

19th February 2025

National Women's Council

A Feminist
Analysis of the
Programme for
Government 2025

*What does the new
Programme for
Government mean for
women & gender equality?*

A Feminist Analysis of the Programme for Government 2025–2029

The new Programme for Government,¹ called “Securing Ireland’s Future”, agreed by Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Independents in January 2025, sets out a map for this Government’s actions over the next five years, with a commitment for five budgets ending in late 2029. The next five years are vital for Government to take action to meet our international and domestic climate and environment commitments under the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals, to tackle the crises in health, housing, violence against women, childcare and education, and to narrow wealth, income and access to public services gaps which affect women and everyone in Ireland today.

Gender inequalities impact women right across our society. Women in 2025 are faced with the lingering impacts of austerity compounded by the recent cost-of-living crisis; a housing, accommodation and homelessness crisis that has affected the entire country; and weak public services that have left our state infrastructure in poorer health than our wealth as a state would imply. Women are experiencing epidemic levels of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Nationally and globally we face a worsening climate and biodiversity emergency. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted and marginalised groups of women are particularly impacted by these inequalities and crises, including lone parents, migrant women, disabled women, older women, and Traveller and Roma women.

At the same time, the resources of the state are significant and provide opportunities to address these wide-ranging challenges and allow for increased investment and a more progressive taxation system to build a more equal and inclusive society.

Welcome commitments for women and gender equality

There are very welcome commitments in the Programme for Government for women and gender equality. A commitment to develop state-led early childhood education and care facilities is a step towards a public system; there are welcome commitments in tackling violence against women including full implementation of the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence and full resourcing of Cuan; commitments for women’s health; a commitment to advance gender budgeting and a commitment to a new National Strategy for Women and Girls. If all of the positive measures to support women in this Programme are implemented, it will bring us one step further in the advancement of women’s rights and gender equality.

Areas of concern for women and gender equality

There are areas of significant concern and a lack of commitment to necessary structural reform – including on reproductive rights, climate and environment, equality and inclusion, and social protection and pension reform. In a number of areas there are welcome long-term commitments – such as the implementation of Sláintecare, meeting our 2030 climate goals, a “step change” for supports and services for disabled people, and a “radical step change” in housing supply – but the individual and concrete commitments in each of these sections will not realise these ambitious statements. There are no clear roadmaps for change in areas where they are desperately needed for women and society, and no clear indication that supporting women and gender equality will be a central focus of the Government’s work.

¹ Government of Ireland (2025) [Programme for Government: Securing Ireland’s Future](#)

What are the Government's priorities?

The Programme for Government gives a strong indication of overarching Government priorities – and contains tangible and measurable commitments. However in many areas the commitments are vague and unclear, and much will depend on how the new Government Ministers approach the implementation over the next 5 years, interpreted through the lens of the Programme's overarching priorities.

The Programme for Government is set out into 11 substantive sections: *Growing Our Economy; Delivery and Reform; Accelerating Housing Supply; Protecting Our Environment; Investing in our Future; A Caring Society; Thriving Communities; Safe and Secure Communities; Enriching Our Society and Culture; Ireland's place in the world; Political Reform; Functioning of Government.*

What is immediately apparent from this list is that Growing Our Economy – a section which includes Enterprise and Employment, Public Finances, Tourism, Agriculture and Food, and Fisheries and the Marine – is the priority, coming ahead of sections dedicated to social infrastructure such as care and support, housing supply, and climate and environmental action. By contrast, the 2020 Programme for Government had "A Better Quality of Life for All" as its first substantive mission; though "Reigniting and Renewing the Economy" came second.

As a statement of priority and intent for the new Government this is concerning. This is not because the need to ensure stable and effective public finances is not important, but rather because of the missed opportunity where the new Government could have laid down a marker about the kind of Ireland they want to build – one which focuses on care and support, public service provision, gender and social equality, and real and radical action on climate and environment.

A vision for a gender-equal, sustainable Ireland

A vision for a gender-equal and sustainable Ireland is critically necessary to guide our development over the next five years. The Programme for Government lacks the ambition and does not go far enough in setting out the structural change necessary to tackle the extent of gender inequality in our society. While the new National Strategy for Women and Girls provides an opportunity for a broader framework to tackle gender inequality, this must be done in a Whole-of-Government way.

Given the urgency of tackling the climate and biodiversity crises, it is very worrying to see a lack of central focus in the Programme for Government on just and inclusive climate and environmental action. There is an imperative to meet our climate goals, and while the Programme contains a commitment to meet our 2030 goals the building blocks for how that will be achieved are not there – in tackling energy poverty, investing in public and active transport, and restoring nature and biodiversity. A distinct focus on the gendered impacts of the climate crisis is missing. The Programme's for Government's lack of focus on tackling social and environmental inequalities is worrying, and the commitment to further cut personal income taxes without commitments to remove regressive tax reliefs – such as fossil fuel subsidies and private pension tax relief – may further narrow the tax base in a way that exacerbates existing inequalities faced by women, and marginalised women in particular.

There is an enormous body of work facing the incoming government, and this Programme for Government will not be judged on its words – but on its implementation. If all of the measures to support women in this Programme are made reality, we will have advanced towards gender equality. There is a long way to go and we need ambitious and visionary leadership and a willingness for real structural change that goes beyond what is laid out in the text of this Programme for Government.

Violence Against Women

There are significant positive elements in the Programme for Government in relation to tackling violence against women, particularly the declaration that: 'Tackling the epidemic of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence will remain a major priority for the Government. We will invest in new refuge spaces, updating the school curriculum, rolling-out training and making the criminal justice system more victim centred, in particular our Courts system.' The implementation of these commitments will be key. The new Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration must prioritise tackling DSGBV, and ensure that all commitments are fully implemented.

Key Programme for Government commitments (p. 120–121)²

- **Fully implement the Zero Tolerance Plan 2022–26, develop a new plan for 2026–30**
- **Continue to support and fully resource Cuan**
- **Deliver at least 280 refuge spaces by 2026; set new targets in successor strategy and ensure a refuge in every county along with additional safe homes for those in need**
- **Criminalise those who seek sex in exchange for rent**
- **More victim-survivor centred justice system:**
 - **Amendment of laws on counselling notes disclosure**
 - **Examine proposals to remove guardianship rights from those convicted of killing their partners or a parent of their child**
 - **Establish specialised judges to handle DSGBV cases**
 - **Invest in training for Gardaí and the DPP to better support victims**
 - **Undertake an audit of our courthouses and facilities to assess their suitability for victims of DSGBV**
- **Implement Human Trafficking Action Plan to identify + safeguard victims of human trafficking effectively through introduction of new National Referral Mechanism**

Impact for women and gender equality

Third National Strategy on DSGBV and Cuan

The Programme for Government commits to the full implementation of the *Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence* (DSGBV), as well as the full resourcing of Cuan, the statutory agency dedicated to tackling DSGBV. These are welcome commitments that need urgent implementation, as despite policy and legislative progress, violence against women is at epidemic levels. In 2023, Women's Aid saw the highest disclosures of domestic violence ever recorded by the organisation in 50 years.³ In the same year, the Gardaí received a domestic abuse call every 10 minutes⁴ and according to the Sexual Violence Survey published by the Central Statistics Office in 2023, 52% of women will experience sexual violence in their lifetime.⁵

Real and effective implementation of these commitments will be key. In particular, the provision of sustainable, multi-annual, funding for frontline services is vital. While there is not a specific commitment to this in the Programme for Government, the full implementation of the *Third National*

² The Key Programme for Government commitments at the beginning of each section are not, but rather highlight key relevant aspects for this analysis. They are also not all verbatim from the Programme, and are edited where necessary for space and relevance.

³ Women's Aid. (2024). [Annual impact report 2023](#).

⁴ McDonagh, D. (2024, February 9). [Gardaí received a domestic abuse call every 10 minutes last year](#). *Irish Mirror*.

⁵ Central Statistics Office (2023) [Sexual violence survey: Disclosure of experiences key findings](#).

Strategy and the resourcing of Cuan can ensure the provision of the necessary supports specialist services for victims-survivors. The report of the Observatory on VAWG report on the Zero Tolerance Strategy (chaired by NWC) have reported serious concerns regarding the uncertain and short-term nature of funds allocated to combat DSGBV.⁶ Given that organisations provide services to highly vulnerable, hard to reach, minoritised women, funding shortages have a particularly consequential impact on communities that experience intersectional forms of violence. The potential is there in the Programme for Government – now it's up to the Government to make it a reality. Furthermore, while the *Third National Strategy* includes a dedicated pillar on prevention, the Programme for Government does not explicitly reference it. A clear and comprehensive government commitment to prevention is essential to addressing the root causes of DSGBV, as without this we will never achieve meaningful progress in tackling violence against women and girls in all its forms.

Victim-survivor centred justice system reform

There are welcome commitments in the Programme which relate to victim-survivor centred justice system reform. Building on commitments to prioritise victim-survivors' voices in the justice system, a stronger focus on DSGBV is essential to fully integrating their experiences across legal processes. NWC, in partnership with the Department of Justice, published research on the intersection of the criminal justice, private family law, and public law childcare systems in cases of domestic and sexual violence.⁷ It found that many victim-survivors must navigate three separate legal systems simultaneously, causing significant trauma and revictimisation. Delivering on Programme commitments requires implementing the report's recommendations to improve collaboration across legal processes and embed victim-survivors' experiences in the justice system.

Commitment to criminalise 'sex for rent'

Following the publication of an NWC report on sexual exploitation and harassment in the rental housing market last year,⁸ we called for the criminalisation of 'sex for rent' as a specific named offence – it is very welcome that the Programme for Government commits to acting on this call. It is also very positive that by including this commitment in the section on Zero Tolerance to DSGBV, the Government recognise the practice as a form of violence against women. 'Sex for rent' exploitation is damaging, degrading, and dehumanising for women. NWC research shows that it is marginalised women who are impacted the most, including women experiencing homelessness, migrant women and international protection applicants and women fleeing domestic violence.

What should Government do next?

The new Government must take decisive action to criminalise those who seek sex in exchange for rent by explicitly outlawing 'sex for rent' arrangements and extending tenancy protections to all renters. Additionally, ensuring access to secure, long-term housing for all victim-survivors of DSGBV through targeted measures and supports will be critical.

In the context of the epidemic levels of violence against women, comprehensive and well-resourced programmes to prevent this violence from happening will be key. Full and effective implementation of the *Third National Strategy* is vital, as it recognises that only through a society-wide effort that we will achieve real change. This includes tackling the negative influence of pornography, challenges with implementation of the new SPHE curriculum, and ensuring online safety for women and girls. The new government focus on addressing online violence against children, but it must also create a safer and more secure digital environment for women and girls and hold perpetrators of TFGBV and the private sector to account.

⁶ Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women (2023) [Monitoring Report on Zero Tolerance](#)

⁷ Egan, N. and O'Malley Dunlop, E. (2023) [A Report on the Intersection of the Criminal Justice, Private Family Law and Public Law Childcare Processes in Relation to Domestic and Sexual Violence](#) Department of Justice and the National Women's Council

⁸ NWC (2024) ['Sex for Rent' An NWC Report on Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment in the Rental Housing Market](#)

Health

The Programme for Government includes welcome individual commitments in the area of Women's Health: a dedicated section on perinatal mental health and a commitment to the establishment of the long-awaited Mother & Baby Unit; positive expansions across publicly-funded fertility services, menopause supports, contraception, and gynaecological care. However, there are significant omissions: there is no reference to the Women's Health Action Plan and while there is a commitment to the full implementation of *Sharing the Vision*, there is no mention of a focus on gender sensitivity. There is also no commitment to implement the Independent Abortion Review, which in our view, will result in more women travelling abroad for care, adding to the already stark figure of more than 1,000 women travelling since the Repeal referendum.⁹

Key Programme for Government commitments (pp. 84–88)

- **Ongoing implementation of Sláintecare**
- **Expand free GP services to children up to at least 12 years**
- **Seek to further increase medical card income limits**
- **Examine possibility of expanding Structured Chronic Disease Management Programme to include more conditions and seek to provide access to more adults**
- **Ensure that all maternity hospitals provide equitable access to termination of pregnancy services**
- **Provide a comprehensive women's health programme in general practice including advice on contraception, sexually transmitted infections, screening, fertility and pre-conception and support for women experiencing menopause**
- **Deliver the first in-patient Mother and Baby Mental Health Unit**
- **Prioritise culturally appropriate mental health supports for Traveller and other minority communities**
- **Dedicated sections on *Women's Health* and on *Perinatal mental healthcare***

Impact for women and gender equality

Universal Healthcare/Sláintecare

Although there is a commitment to the "ongoing implementation of Sláintecare", there is no clear roadmap for the transformation of our health system to a universal public service that guarantees healthcare for all women and girls. This is critical in the context of the disproportionate impact of many chronic health conditions on women – including reproductive health issues like endometriosis and autoimmune diseases like lupus. In fact, more than 70% of chronic pain sufferers are women.¹⁰ There is also an absence of targeted commitments to address the significant structural and health inequalities experienced by women and girls – including Traveller women, disabled women, migrant women, and Roma women.

Abortion

The Programme for Government is particularly disappointing in its lack of commitment to implement the Independent Abortion Review. The commitment in the Programme for Government

⁹ The Journal.ie (2025) [Your Stories: Have you had to travel abroad to access abortion services?](#)

¹⁰ Campbell, P (2003) [Relieving endometriosis pain: why is it so tough?](#) *Obstetrics and Gynecology Clinics of North America* 30(1) pp. 209-20

that all maternity hospitals provide equitable access to termination of pregnancy services does not go far enough, as this will only address one part of one recommendation from the Independent Review. As +95% of abortions take place in GP services, the real issue with respect to access is at a primary care level. This is why – in addition to decriminalisation and removing the mandatory 3-day wait – NWC has also recommended that the HSE recruit for a Primary Care Lead for Termination of Pregnancy to address gaps in training, guidance, and data collection for early medical abortions.

Women’s Health Action Plan

There is no specific reference in the Programme for Government of the Women’s Health Action Plan (WHAP). However, the Programme commits to individual measures which are contained within the WHAP, including positive expansions across publicly funded fertility services, including the establishment of the first public AHR treatment centre, menopause supports, contraception, and gynaecological care. There are further commitments within the Programme to increasing the existing network of specialist menopause clinics and to developing a Model of Care for the menopause. With respect to Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) for women experiencing symptoms of the menopause, it notes that free HRT will be provided at no cost for the drug/product, but the lack of reference to primary care costs will likely mean that women will have to continue paying for their GP visits. The inclusion of an expansion of the Free Contraception Scheme is also welcome. However, overall within these commitments there is a distinct lack of focus on meeting the particular health needs of marginalised groups of women. It would have been preferable to see the inclusion of an overall commitment to the WHAP. While we recognise that core elements of the plan are included we hope that the new Minister will continue to develop the Plan as the framework to address women’s health.

Mental Health and Perinatal Mental Health

The inclusion of a dedicated section on perinatal mental health and a commitment to the Mother & Baby Unit are both very welcome and vitally important, with one in five women encountering a mental health difficulty during the perinatal period.¹¹ The Programme for Government commits to the full implementation of Sharing the Vision, but with no focus on gender-sensitivity. It notes a need to enhance provision for adult and youth in-patient beds for eating disorders geographically, and it does reference the need for culturally appropriate mental health supports for Traveller and other minority communities – both of which are welcome. However, while more beds are welcome, ultimately the priority must be on ensuring care needs are met within the community, where possible, requiring enhanced investment in services at all levels of the system.

What should Government do next?

This Government has an opportunity to significantly close the gaps in women’s health inequalities, starting with a clear roadmap for the full implementation of Sláintecare to ensure a truly universal healthcare system. It must also act on the recommendations of the Independent Abortion Review, prioritising measures like decriminalisation and removing the mandatory three-day wait. Additionally, the positive legacy of the Women’s Health Action Plans can be continued by fully integrating policy commitments with respect to reproductive, gynaecological, and menopause care into high-quality health services and initiatives. Crucially, the government must recognise that women’s health is inextricably linked to broader social determinants like housing, poverty, education, and employment. Tackling health inequalities requires whole-of-government responses, alongside targeted measures to address the structural disadvantages faced by disabled women, Traveller women, migrant women, and Roma women.

¹¹ NWC (2024) [Perinatal Mental Health: Listening to Women and Shaping the Road Ahead](#)

Early Childhood Education and Care

Lack of accessible and affordable early childhood education and care (ECEC) is the single biggest barrier to women's equal participation in society. Although the last Government more than doubled the state investment in the sector, significant issues of affordability and access remain for many families with fees in Ireland among the highest in Europe,¹² while educators continue to be underpaid and many providers are struggling. The new Programme for Government has welcome commitments to reducing fees, and to beginning the development of public supply – however, it does not go far enough in supporting educators. In order to fully realise the objectives contained in the Programme of affordability and accessibility structural reform is necessary that moves to a public system of ECEC, and through direct delivery by the state of ECEC services.

Key Programme for Government commitments (pp. 62–63)

- **Undertake a broad consultation and publish a detailed Action Plan to build an affordable, high-quality, accessible early childhood education and care system with State-led facilities adding capacity**
- **Progressively reduce childcare costs to €200 per month per child through the National Childcare Scheme (NCS)**
- **Increase core funding, maintaining the fee cap and ensuring transparency, while reducing administrative burden on providers**
- **Develop Forward Planning and Delivery Unit in the Dept., identifying need, demand and deliver public supply; public investment for state-owned facilities**
- **Continue to implement Employment Regulation Orders**
- **Introduce “Earn and Learn” apprenticeship model**
- **Explore extra hour of ECCE per day in second year of pre-school, and examine ECCE eligibility criteria**
- **Introduce Pay Related Parents Benefit and explore other payments where a similar model could be applied**

Impact for women and gender equality

Action Plan must be focused on delivery of a public system of ECEC

The inclusion of a reference to “state-led” early childhood education and care in this Programme for Government has the potential to be game-changing for women in Ireland. We welcome the reference to greater state involvement in the sector, as well as the introduction of state-led capacity – and credit the campaign of NWC and the Together for Public Alliance¹³ in this achievement. The Together for Public Alliance, led by the NWC and comprised of more than 40 member organisations including women's and men's groups, children's rights groups, academics, trade unions, and equality and human rights groups campaigning for a public system of ECEC. The commitment to “undertake a broad consultation and publish a detailed Action Plan” must be focused on delivery of a public system, and be a priority within the first 100 days of the Government. This consultation and

¹² Eurydice (European Education and Culture Executive Agency) (2025) [Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe 2025](#)

¹³ For more information about the Together for Public Alliance see the [page on the NWC website](#)

resulting Action Plan can provide a roadmap for the development of ECEC as a vital public service, essential for increasing women's engagement in all aspects of social, economic, political and cultural life. It is critical that the consultation includes the NWC and the Together for Public Alliance as key stakeholders in shaping the development of public ECEC in Ireland.

Public system is the only way to ensure affordability, access + inclusion

The only way we can achieve the kind of early childhood education and care system that the Programme for Government talks about – high-quality, affordable, accessible – is through a public system of ECEC which includes after-school and School Age Care and is integrated with other public services and supports. Structural change is needed, and the implementation of the commitments in the Programme for Government must be focused on moving towards a public system.

Over the last few years the state has invested hugely in state supports for the early years sector (doubling over the course of the last Government), but the same problems remain. More state investment isn't the only thing that's needed – the system needs to change.

The NCS and Core Funding models are clearly not working as they should, and it's crucial that the consultation reflects the need for reform of all subsidy funding streams in moving towards a public system. NCS, for instance, lacks flexibility, and Core Funding seems to favour larger chains while smaller providers are struggling to keep their services running.¹⁴ The Government must hit the ground running – these structural changes will take time, and the best time to start them is now.

Commitments to support educators not good enough

The lack of significant action to support educators in the Programme for Government is very disappointing. The commitment to continue relying on Employment Regulation Orders is insufficient – EROs are taking far too long to implement and are only just keeping pace with the minimum wage. This will further exacerbate the recruitment and retention crisis (and the lack of valuing of the work of a women-dominated sector), threatening progress in other areas. Wages in the sector need to be nationalised which is the best way forward if the state plans to run its own services.

The "earn and learn" scheme is a poor idea. There's no shortage of students pursuing early years degrees, but the issue is retention due to poor pay and conditions. Instead of the creation of an apprenticeship scheme, we need to focus on improving pay and conditions for all educators.

Welcome commitment to examine pay-related Parents Benefit

It is very welcome commitment to see a commitment on pay-related Parents Benefit. Payments in most OECD countries offer at least 50% of average earnings – with many offering 100%¹⁵ – while in Ireland less than a third of average earnings are replaced. It must be extended to maternity, paternity and other forms of benefit – and these leaves must be expanded, with a view to ensuring that women have access to adequately paid maternity leave for the first year of their child's life.

What should Government do next?

Within the first 100 days of Government, the Minister must clearly outline a timeline and scope for the Action Plan Consultation. This must be developed with urgency, focused on the development of a universal, accessible, inclusive public system of ECEC, with the NWC and the Together for Public Alliance as key stakeholders, and in a way that ensures that actions to begin the delivery of state-led facilities are ready for inclusion in Budget 2026.

¹⁴ Taft, M. (2025) [Negotiating Childcare](#)

¹⁵ OECD (2021) [OECD Family Database: F2.1. Parental Leave Systems](#)

Care, Support and Disability

There is no real commitment to structural change and investment in our social infrastructure as a central part of society in the Programme for Government. A significant change of focus is needed towards centring our social infrastructure within a new economic and social model – including a real social valuing of both paid and unpaid care and support work, and a recognition of the need for broader changes in every aspect of Government policy towards greater inclusion and the removal of barriers. The rights of disabled people must be central to commitments right across the entire Programme for Government, in line with UNCRPD, and not just in the context of service provision.

Key Programme for Government commitments (pp. 92–94, 100–102)

- **Providing a step change in supports and services required by disabled people**
- **Prioritise the publication and fund a new National Disability Strategy**
- **Work in partnership with disabled people and their representative organisations in co-designing improvements to services**
- **Consider the development of a multiannual approach for disability services, which will be linked to productivity, staff levels and the delivery of services**
- **Increase personal assistance hours, and increase Disability Home Support hours, and continue to support the rollout of personalised budgets nationally**
- **Expand the Travel Assistance Scheme, and ensure all public transport operators provide safe and accessible access for all passengers**
- **Introduce a permanent Annual Cost of Disability Support Payment with a view to incrementally increasing this payment**
- **Continue to significantly increase the income disregards for Carer’s Allowance with a view to phasing out the means test during the lifetime of the Government**
- **Examine the introduction of a Pay Related Carer’s Benefit for individuals who have to give up work suddenly in order to provide full-time care to a loved one**
- **Design a Statutory Homecare Scheme to allow people to stay in their own home for as long as possible**

Impact for women and gender equality

“Step change for disability” must be rights-based in line with UNCRPD

Commitment to “step change for disability” must mean more than just service provision, and include rights-based action on housing, accessible public services and tackling poverty and social exclusion, in line with UNCRPD. While support and services for disabled people is included as one of the 8 key points highlighted in the introduction of the Programme for Government, it is unclear exactly what this means – and whether it means more than just an increase in current service provision of supports. Clarity and specific detail are needed on commitments provided. Government should adopt a rights-based approach, centred on UNCRPD, which focuses on accessibility of and inclusion in public services, and on dismantling barriers faced by disabled people across all aspects of life, focused on disabled people’s autonomy and self-determination. The new National Disability

Strategy must have the committed-to Whole of Government approach, be fully resourced, and be integrated across all Departments.¹⁶

Removal of the Carer's Allowance means test is important step

The commitment to eliminate the means test for Carer's Allowance is an extremely welcome step forward in valuing the work done by carers, giving them a form of basic income. A clear timeline needs to be set out for this, and it needs to be done in conjunction with investment in other supports for carers. This is a vital measure for supporting women and the unpaid care and support work they do, as the vast majority of family carers are women.¹⁷

Care and support must be central part of state economic model

The Programme for Government does not signify a shift in the Government's approach to care and support as vital parts of our economic and social model. We need significant structural change in care and support services which centre the value of care and support as central to our social, economic and environmental model in the future – recognising care work as green work. Care and support work is 26 times greener than manufacturing jobs¹⁸, requiring no extraction of resources from the Earth. Despite this, care work continues to be poorly paid and gendered work, carried out largely by women and marginalised communities such as migrants. Care services and employment when properly resourced and valued could fulfil the double roles of advancing gender equality and helping meet climate change targets.¹⁹ Unfortunately, there is no evidence of this shift in the Programme for Government.

Not enough concrete measures for older women

There are positive practical measures in the Programme for Government for positive ageing at home and in the community. However, in some cases the language is weak and commitments are long overdue – for example, there is a commitment to “design” a statutory homecare/support scheme, while that scheme was already committed to be introduced (not just designed) within the lifetime of the last Government. There are nearly 6,000 people on waiting lists for home care hours.²⁰ Clarity and more substantive commitments are needed for older women, along with a commitment to a rights-based, person-centred, gender-sensitive approach to all aspects of Government policy that support independence, dignity, and equality for older women across the country, particularly marginalised groups of women. Ensuring the work of the Commission on Care for Older People centres this approach in their work will be essential.

What should Government do next?

The Government must recognise care and support services as vital parts of our social infrastructure, and that investment in a public system rather than dependence on the market to provide services is crucial. Universal home and community care and support services must be rights-based, person-centred and promote autonomy, independence and dignity of the individual. At the same time, any step change in disability must be much broader than just service provision, and must be centred on vindicating the rights of disabled people across all aspects of government policy.

¹⁶ Independent Living Movement Ireland (2025) [ILMI Review of Securing Ireland's Future](#)

¹⁷ <https://www.familycarers.ie/media/3549/family-carers-ireland-state-of-caring-2024.pdf>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Dukelow, F., Forde, C. and Busteed, E. (2024).

²⁰ [Statutory Home Care: Statements – Dáil Éireann \(33rd Dáil\) – Thursday, 27 Jun 2024 – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

Equality and Inclusion

There are positive commitments within the Programme for Government for advancing gender equality, including the commitment to publish and implement an updated National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG), to advance gender budgeting, and measures in relation to women's leadership and participation. However, there is no indication that gender equality will be a leading objective across the whole of Government – though the new NSWG provides potential for a broader framework to address equality for women beyond the commitments contained in the Programme.

Key Programme for Government commitments (pp. 97–99)

- **Publish and implement an updated National Strategy for Women and Girls**
- **Develop a way to advance gender budgeting**
- **Encourage mentorship opportunities in both public and private sectors, aimed at greater gender balance on company and state boards**
- **Advance education, training and maintenance of new digital skills and capacities, and particularly STEM subjects, with a special focus on girls**
- **Actively promote the inclusion of women and minorities in all political roles, fostering a more diverse political landscape**
- **Establish maternity/paternity/ adoptive leave policies for all elected representatives**
- **Support rollout of the Regional Women's Caucus Network across all local authorities**
- **Introduce amendments to modernise the Incitement to Hatred Act 1989 following engagement with the Joint Oireachtas Committee, in line with EU standards**
- **Implement the Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy**
- **Dedicated sections on *Empowering Women, LGBTQI+, Combat racism and discrimination and Support Traveller and Roma Communities***

Impact for women and gender equality

Embedding gender equality in government actions

The Programme for Government has a welcome recommitment to publish and implement a new National Strategy for Women and Girls as well as a commitment to advance gender budgeting. These are not entirely new commitments, but they are welcome to see reflected in the Programme. These commitments have the potential to reshape the work of all Government Departments in achieving equality for women. It is crucial to ensure effective coordination and integration of the forthcoming National Strategy for Women and Girls with all other strategic documents and plans. The issues faced by women do not occur in isolation, but are closely linked across a range of challenges, in housing, social protection, healthcare, violence against women, education, employment and social participation. This alignment is essential for embedding the objectives of the NSWG within the broader context of advancing women's rights and gender equality in an intersectional, cross-departmental, whole-of-society approach that coordinates and integrates all relevant policies, laws, and legislation. For example, gender-proofing of the Estimates and Budget process needs to be an integral part of how all Government Departments make their decisions – not just an after-the-fact analysis tool.

Women's leadership and no gender balance in Ministerial appointments

There are only six women amongst the record number of 23 Junior Ministers, following the decision to decrease the number of women in the Cabinet from 4 to 3 out of 15. This sends a concerning message about the Government's commitment to women's equality. Although we have the largest number of women Senators that we have ever had, with the 11-seat Taoiseach nominations, NWC campaigned to have more ethnic diverse women in the Oireachtas to represent the needs of our growing diverse population. It is therefore all the more important that the Government prioritises actions that will promote the participation and representation of women in all aspects of society, including leadership in politics. There is a welcome commitment to support the Regional Women's Caucus Network, but no commitment to implementation of gender quotas for local elections.

Broader focus needed on women in all aspects of society

Most of the Programme for Government's commitments specifically focused on gender equality (in the Equality and Inclusion section on "Empowering Women") are oriented around business and employment, highlighting tax credits and taxation reform as key measures. There are commitments to support women and girls in education and in particular in STEM, which is welcome. But overall, this focus is limited – by primarily focusing on women's equality in the context of the workplace, all other aspects and facets of women's engagement in social, cultural, political, economic, caring and community life are left out.

Incitement to Hatred Act reform

It is welcome to see the Government commit to reform of the Incitement to Hatred Act 1989. The Government must expedite the introduction of incitement to hatred legislation, complemented with the introduction of a dedicated Action Plan Against Hate to address hate crime and hate speech against women, including women from minority and marginalised groups. Government has a key role in stemming this rise in hatred by expediting hate crime and hate speech laws, and by obliging social media companies to enforce standards online.

What should Government do next?

NWC is of the view that there is an opportunity through the new National Strategy for Women and Girls to further develop and progress key actions on a range of issues relating to the advancement of women's and girls' rights. It is imperative, however, that any new strategy includes specific commitments with robust actions, indicators, timelines and identified bodies responsible for implementation. This must be complemented with appropriate resourcing and an effective and sustained monitoring mechanism, ensuring that women and women's groups are at the centre. There must be an intersectional focus to all aspects of the new Strategy and effective coordination across all equality strategies.

Given the government's commitment to supporting women in all their diversity in entering the political landscape, clear priorities and actions must be put in place to achieve this goal. Systematic barriers preventing women from entering and remaining in politics are well-documented, and these barriers must be removed to encourage more women to consider a political career – including the introduction of statutory gender quotas for local elections, making care costs eligible as election expenses, and ring-fencing funding for political parties to tackle the underrepresentation of women in membership, candidacy and retention, along with developing candidate selection processes that support a diverse range of women, including Traveller women, women from ethnic minorities, migrant women, and disabled women.

Housing, Homelessness and Accommodation

The housing, homelessness and accommodation crisis continues to have a devastating impact on women and families. Ireland has one of the highest rates of female homelessness in the EU,²¹ with 3,982 women homeless in December 2024.²² Marginalised women such as lone parents, migrant women, and older women are particularly negatively affected by the crisis. The publication of the Housing Commission's Report²³ last year has laid out starkly the accommodation deficit that faces our society – up to a quarter of a million homes; and recent news that last year's housing targets were missed by a significant margin is not good enough. Without a significant gear shift in the state-led building of homes over the next few years, this crisis will continue.

Key Programme for Government commitments (pp. 39-47)

- **Introduce a new, all of government national housing plan to follow Housing for All, underpinned by a multi-annual funding commitment**
- **Ramp up construction capacity to build over 300,000 new homes by the end of 2030 in line with the revised Housing Targets to meet both existing and future demands**
- **Continue to roll out social housing, building on average 12,000 new social homes per annum; build more cost-rental units through the LDA, local authorities and AHBs**
- **Reaffirm commitment to the Lisbon Declaration, and work towards ending homelessness by 2030**
- **Progressively increase the Rent Tax Credit, and continue the landlord tax credit**
- **Establishing Rent Price register, enhance enforcement powers of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), establish statutory timelines for dealing with complaints**

Impact for women and gender equality

No housing solutions for marginalised women

Housing is a huge crisis in Irish society, and its effects for women are devastating. Particular groups of marginalised women are affected by this crisis in different ways. Traveller and Roma women, disabled women, migrant women, older women, victim-survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, women leaving prison and lone parents all face significant barriers to accessing secure, affordable and safe housing. Domestic abuse is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children, yet there is no recognition of the need for long-term housing options for victim-survivors of DSGBV in the Programme for Government.²⁴ According to Safe Ireland, 180 women and 275 children seek emergency accommodation every month. In 2021 more than 3,000 requests for refuge could not be met by services.²⁵ 46% of Roma reported being homeless at some stage in their lives, while 39% of Travellers meet the European definition of homelessness compared

²¹ Bretheron, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) [Women's Homelessness \(European Evidence Review\)](#)

²² Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2025) [Homeless Report – December 2024](#)

²³ Housing Commission (2024) [Housing Commission Report](#)

²⁴ Hamill, S. (2023) [Social Housing, Domestic Violence and the Public Sector Duty](#) Mercy Law Resource Centre

²⁵ Safe Ireland (2021) [Women's Domestic Abuse Refuges: Submission to Oireachtas Justice Committee.](#)

to 6% of the general population²⁶ – yet there is no commitment to the provision of more Traveller and Roma accommodation in the Programme, only that Traveller accommodation funds should be fully drawn down. Migrant women face a range of barriers, with migrant women from outside the EU more likely to live in overcrowded housing and experience homelessness,²⁷ yet as outlined below there is little in the Programme for Government for private renters. 27% of people who are homeless have a disability²⁸ and older women are more likely to be living alone than men, and are more likely to live in low-quality housing.²⁹ Though there are some specific housing measures for disabled people and older people, evidence of the scale of change needed to provide secure, appropriate housing for all is not there. Ireland’s housing strategy remains over-reliant on the private sector to build homes and provide rented options. It’s vital that all housing policy, budgets and provision are gender-proofed and gender-sensitive, ensuring secure, affordable housing and accommodation options for all women and girls.

Weak in committing to ending homelessness

In December 2024, there were 3,982 women homeless in Ireland, and 4,510 children – while 57% of all families homeless were one-parent families.³⁰ One of the subsections in the Programme for Government is “Reduce homelessness and protect vulnerable households”, with a commitment to “work towards ending homelessness by 2030”. This is not good enough. A strong commitment to end homelessness and the necessary actions are lacking, and that is extremely disappointing.

Private renters left behind once again

There are no real extra protections for private renters. While the commitment to further developing cost-rental housing is welcome, many women will continue to live in private rental situations. The focus on tax credits for renters and landlords, and on renters becoming home buyers, instead of on strong, legally enforced protections for private renters is not good enough – with the exception of the welcome commitment to criminalise ‘sex for rent’ exploitation. Greater clarity and urgency are needed around the commitments to enhance the enforcement powers of the RTB.

What should Government do next?

Without significant action by the state, the housing, homelessness and accommodation crisis will continue, and will continue to impact women across the country. The state must dramatically increase its own provision of housing, focusing on social, affordable and cost-rental homes, and increase protections for renters. The new Government must also recognise and implement the solutions needed for marginalised women: such as the resourcing and implementation of the forthcoming National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (mentioned in the Programme for Government); full resourcing of the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People Implementation Plan and sufficient funding for all areas of disability housing policy; increased investment in housing supports for older people, including a range of housing aid grants and home support grants; resourcing an integrated gender-sensitive emergency accommodation response for victim-survivors fleeing violence; and reconvene the Family Homeless Prevention sub-group as part of the National Homeless Action Committee and develop a family homelessness action plan. Gender-sensitivity in housing law, policy and practice is vital. Coordination across government departments is needed to address the links between housing precarity and gender inequalities, particularly the different forms of violence against women.

²⁶ Pavee Point (2023) [List of Issues to UN CEDAW, September 2023](#)

²⁷ ESRI (2022) [The integration of non-EU migrant women in Ireland](#)

²⁸ ESRI (2018) [Discrimination and Inequality in Housing in Ireland](#)

²⁹ Age Action (2023) [Spotlight on Income in Older Age](#)

³⁰ Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2025) [Homeless Report – December 2024](#)

Climate and Environment

Real action on climate and environment is not prioritised within the Programme for Government to the degree that it should be given the immediacy of the climate and biodiversity crises facing Ireland and the world. In addition, the gendered aspects of these crises and the specific solutions needed for women are absent. While the Programme for Government re-commits the Government to the legally required 2030 targets, the climate and biodiversity crises are not identified as a key driver for policy change. Without effective, sustainable, inclusive and gender-sensitive climate and environment solutions in transport, energy, housing, and across government departments, women will continue to be disproportionately impacted by our changing climate and the destruction of our environment.

Key Programme for Government commitments (pp. 49–58)

- **Deliver actions to achieve a 51% reduction in emissions from 2018 to 2030 and net-zero emissions no later than 2050**
- **Set ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2040**
- **Support the Just Transition Commission’s work to listen to communities, address their concerns, and ensure they benefit from the green transition**
- **Implement a Whole-of-Government Strategy to fully integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into national policies and initiatives, ensuring that each goal is actively pursued across all levels of government**
- **Allow data centres that contribute to economic growth and efficient grid usage, such as prioritising waste heat capture for district heating systems and other local uses**
- **Ramp up our targets to deliver more B2-equivalent home retrofits each year from 2026 to 2030, with a focus on lower income households**
- **Intensify the transition to lower-cost renewables in electricity generation, and transition away from expensive imported fossil fuels**

Impact for women and gender equality

No urgency for action on climate and biodiversity

As the Programme for Government lays out a course for Ireland from 2025 until nearly 2030, it seems obvious that tackling the twin crises in our climate and our environment should be front and centre in the Programme. However, this is not the case – with a greater focus on economic growth rather than on reducing our emissions, restoring our environment, and doing so in a way that is socially just and recognises the gendered impacts of these crises. Climate and environment feel like afterthoughts within the Programme when they should be central to it. Commitment to targets is not enough – we need to see how they will be achieved. It’s welcome that the Programme for Government recommits to our legally binding 2030 climate targets, but it is worrying that the targets for 2040 are left out, and the roadmap for how we will achieve the 2030 targets is very unclear. Our greenhouse gas emissions decreased in 2023 by 6.8%, but we need to see a consistent annual decrease well above this scale over the next five years to hit our targets. And while a commitment to integrate the SDGs into policy-making is welcome, it’s hard to see how this could work without moving responsibility to the Department of Taoiseach.

No focus on gender, and not enough on social justice, equity + inclusion

There is a glaring lack of clear commitments in recognising the differentiated impact that the climate and biodiversity crises have for women, and the language in key environmental justice commitments is weak and unclear. The language used for the Just Transition Commission is very weak, with no indication that this body will be central to the Government's policies. There is no mention of the forthcoming Energy Poverty Action Plan, and the residential energy sections are still focused on homeowners rather than renters, people in emergency accommodation, or those living in trailers or other forms of accommodation. Those most at risk of energy poverty are often women – lone parents in rented accommodation are the most at-risk group.³¹ There is not enough ambition in the commitments on public and active travel, and overall there is very little mention of nature and biodiversity or other planetary boundaries, with the major sections only focusing on decarbonisation. Not having a clear plan for social impacts will impact our ability to access vital EU funding like the Social Climate Fund, for which Ireland will need to identify vulnerable groups to energy and transport poverty and outline tailored measures to assist those groups for access to the Fund. Not paying sufficient attention to the social impacts of climate change is fiscally, environmentally, and socially irresponsible.

The energy transition and data centres

All community-owned energy initiatives committed to are welcome. However, the language used by the Programme for Government in relation to energy is cause for concern, as these commitments leave the door open for the development of a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal if it is considered for energy security. This would be a disaster, locking us into a form of energy that is worse for the climate than coal.³² The focus on new data centres also shows a lack of recognition of the need to assess the current environmental impacts of data centres, including the fact that they use 21% of Ireland's electricity – more than all urban housing.³³

Air, water and food quality

Many of the welcome commitments on food and water quality contained in the Programme for Government are entirely incompatible with another major commitment, to seek to retain the nitrates derogation. There is also no recognition of the particular health impacts faced by women in relation to poor local environmental quality in air and water. This is a theme throughout the Programme for Government in relation to climate – while overarching targets are highlighted, the individual actions required to achieve them are either not spelled out, or contradictory in their approaches.

What should Government do next?

Urgent, significant and ambitious action needs to be taken on Ireland's climate and biodiversity crises to avoid hefty fines from the EU and to ensure Ireland meets its own legally binding climate targets. The transition to net-zero will worsen existing social inequalities unless climate policy and plans are created with attention to those inequalities, and will continue to impact women disproportionately. The Government must prioritise faster and fairer climate action, including a gender lens in both data collection and policy development, and ensure implemented of actions such as publishing and actioning the revised Energy Poverty Action Plan and ensuring that the Just Transition Commission has meaningful influence in steering climate policy.

³¹ Dukelow, F., Forde, C. and Busteed, E. (2024) [Feminist Climate Justice Report](#) Feminist Communities for Climate Justice (NWC/CWI)

³² Igini, M. (2024) [LNG 33% Worse for Climate Than Coal Over 20-Year Period, Groundbreaking Research Reveals](#) EARTH.ORG

³³ CSO (2023) [Data Centres Metered Electricity Consumption 2023](#)

Social Protection and Tax

Our social protection system was built for a different era and based on a largely ‘male breadwinner’ understanding of both the labour market and how social protection supports should work – resulting in significant gender gaps in income, wealth, pensions, and access to supports.³⁴ Investment in and reform of our social protection system as a public service, and a broad, progressive tax base to fund it, is vital for advancing gender equality. There are significant welcome commitments in this Programme for Government, in particular the removal of the Carer’s Allowance means test and the introduction of a pay-related element to Parents Benefit and other benefits. But real commitment to structural reform that will tackle structural gender inequalities is absent.

Key Programme for Government commitments (pp. 18, 99–103)

- **Protect core welfare rates while ensuring that available resources are targeted at vulnerable groups who are unable to work**
- **Examine what modifications or changes may be made to support women who currently fall outside the existing schemes to qualify for a State Pension**
- **Examine the extension of Parents Leave and Benefit and additional flexibilities**
- **Set new child poverty target, examine ways to lift more children out of child poverty**
- **Explore a targeted Child Benefit Payment**
- **Introduce a new Working Age Payment**
- **Expand eligibility for Fuel Allowance to families in receipt of Working Family Payment**
- **Progressively increase the Child Support Payment**
- **Examine how social protection can better support people fleeing domestic violence**
- **Complete the roll-out of Hot School Meals to all Primary Schools in 2025, commence rollout to all secondary schools over the lifetime of the next government**
- **Maintain broad tax base, and implement progressive changes in taxation if the economy remains strong, including indexing credits and bands**

Impact for women and gender equality

Welcome individual social protection measures

The removal of the means test for the Carer’s Allowance, the extension of the Fuel Allowance to include those receiving the Working Family Payment, and the further rollout of the Hot School Meals Programme are welcome and will move forward in addressing inequality. These are measures which NWC previously campaigned for.

Clarity needed on some key commitments

There are a number of promising commitments – including increased supports for lone parents, changes to pension eligibility for women, and better supports for DSGBV victim-survivors. Government must outline exactly how they intend to tackle these commitments, and engage with women and women’s organisations like the NWC.

³⁴ National Economic and Social Council (2022) [Ireland’s Social Welfare System: Gender, Family and Class](#)

No significant reform of social protection system for gender equality

While there are welcome expansions of individual social protection payments, the Programme for Government does not commit to the degree of structural reform necessary to ensure adequacy and security of income for all. In particular, the lack of a strong commitment to benchmark social protection rates, thresholds and disregards is extremely disappointing – with a commitment to benchmark and index tax bands and credits instead. This very clearly shows that the Government's priority is providing security for those on middle and higher incomes; NWC have been very clear that the priority for developing benchmarking and indexing systems should assist those on lowest incomes first through the social protection system, before seeking to benchmark and index tax bands. Without a clear and co-ordinated approach with benchmarking and evidence-based policymaking, the approach will continue to be scattershot and uneven, and women, particularly from marginalised groups, will continue to be left behind.

The commitment to tackling child poverty is welcome, however there is no clear vision to end or to tackle poverty for all or wealth/income inequality as a driving factor behind the work of the Government. With a gender pay gap of nearly 10%,³⁵ high enforced deprivation rates among groups like lone parents (85% of whom are women³⁶) with a 45.6% enforced deprivation rate,³⁷ significant action is needed and the Programme reflects a missed opportunity to commit to those reforms.

Tangible commitments needed for pension adequacy for older women

It is welcome to see a recognition of the need to change the pension system to support women who fall outside existing pension provision, however the commitment to “examine” this issue is weak. NWC have consistently highlighted the issues faced by older women in accessing pension supports, as there a gender pension gap of more than three times the gender pay gap at 35%,³⁸ and have outlined the necessary solutions³⁹ – central to this is the need to move to a Universal State Pension.

No commitment to tax justice to develop universal public services

The tax system is an important way of both funding vital public services and of tackling social and economic inequalities. With commitments to lowering taxes like income tax (through indexing bands and credits), while at the same time not providing for any significant broadening of the tax base through reducing fossil fuel subsidies, tax relief on private pensions, or on wealth and employers' social insurance, the Programme for Government does not provide for a broad tax base which we can be sure can fund public services in the future. This is irresponsible, socially, fiscally and environmentally – and is a huge missed opportunity to build a more just, sustainable and feminist Irish economic and fiscal model. Women face considerable barriers in accessing public services, and they must be funded properly to appropriately meet the needs of women in all their diversity.

What should Government do next?

Rapid action should be taken to implement the welcome reforms contained in the Programme for Government, along with engagement with civil society and affected women to develop further clarity on the vaguer commitments. The Government should also fulfil its promise to broaden the tax base in a progressive way through looking at reducing subsidies on private pensions and fossil fuels, and to use that revenue to develop the social protection as an effective public service.

³⁵ CSO (2023) [Structure of Earnings Survey](#), Table 3.1

³⁶ CSO (2023) [Census of Population 2022 Profile 3 - Households, Families and Childcare](#)

³⁷ CSO (2024) [Survey on Income and Living Conditions, Table 5.1](#) Household type: Lone parent with at least one child aged less than 25

³⁸ ESRI (2019) [Gender, pensions and income in retirement](#)

³⁹ Gilmore, O. (2024) [Still Stuck in the Gap: Pensions Auto-enrolment from a Gender and Care Lens](#) National Women's Council