforce, limiting them to part time precarious employment or disengaging fully from paid employment. Improved conditions for workers in early education sectors is necessary alongside the introduction of a publicly funded model of childcare which addresses both workers' rights and affordability and could be transformative for women in rural communities. Those working in home care can have longer distances to travel between people' homes and are not paid for this travel time.

Pension equality

Women who have contributed through their unpaid care work, experience cumulative disadvantage over the life course in relation to pension eligibility. Carers and former carers can have differential access to state pensions due to interrupted employment during their life. This has long term implications for the financial security and independence of women who provide care. The means-tested system creates additional difficulties for women who are denied entitlements to non-contributory old-age pensions because of their husbands' incomes and assets – in reality excluding all women in agriculture. In 2012, due to changes introduced to eligibility criteria for the contributory pension, women were disproportionately impacted.⁹² Women are more likely to be in low paid, part time jobs on precarious contracts which make it difficult to collect sufficient PRSI contributions to be eligible for the full State contributory pension. 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 strongly recommends 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 urgently requires reform to tackle these types of structural inequalities through the introduction of a universal state pension.⁹³

⁹¹ CSO(2019) Women and men in Ireland

⁹² Bassett, M. (2017) Towards a Fair State Pension for Women Pensioners. Dublin: Age Action.

⁹³<https://www.socialjustice.ie/sites/default/files/attach/publication/5197/universalstatesocialwelfarepension.pdf?cs=true>

Recommendations

Care

- To guarantee a fair state pension system which will guarantee income adequacy and dignity for women and men in older age, the government should introduce a universal state pension system.
- Any reform of the pension system needs to take account of women's work and care patterns
- Legislate for a full and retrospective homecare credit to support women to access a full pension
- Introduce a publicly funded model of childcare
- Improve statutory family and paid leave
- Provide social care supports for disabled people and older people including personal assistance and homecare

Health

Ireland's two-tier healthcare system perpetuates broad inequalities in terms of income. The increasing cost of private health insurance has a particularly high impact for rural areas. Extra costs when accessing specialist healthcare include travel costs and accommodation costs if receiving treatment. Women may experience different diagnosis and treatment depending on a number of factors, including socio-economic status and age. Living in a rural area has been shown to have a negative impact on women's health and mental health, as a result of having to travel distances to access services and the variation in the level and nature of services between the regions. As previously noted, rural transport is under resourced and can lead to missed appointment times, leading to being pushed down waiting lists. Transport barriers have been noted as a major issue in rural areas to accessing mental health services.⁹⁴ In order to access addiction services, women may have to travel to larger urban centres to access support and treatment. With 18% of households having no access to high speed broadband, many in rural areas, it limits the capacity for women to access health information online.⁹⁵ For breast cancer screening, there is a higher incidence of screen detected breast cancers in urban populations as opposed to rural populations.⁹⁶

Reproductive Health

⁹⁴ Irish Rural Link (2016) Poverty and Social Inclusion. The Case for Rural Ireland. [//www.irishrurallink.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Poverty-and-Social-Inclusion-The-Case-for-Rural-Ireland.pdf](http://www.irishrurallink.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Poverty-and-Social-Inclusion-The-Case-for-Rural-Ireland.pdf)

⁹⁵ <https://fibrerollout.ie/rural-ireland/nbp/>

⁹⁶ National Cancer Registry Ireland. (2016). Cancer inequalities in Ireland by deprivation, urban/rural status and age: a National Cancer Registry report. National Cancer Registry. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncri.ie/sites/ncri/files/pubs/cancer-inequality-report-summary-2016.pdf>

An additional barrier faced by women when trying to access contraceptive care is the lack of adequate services in their local area. Research carried out reported that of the 11% who noted difficulty in accessing contraception, 42% reported lack of access to contraceptive services in their locality.⁹⁷ Significant regional disparities exist in the quality and availability of services. Family planning clinics are not evenly distributed across the country, with the majority in urban centres. We know that not all GP practices provide for Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) and it is likely that there is uneven coverage across the country. LARCs are the most effective and long acting form of contraceptive and include the hormonal and copper coil, implant or injection. The roll-out of contraception services must ensure access in all areas of the country.⁹⁸

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency (2004) has highlighted that contraceptive services in Ireland are 'poorly developed', particularly in relation to the lack of services in rural areas, the cost of contraceptives and the need to deregulate emergency contraception in order to prevent crisis pregnancies. There is clear evidence that emergency contraception is not locally accessible nationwide.⁹⁹ Just over half (51%) of women aged 17-45 claim that they have had sex where no contraception was used, with those living in rural areas and those aged 17-24 (53%) more likely to have had sex in the past where no contraception was used." "Those that live in a rural area (29%) and those that use a hormonal coil or IUS (31%) are most likely to claim that they have to travel outside of the town/city/ village that they live in to access the contraception they are currently using".¹⁰⁰

Women accessing post-natal GP care also experience a geographical disparity. Nationally, almost 85% of women attended the two-week post-natal appointment while less than half of women in Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo attended.¹⁰¹ Of those who did not attend, the majority said it was because they were unaware of it. Full implementation of the National Maternity Strategy is required to ensure women and children all over Ireland have the same level of care.

⁹⁷ Irish Contraception and Crisis Pregnancy Study 2010 (ICCP-2010). A Survey of the General Population. Crisis Pregnancy Programme Report No. 24.

⁹⁸ NWCI (2019) Submission to the Department of Health on access to contraception https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWCI_submission_-_Contraception_-_2019.pdf

⁹⁹ NWCI (2006) Women's Health in Ireland: Meeting International Standards. <http://www.nwci.ie/download/pdf/healthreport06.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ https://wellwomancentre.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2020/11/Dublin_WWC_CONTRACEPTIVE_Report_NOV2020_FINAL.pdf

¹⁰¹ <https://www.hiqa.ie/hiqa-news-updates/national-survey-reveals-geographical-disparity-when-it-comes-accessing-postnatal>

The LGBTQI+ community don't have the same range of options for social and health supports in rural areas.¹⁰² It can be much harder to access crucial supports like sexual health, LGBTQI+ friendly counsellors, GPs and trans healthcare.¹⁰³

There can be additional challenges for women and girls in rural communities accessing reproductive healthcare including conscientious objection to the morning after pill, hormonal contraception and termination services with some providers. Lack of availability and cost of transport to travel to another provider can be barriers. For women accessing abortion services the mandatory three day wait period acts as a barrier, particularly for women travelling long distances to abortion providers who must attend two separate appointments for an abortion. There can be a lack of access to abortion aftercare due to distance from specialised services that provide free after care. As we continue to live along-side COVID-19, it is important that we can harness innovations which have made access to care more seamless and safer for both patients and providers. The continuation of the option of remote consultation for abortion care would greatly improve women's experience of reproductive health services. We believe the optimum approach would be that both face-to-face and remote consultations would be offered, with remote consultation available, where it is the woman's preference and clinically appropriate.

Mental Health

The Women's Health Council, documented that women living in rural communities experience greater difficulties in accessing counselling and support services, as these are concentrated in urban areas, women living in rural communities sampled were further away from key services, had reduced access to transport, were less likely to be in employment outside the home and were more likely to be eligible for a medical card than their urban counterparts. This lack of counselling and support services in rural areas acts as a contributory factor to social exclusion and poorer mental health outcomes. The report highlights that service depletion in rural areas placed a severe strain on women, as they have added responsibility of caring for others who are young, elderly or unwell and that overall Irish research has also found that girls living in a rural environment experience greater psychological difficulty than girls from urban areas. The impact of loneliness and

¹⁰²https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Womens_Health_in_Ireland__Evidence_Base_for_the_Development_of_the_WHAP_-_2019.pdf

¹⁰³ <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/lgbt-life-in-rural-ireland-you-can-feel-like-you-re-the-only-one-1.4017385>

isolation was reported in our recent report on Womens Mental Health.¹⁰⁴ LGBTQI+ people can experience isolation and lack of support. They may be LGBTQI+ for a while before coming out and this can be an extra strain with the regular stresses of being a young person.

“I live on my own and it can be very lonely. Sometimes you can feel like you’re going a bit mad...it can be hard to make friends, especially in a rural area” (woman in a rural women’s group)¹⁰⁵

Recommendations

Health

- Implement Slaintecare to ensure that gender inequities in current health and health care are considered and ameliorated in future service design
- Integrate the social determinants of women’s health (including caring responsibilities, longer lives with chronic diseases and low incomes) into health service development to effectively address the health impact of sustained inequality on women.
- Introduce a scheme for universal, free access to contraception
- Ensure local access to abortion and provision in all maternity hospitals
- Ensure provision of outreach health services to remote and isolated communities including maternity care

Violence against women

Gender based violence is compounded and enabled by the greater prevalence of economic dependency, stigma in accessing support services, lack of culturally appropriate services for Traveller and Roma women and the geography and distance of where support services are located. In small communities, professionals will be well known and their familiarity with both the abuser and the victim has been shown to be an inhibitory factor for those requiring support.

Longford Womens Link’s Domestic Violence Service (LWLDVS) provides supports including 1:1 Support, Group support, Court accompaniment and advocacy to over 300 women every year and these figures are increasing year on year. In 2020, a key area of concern for this rural service is the issue of rural transport. In 2019, LWLDVS assisted 43 women with transport to crisis supports which amounted to 201 journeys to and from appointments

¹⁰⁴ NWCI (2018), Out of Silence Womens Mental health in their own words
https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Out_of_Silence_Report_-_NWCI_-_2018.pdf

¹⁰⁵ ibid

including court, solicitors and viewing properties. This is a critical element of LWLDVS support, given the lack of accessible rural transport options in the region, and needs consistent resourcing. Additional transport costs can compound the situation for women experiencing domestic violence and for services working to support women. It takes much longer for rural victims to attend support meetings (between 30 minutes and two hours) compared to 25 minutes for an urban victim. Victims in the most remote locations take longer to act in any way against the perpetrator- 3.2 years compared to 2.6 years for urban victims. Fewer rural victims will contact the gardaí (54% compared to 61%). The cohort of older victims (over 55) who never contact a service is extremely high in rural settings. Access to support workers remains a more significant issue in rural areas: it is hard to find neutral locations and home visits are difficult due to higher stigma felt by victims in small communities.¹⁰⁶ The use of taxis is not sustainable in the long term given our climate goals and for services. In Northern Ireland, free public transport is available for victims fleeing domestic violence.¹⁰⁷ There is also a scheme in operation in the UK called Rail to Refuge¹⁰⁸, it could be more applicable to buses in rural areas. This acknowledges the level of danger, experienced by women, when leaving an abusive relationship.

Domestic violence against women in rural areas is more hidden and can be a contributing factor to homelessness. This can be due to several factors including, stigma often associated with these issues, lack of services available or lack of awareness of the services available to women in an area. West Cork Women against Violence project reported a rise in 2016 in rural homelessness; it noted that 50% of the women accessing support from the homeless charity had an experience of domestic violence.¹⁰⁹ Hidden homelessness can be an issue in rural communities, where generations of families can be living in overcrowded situations.

Nine counties in Ireland have no dedicated refuge for women and their children. Ireland's refuges only provide 31% of the places needed according to the Recommendation of the Council of Europe. Traveller and Roma women experience discrimination accessing services and account for the largest group in admissions to refuges.¹¹⁰ The homelessness figures do not count the women staying in refuges. The Donegal Domestic Violence Service (DDVS),

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.longfordleader.ie/news/local-news/506998/rurality-is-a-key-weapon-of-domestic-violence.html>

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/news/ministers-announce-free-public-transport-those-fleeing-domestic-abuse-0>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/rail-to-refuge/>

¹⁰⁹ http://westcorkwomensproject.ie/wp-content/uploads/whisper_67.pdf

¹¹⁰ Irish Traveller & Roma women joint shadow report:

A response to Ireland's consolidated sixth and seventh periodic report to the UN committee on the elimination of discrimination against women 20 January, 2017

has four units with nine beds and they accommodate an average of 18 women and children every week.¹¹¹

Additionally, for a woman living on a farm, accessing legal remedies such as a barring order may not be effective as the perpetrator will continue to work on the family farm around the home. This is also the case for Traveller women living on halting sites seeking protection. The infrequency of court sittings, the time for a Garda response compounded by closure of rural Garda stations, rotation of Garda in rural stations, lack of anonymity and isolation from family and friends can all compound the experience in a rural community. Our members have also raised the issue of prostitution and trafficking in rural areas. There are gaps in research on women in prostitution in rural areas. Services report from their frontline work that there are lots of women spread around the country. It's also evident in the online advertising of prostitution that women are available in rural areas – a big concern is certainly around their access to supports and services in their area. Where women are touring/ toured around the country, this further limits their possibilities to seek supports.¹¹² A lot of the support services for women to exit prostitution are based in Dublin. A study by the Immigrant Council of Ireland in 2009, estimated that 41% of women in prostitution were being moved around Ireland and also that the majority of women were migrant women.¹¹³ For women living in Gaeltacht communities where the native language is Irish, supports should be available through the native language.

Recommendations

Violence against women

- Address violence against women through a combination of stronger legislation, increased effectiveness of the state's frontline services, community-based services and significant investment to ensure women's safety and protection.
- Address the links between domestic violence and homelessness
- Continue to provide rent supplement for victims of domestic violence
- Provide free transport for those fleeing domestic violence

Women from minority ethnic backgrounds

"Migrant women are part of the make-up of Ireland's increasingly diverse society. They are contributing to Ireland's economic success and to the social transformation of rural communities, both as active participants in the labour

¹¹¹ <https://donegalnews.com/2020/07/revealing-the-true-extent-of-donegals-homelessness/>

¹¹² https://emn.ie/files/p_201211231126542009_Trafficking_Report_ICI.pdf

¹¹³ https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Womens_Health_in_Ireland__Evidence_Base_for_the_Development_of_the_WHAP_-_2019.pdf

market and through family life and community activity.”¹¹⁴

The Irish population has changed and been strengthened through immigration. Migrant workers are a part of rural Ireland and their contribution to rural life is important from both an economic and cultural perspective. The specific experiences of migrant women in rural communities can be compounded by racism and discrimination, language barriers, legal status and precarious forms of employment. Their involvement in decision-making structures should also be supported and enabling opportunities for the voice of migrant women to be heard.

“Get our diverse voices out there, make us visible and claim our space.” (Quote from member)

Forced global migration and the displacement of people from their home countries due to war and persecution, is a current and increasing reality throughout the world. It is a reality which presents and will continue to present serious challenges for those with no choice but to leave their homes in search of asylum, safety and a secure future for themselves and their families. It is a reality too, which places a significant responsibility on receiving countries to develop systems that meet the needs of asylum seekers in a manner that protects and promotes their human rights, dignity, empowerment and inclusion. The particular experiences and vulnerability of women coming to our shores seeking asylum cannot be ignored. Asylum seeking, and refugee women and their families also form a significant part of the demographic profile of many rural towns and villages in Ireland. Many are women parenting alone, who have lost their partners and families in war zones. They have significant additional barriers including language and cultural issues; complex physical and mental health issues; the application process for international protection; high levels of income poverty and low levels of familial or other social networks.

The Irish system of accommodating people in remotely located of direct provision centres, creates additional issues for free movement, integration and any healthy development of life in Ireland.¹¹⁵ The system of direct provision in Ireland since its introduction 20 years ago, has long been an issue of concern for NWC and its members. It has been well documented as having negative human rights implications for those who are placed there and has been widely condemned for the damage that it does. Recently, we have witnessed the organisation of coordinated antagonistic responses from local communities to the opening of

¹¹⁴ Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (2008) Enabling Equality: Migrant Women in Rural Ireland

¹¹⁵ <https://akidwa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/LetsTalk2.pdf>

new centres or the arrival of new families. Some groups and individuals are using the concerns of rural communities, around lack of investment in social infrastructure, to create tensions. This is highly distressing for women and families seeking protection. Misinformation and far right rhetoric must be challenged and support for more inclusive processes and responses in rural communities supported.¹¹⁶ Many communities have been proactive, in Borisokane¹¹⁷ and Lisdonvarna, forming welcoming committees and friends of the centre groups. They are reaching out to new members of the community offering friendship and practical supports.¹¹⁸ Many asylum seekers and refugees work voluntarily in communities and contribute a great deal to community life in terms of both their skills from their country of origin and culturally. They were also working in essential services particularly in nursing homes, hospitals, as cleaners and shop assistants. 3,000 permissions to work have been granted to people living in direct provision centres. Rural development programmes must recognise the distinct needs, experiences, contributions and situations of vulnerability faced by migrant women and girls.

“Women can be leaders and drivers of change, bringing with them skills, innovative ideas, and a diversity of cultural practices that enrich societies and help to challenge prejudices, discriminatory social norms and harmful gender stereotypes.”¹¹⁹

Recommendations

Women from minority ethnic backgrounds

- Name and target minority ethnic women across all rural development programmes
- 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
- Support for locally based responses that promote belonging, welcoming and inclusion and that provide opportunities for local communities to show solidarity and support to those seeking refuge and safety on our island

Women’s participation in public and political life

Women contribute to rural society through voluntary work, community development, care work, small businesses and employment. There is a need to address the lack of women’s participation as decision makers in all local, community and rural development organisations,

¹¹⁶ <https://www.communityworkireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/welcoming-asylum-seekers-a-community-work-response-1.pdf>

¹¹⁷ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/the-tipperary-town-that-changed-its-mind-on-asylum-seekers-1.4062528>

¹¹⁸ <https://www.amnesty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Welcoming-Communities.pdf>

¹¹⁹ Joint Statement for International Women’s Day 2018 Published by the Expert Working Group for Addressing Women’s Human Rights in the Global Compact for Migration

as well as local authorities and associated structures of Local Community Development Committees and Strategic Policy Committees. There is an urgent need for a gender analysis which emphasises the structural causes of women's inequality, the analysis of the roles, responsibilities and influence that women hold in decision-making structures as well as the need for participation of a diversity of women, particularly including those from marginalised groups.

There is a lack of gender balance on rural decision-making structures including farming and sporting organisations. There is only one woman on the 53-member council of the Irish Farming Association (IFA) and the role of president has never been held by a woman. Women now make up 26% of councillors.¹²⁰ The EU average is 32%. There was a notable urban-rural divide in terms of women's representation levels in the 2019 Local Elections. In some rural constituencies, it is as low as 6%. There are 23 electoral areas with no women representatives, the majority of which are in rural areas. Only ten Local Authorities have achieved a so-called critical mass status of 30 per cent or more women councillors. The distance and geography of centres of decision making can limit the voices of women in policy making. An Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) 2016 survey of its members illustrated the significant pressures placed on local councillors and highlighted in part the difficulties facing women county councillors in particular. It found that for rural-based women with care duties, additional burdens included the lack of proximity to council and constituent meetings. The introduction of a candidate selection quota for local elections is necessary, alongside a targeted geographical strategy to address representation across all constituencies.

Women and Community Development

Local women's organisations have been consistently working to highlight the barriers women in rural communities' experience; they enable women to participate in education and training, employment, leadership roles through providing crucial supports such as childcare, mentoring; they provide locally based advice and counselling, they are access points for higher education and training; they provide services for women experiencing domestic and sexual violence and support women to engage in public and political life.

Women's groups and networks provide a safe place for women experiencing different forms of social exclusion to come, to learn, to build links with other women that ultimately lead to

¹²⁰ <https://adriankavanaghelections.org/2019/09/02/city-and-county-council-members-co-options-and-changes-since-the-2019-local-elections/>

being part of a collective identity. Women's groups and networks are managed by members and are thus driven by 'bottom-up' agendas. The participation of the women's networks in local decision and policy-making fora through such groups and networks is a true route to the participation of excluded women in decision-making. Family Resource Centres provide essential and universal services and supports in many rural communities and benefit many women and children.¹²¹

*'Voices that defend women's rights are significantly weakened and the considerable community, solidarity and development work carried out by women is no longer possible'*¹²²

Austerity and cutbacks over recent years have decimated community development projects, in particular those working with women.¹²³ We have lost the voices of marginalised women in local planning decisions and an opportunity to build healthy and vibrant communities that are informed by the experiences and expertise of all their residents. The community development sector has experienced significant cuts to funding, the prioritisation of labour market activation initiatives focused on individuals over collective social and economic development, and the replacement of grant-aided schemes with target-driven, centrally prescribed tendering processes in a new commissioning environment. We know from our many members working at community level that they are struggling and are increasingly unable to provide essential supports and advocacy for women in our communities. This lack of financial support is limiting women's development and engagement in civil society. This was noted by the CEDAW Committee in their Concluding observations in 2017;

*"The Committee urges the State party to take appropriate measures to restore funding for non-governmental organisations working in the field of women's rights to enable them to continue to contribute to the implementation of the Convention."*¹²⁴

The National Collective of Community Based Women's Network (NCCWN) is one legal national entity with 17 branches throughout the country supporting women through the provision of community education programmes and other initiatives. These 17 local NCCWN Women's Community Development Projects have 45 employees and 2 working at national level. While significant cuts to funding have impacted negatively on their capacity, the NCCWN Women's Projects continue to engage and work with marginalised women in

¹²¹ Finan, Eileen and Brady, Bernadine (2019) ""They Pulled Me Through the Darkest Times": Exploring the Social Benefits of a Women's Group in Rural Ireland," Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies: Vol. 19: Iss. 1, Article 2. Available at: <https://arrow.dit.ie/ijass/vol19/iss1/2>

¹²² Rory Hearne and Cian McMahon, eds, (2016) *Cherishing All Equally 2016: Economic Inequality in Ireland*, Dublin: TASC, p. 193, available: http://www.tasc.ie/download/pdf/tasc_inequalityreport_2016_web.pdf

¹²³ Brian Harvey (2012) *Downsizing the Community Sector: Changes in employment and services in the voluntary and community sector in Ireland, 2008-2012*

¹²⁴ CEDAW Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland 3 March 2017

disadvantaged communities to support their participation and ensure that their voices are heard.¹²⁵

Community development work can be challenging in a rural context due to lack of public transport, resources, lack of childcare et. Spatial distribution of problems and issues such as poverty and violence against women can render collective action difficult which is why properly resourced community work is essential. A different approach is required acknowledging the stigmatising possibilities of some interventions in a rural area, if all are invited to participate, it can allow the most well off, articulate and confident to dominate. Ireland's rural development plan needs to acknowledge the important role that community development and specifically the women's sector, women's groups and networks bring to rural life in increasing individuals' capacity to become involved in local decision making, community education and employment.

Women in rural communities in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) is a regional network established in 2006 to articulate the voice of women in rural areas. They have developed a manifesto based on research carried out with over 300 women on their views on themselves, their families and their communities.¹²⁶ The research presents the challenges for disadvantaged women living in rural communities including a historic underinvestment in rural communities, lack of infrastructure, post conflict legacy and the burden of caring responsibilities leaving more women at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In rural communities that have experienced conflict, women need to be included in peace and reconciliation bodies to secure a lasting resolution. Brexit is a huge cause for concern for women living in Northern Ireland and in the border counties.¹²⁷

NWC recommendations

Women's participation in public and political life

- Legislate for a quota system to be extended to local elections with an initial quota of 40% women's representation in the Local Elections 2024
- Set additional targets to improve diversity including a targeted geographical strategy to address all constituencies
- A comprehensive gender audit across all local, community and rural decision-making structures

¹²⁵ Brian Harvey (2012) Downsizing the Community Sector: Changes in employment and services in the voluntary and community sector in Ireland, 2008-2012

¹²⁶ <http://www.nirwn.org/policy/rural-womens-manifesto/>

¹²⁷ <https://www.rte.ie/eile/brainstorm/2019/0219/1031486-brexits-worrying-effect-on-women-in-northern-ireland/>

- Support and resource the women’s community sector to advance equality for the most disadvantaged women in rural Ireland. This means effective and sustainable projects advocating for women’s equality and building leadership. The value of community development in rural areas needs to be reaffirmed through increased investment and prioritisation.
- Ensure all supports and services being developed are delivered in rural areas and take cognisance of the added difficulty of supporting disadvantage in rural areas

Using frameworks to promote equality and social justice

Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

In 1979 the Irish Government signed up to the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to commit Ireland to take action towards eliminating discrimination against women in all areas of our society. The following are the concluding observations from the reporting mechanism in 2017.

The Committee welcomed the adoption of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and notes that a new Action Plan for Rural Ireland, which seeks to advance economic and social progress in rural areas, is being developed. However, the Committee was concerned at the lack of information on specific measures being taken to address the barriers that rural women face in agriculture and land ownership. The Committee is also concerned at reports that rural women face difficulties in accessing social services including access to public transport, childcare, health services, employment, education and training.

“The Committee recommends the State Party to ensure the integration of a gender perspective in the new Action Plan for Rural Ireland currently being developed and to provide information in its next periodic report on the overall situation of rural women highlighting the impact of the measures taken to improve on rural women’s land ownership and participation in agriculture as well as access to social services including public transport childcare, health services, employment, education and training.”¹²⁸

Public Sector Duty

Public bodies need to take into account and make explicit in their communications and direction the legislative implications arising from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 which confers a positive duty to have regard to, in the performance of their functions, the need to ‘(a) eliminate discrimination, (b) promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and (c) protect the

¹²⁸ CEDAW Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland 3 March 2017

human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services'.¹²⁹ Public bodies are now required in their annual reports to report on related 'achievements and developments' pertaining to, for example, State obligations to prioritise the most marginalised and vulnerable in society and to ensure that women enjoy equality with men in political and public life. This positive duty is referenced in the NSWG action 6.1; "All Public Bodies will assess and identify and human rights of women and girls and the gender equality issues that are relevant to their functions and address these in their strategic planning, policies and practices and annual reports".

Sustainable Development Goals

On 1 January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit — officially came into force. Over the next fifteen years, with these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.¹³⁰ The 2030 Agenda has opted to include both a stand-alone goal on gender (SDG 5) and to integrate a gender perspective into many of the 17 goals.¹³¹ The goals on poverty, health, including universal access to reproductive health, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, decent work and inequalities are also of critical significance to women and girls. This provides a useful framework for measuring progress for sustainable development in rural communities.¹³² The Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment has lead responsibility for promoting and overseeing national implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs. This will be a whole-of-government initiative and involve establishing a robust SDG implementation and reporting framework.¹³³ We welcome that the commitments in our rural future are linked to the SDGs.

¹²⁹ <https://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty/>

¹³⁰ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

¹³¹ <https://www.uclg.org/en/issues/gender-equality>

¹³² Social Justice Ireland 2018 Measuring Progress: Economy, Society and Environment in Ireland, Prof. Charles M.A. Clark, St. John's University, New York Catherine Kavanagh, University College Cork Niamh Lenihan, University College Cork

¹³³ <https://irelandsdg.geohive.ie/>