

## Programme for Government National Women's Council Recommendations December 2024

Women's rights and advancing gender equality must be central to the new Programme for Government. Women and girls continue to face significant social and economic inequalities, with marginalised women facing additional challenges. Women are facing a housing and homelessness crisis, a cost-of-living crisis, a public services crisis in terms of access to essential services like childcare, health and social care – and the ongoing effects of the climate and biodiversity emergency. There is an epidemic of violence against women, and a growth in far-right violence and hate, with a deeply anti-women sentiment. This Programme for Government will shape the next five years and must pave the way for real gender equality, underpinned by genuine policy commitments. The incoming Government must commit to tackling the widespread systemic gender inequalities we face and fully address the needs of all women and girls in our society. Only with vision, real ambition, and a commitment to gender equality can we achieve the Ireland we all want to see.

### Deliver Public Childcare

Both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael committed to a significant reform of childcare in their manifestos, with FF outlining its commitment to 'ramping up state led provision' and FG promising €340m to deliver 30,000 public spaces in early learning and school aged care services by 2030. Both parties are aligned on capping fees for families at €200 per month for each child. In order for these promises to be delivered for families, educators and providers, the next Programme for Government must commit to a transition to a new public, not for profit, system of early childhood education and care akin to our primary school system.

### The next Programme for Government should commit to:

- Establish an Implementation Group to address affordability, access, and conditions for educators, guaranteeing ECEC and school-age childcare through legislation from the age families need it
- Invest in a publicly-delivered ECEC system, with 30,000 new places by 2030, capping fees at €200 per month and providing additional supports for low-income families
- Guarantee fair pay and conditions for early years educators, aligned with their qualifications and experience
- Strengthen family leave by increasing payments, introducing a percentage-of-earnings model, converting unpaid leave to paid, and ensuring equal entitlements for lone parents

## Deliver Care Services and Supports

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have pledged to enhance services and supports for disabled and older people, including the introduction of a statutory homecare scheme, new day centres and Meals on Wheels services, investment in the Enhanced Community Care Programme, housing adaptation grants, personal assistance, and respite services. To address the care crisis, the Programme for Government must deliver universal, rights-based, person-centred health and social care that promotes individual independence, autonomy, and dignity.

### The next Programme for Government should commit to:

- Fully realise the UNCRPD to ensure active equal participation of all disabled people in all aspects of society
- Legislate for a national Personal Assistance Service, expand personalised budgets and hours, align supports with independent living and employment, and resource DPOs to drive change
- Provide housing options for disabled and older people which promote choice and independent living through universal design, ageing-in-place supports, and right-sizing options, underpinned by gender impact assessments
- Introduce a rights-based home support scheme with regulated providers, a fully established National Home Support Office, full interRAI implementation, appropriate pay and funding, and a gender-sensitive delivery model
- Publish and implement reports of the Commission on Care for Older People, with a gender impact analysis to meet older women's specific needs in health and social care
- Invest in Enhanced Community Care, Community Health Networks, and social care supports, including day services and Meals on Wheels, under a rights-based framework

## Eliminate Poverty

Both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael's manifestos include welcome commitments to targeted changes in the social protection system. However, these must be accompanied by significant structural reforms to ensure care is adequately valued, recognised, and supported, alongside tailored measures for marginalised groups such as disabled women, migrant women, lone parents, and Traveller and Roma women. The new Programme for Government must prioritise secure, permanent increases to social protection payments, moving away from once-off measures and income tax cuts that weaken our tax base. This approach is essential to guarantee all women the income needed for a minimum essential standard of living, now and into the future.

### The next Programme for Government should commit to:

- Benchmark all social protection payments, disregards, and thresholds, ensuring that they increase with wage growth and inflation, and that they are set at a Minimum Essential Standard of Living that ensures an adequate income for all

- Examine the introduction of a Participation Income (PI) model which recognises meaningful social contributions such as care and support, voluntary and community work and includes a robust gender analysis and impact assessment
- Move towards implementing a Universal State Pension for all, benchmarked at a level that provides an adequate income, and funded by ending or standard rating a range of existing tax reliefs on private and occupational pensions
- Fully individualise the social protection system so that women are treated as individuals, rather than dependents of their partner
- Tackle gender inequalities in paid employment by strengthening the Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021, implementing targeted measures to close the gender pay gap, and legislating for enhanced collective bargaining, particularly in sectors with high female employment

## Provide Housing and Accommodation

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have outlined plans to address Ireland's housing crisis, including delivering 300,000 new homes by 2030, expanding social housing to 12,000 social housing units annually, preventing homelessness, and increasing housing adaptation grants. Fine Gael also commits to improving housing options for older people and expanding access to housing for Travellers. To effectively tackle the crisis, it is essential that the next Programme for Government address women's unique housing needs and experiences in all their diversity. This requires gender impact assessments of all housing policies, budgets, and services, alongside targeted measures for marginalised groups of women.

### The next Programme for Government should commit to:

- Develop housing policy, budgets and services that are gender-proofed and deliver secure, affordable, long-term housing and accommodation options for all women and girls
- Implement the recommendations of the Housing Commission Report 2024, including the construction of at least an additional 250,000 homes over the next five years, equating to 50,000 new homes annually
- Increase investment and supply in state-led housing towards an ownership target of at least 20% of total housing by Approved Housing Bodies and Local Authorities
- Strengthen tenant rights with a rent freeze, stricter rent controls, an eviction ban, increased inspections, expanded Residential Tenancies Board powers (to address sexual harassment), legislating against "sex for rent," and extended Residential Tenancy Act coverage for licensees
- Provide targeted housing supports for marginalised women by resourcing key strategies, (e.g., Traveller and Roma Inclusion, Housing for Disabled People), investing in housing options for older women, ensuring secure housing for DSGBV survivors and women leaving prison, and tackling family homelessness with a dedicated action plan

## Transform Women's Health

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael commit to advancing women's health through establishing a Mother and Baby Mental Health Unit, expanding perinatal mental health midwifery posts, in addition to state-funded IVF and free contraception, and improved services for gynaecology, endometriosis, and menopause. Fine Gael's pledge to guarantee full abortion services in all maternity hospitals is welcome, but the Programme for Government must go further by fully implementing the Independent Review on Abortion to ensure direct, local access for all who need care. Achieving these goals within a universal healthcare system is essential to ensure equitable access, especially for marginalised women and girls.

### The next Programme for Government should commit to:

- Guarantee universal healthcare for all women and girls by committing 10% of the annual health budget to roll out Sláintecare, expanding GP visit cards, extending chronic disease management, and developing patient-centred primary and community care
- Fully implement the Women's Health Action Plan, expanding IVF, menopause, free contraception and gynaecology services, with targeted measures to address the needs of marginalised women and girls
- Fully implement the Independent Review on Abortion to ensure safe, local, legal access for all, removing barriers like decriminalisation, the mandatory 3-day wait, and limited coverage across communities, in line with international best practice and lived experiences
- Deliver gender-sensitive mental health services in line with *Sharing the Vision* by increasing mental health funding to 10% of the health budget and reinstating national mental health leadership in the HSE
- Fast-track the Mother and Baby Unit for severe and complex perinatal mental health inpatient care, with broader investment in the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Model of Care to strengthen community, primary, and specialist services

## End Violence Against Women

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have reaffirmed their commitment to a zero-tolerance approach to domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence (DSGBV), with Fine Gael pledging the full implementation of the Zero Tolerance Plan 2022–2026 and Fianna Fáil advancing critical legislative priorities such as criminalising 'sex for rent.' Both parties recognise the need to increase refuge spaces, reform the courts system to prioritise victim-survivor needs, and introduce measures such as a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme. The Zero Tolerance Strategy and the establishment of the DSGBV agency, Cuan, provide a strong foundation to tackle gender-based violence, but full implementation and resourcing are essential to eliminate violence against women in all its forms.

### The next Programme for Government should commit to:

- Allocate secure, multi-annual funding to Cuan to deliver its own functions and ensure it can effectively allocate resources to vital frontline DSGBV services, research, and advocacy
- Combat misogyny and online violence by fully resourcing the TNS prevention pillar, enacting hate crime and incitement to hatred legislation, implementing an Action Plan Against Hate, and strengthening protections against technology-facilitated gender-based violence
- Embed a survivor-centred approach throughout the justice system through increased judicial capacity, improved coordination across the relevant courts, enhanced court and non-court supports for DSGBV survivors, and reforms to the in-camera rule to better protect women
- Deliver 500 domestic violence refuge spaces in line with Council of Europe guidelines, ensuring availability in every community, and implement targeted measures to secure safe stable housing across all housing types for DSGBV survivors
- Ensure truth-telling, accountability, and redress for all survivors of institutional abuse through independent survivor centred investigations, rights-based redress schemes, and a national compensation scheme that fulfils international legal obligations and addresses survivors' needs

### Put People and Planet First - Feminist Climate Justice

The next five years will be absolutely vital for climate action, and the new Programme for Government must drastically increase the ambition and investment shown in the last government towards climate action, recognising the gendered impacts of the climate crisis. Both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael's manifestos recognise the importance of climate action – however, the Programme for Government must explicitly recommit to our obligations under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, and our international obligations under the Paris Agreement. It must include a wide range of measures and a clear roadmap of how we hit our targets – not just on emissions reductions, but on nature and biodiversity restoration, and on ensuring a just transition for everyone, nationally and globally.

### The next Programme for Government should commit to:

- Meet our obligations under the Climate Action Amendment Act to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by at least 51% of 2018 levels by 2030, and reach net-zero emissions by 2050
- Significantly increase targeted investment in retrofitting schemes and measures, prioritising marginalised groups and those affected by energy poverty, and develop research to analyse the gendered effects of energy poverty

- Prioritise and increase investment in public and active travel infrastructure, focusing on rural transport, making transport safer and more accessible, and on reducing the cost of public transport for people who struggle to access it
- Extend and expand the Community Climate Action Programme to empower local communities through capacity-building and community development, driving systemic change in climate justice, with a specific focus on integrating a gender dimension
- The long-overdue Just Transition Commission must be well-resourced, centre the voices of women and marginalised communities, and include and value care work, which is inherently low-carbon and key to our just transition

## Advance Women's Leadership and Participation

Despite being over half of Ireland's population, women remain underrepresented in Irish politics. The new Programme for Government must include practical supports, alongside measures like gender quotas at a local level, to increase women's representation at all levels of politics. The women's sector in Ireland has been the key driver in highlighting and addressing issues of isolation, economic dependency, poverty, violence, and powerlessness among women in all their diversity, and funding for women's and community organisations across the island must be strengthened to continue and expand this work.

### The next Programme for Government should commit to:

- Legislate to introduce gender quotas for local elections and ensure women make up at least 40% of Cabinet Ministers, at least 40% of Junior Ministers, and at least 40% of Dáil Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs
- Reform and increase supports for elected representatives, including maternity and family leave provision, and by allowing childcare/care and support costs as an expenditure category for Councillors
- Increase funding, including multi-annual state funding, to properly resource women's community organisations, and the broader community sector, to promote inclusivity, solidarity and diversity
- Develop all-island strategies to advance women's rights and gender equality and support/resource the community and voluntary sector to promote the full equality for women on an All-Island basis
- Ringfence specific funding in future Shared Island programmes in the form of a 'Women's Fund' for women's organisations working in the areas of peacebuilding, reconciliation, and North/South-cooperation on the island



## **About Us**

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) are the leading national representative organisation for women and women's groups in Ireland, founded in 1973. With nearly 200 members, the ambition of the National Women's Council is an Ireland where every woman enjoys true equality and no woman is left behind.

For further information and/or to discuss any of the above content please contact Kate Mitchell, Head of Development and Policy, NWC at [katem@nwci.ie](mailto:katem@nwci.ie) or at 085 858 5209.