

September 2023

Submission to the 88th Pre-
Sessional Working Group of
the Committee on the
Elimination of Discrimination
Against Women

The National Women's Council (NWC) is the leading national representative organisation for women and women's groups in Ireland, founded in 1973. We have over 190 member groups and a large and growing community of individual supporters. The ambition of the National Women's Council is an Ireland where every woman enjoys true equality and no woman is left behind. NWC will provide a coordinated voice for civil society through the CEDAW reporting process, including through this submission on the 'List of Issues Prior to Reporting' and the future development of a shadow report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

This submission is structured by outlining the key themes/issues impacting women and girls in Ireland as they relate to provisions set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Each section/theme includes key recommendations and actions to be taken by the State, an overview of the current context, in addition to suggested questions/inquiry.

Violence Against Women

(Articles 2, 3, 5, 16)

- Resource and implement, through allocated ring-fenced funding, the Third National Strategy on Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence
- Establish and appropriately resource the proposed statutory agency (due to be established in January 2024¹) on tackling and reducing DSGBV to carry out its functions, and provide sufficient multi-annual funding to frontline services and supports
- Develop a DSGBV Data Strategy, coordinated by the Agency, for the implementation of a 'gold standard' of data collection (incl. disaggregated data) and analysis by all relevant public service bodies²
- Establish fully accessible domestic violence refuge accommodation units in every county, providing a minimum of 1 refuge space per 10,000 population
- Reform the Habitual Residence Condition test to ensure that victims-survivors of DSGBV can access housing supports and social protections promptly
- Counter and prevent misogynistic hate crime through the introduction of new hate crime and incitement to violence 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 groups³

¹ See <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2023-09-21/221/>

² The Committee in its concluding observations 2017 recommend that Ireland implement the "gold standard" so that data on all forms of gender-based violence against women, including domestic violence, are systematically collected and analysed and that they are disaggregated by, inter alia, age, ethnicity and relationship with the perpetrator.

³ The Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill 2022 includes gender as a protected ground, however, to date, there is a lack of clarity with respect to the specific measures planned to counter and prevent misogynistic hate crime, including when it intersects with other grounds. Furthermore, as the Bill is progressing through the Houses of

- Deliver in full a new objective mandatory Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) curriculum for junior⁴ and senior cycle which is inclusive of all students and is underpinned by a whole school approach to advance gender equality, transform young people’s perceptions of gender and gender stereotypes and prevent gender-based violence
- Combat the harms of pornography on children and young people, particularly in relation to the normalisation of sexual behaviour based on misogynistic and violent models of sexual expectations and its impact on gender equality
- Address and combat the increasing phenomenon of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) in all its guises, particularly in relation to child and intimate image abuse, and take steps to create a safer and more secure digital environment for women and girls and hold perpetrators of TFGBV and the private sector to account
- Develop a legislative framework for adult safeguarding, together with a comprehensive, human rights-based national policy, which ensures greater understanding of and protection from domestic and sexual violence against older persons and adults at risk in personal/home settings and in both State and private care homes and institutions

Current context

The epidemic of violence against women continues to grow in Ireland.⁵ The Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, published in 2022, provides a strong blueprint for the elimination of violence against all women and girls in Ireland. However, there has been no costing carried out by the State on the budgetary requirements to implement this Strategy, nor has there been any allocation of ring-fenced funding to ensure it is realised in full.

The commitment set out in the Strategy to establish an integrated whole-of-government national response through the creation of a new statutory agency will be critical to its full and effective implementation. It is essential that the new agency plays a critical role in the development and coordination of a data strategy⁶ on DSGBV and is appropriately resourced to allocate sufficient funding to frontline services. Significant investment is required to increase the number of domestic violence refuge spaces available in the State, to ensure provision in communities across the country^{7,8} and resource refuges to respond appropriately to the intersecting needs of all women and children.⁹

the Oireachtas, there is so far, no commitment to an Action Plan Against Hate that would tackle the roots of hate through training, enhanced monitoring and data collection, strengthening of victim supports, awareness raising and education.

⁴ A new junior cycle SPHE curriculum commenced in schools in September 2023. An updated Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum is available for consultation until mid October 2023.

⁵ From the beginning of 2022 to date, 18 women died violently, and in the first quarter of 2022, domestic abuse calls and incidents were 13% higher than the same period in 2021. The Sexual Violence Survey 2022 from the Central Statistics Office also showed that 52% of women will have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime, and that the majority of women (79%) knew the perpetrator.

⁶ Despite a recommendation by the Committee in 2017 to implement the “gold standard” in data collection so that all forms of gender-based violence against women are systematically collected and analysed and disaggregated this has not been achieved by the State. The new Agency must play a critical role in developing and coordinating a data strategy to effectively document the prevalence of DSGBV in Ireland, but also to inform the legal and policy frameworks regulating the prevention, response and prosecution components.

⁷ Domestic violence refuge spaces must be increased significantly from the current 181 units to the recommended 500 spaces (1 per 10,000), in line with Council of Europe guidelines. As of June 2023, there were still nine counties in Ireland without any refuge provision. Despite the commitment in the Third National Strategy to bring the number of refuge units to 280 nationally, this will still fall far short of the Council of Europe guideline.

⁸ According to Safe Ireland, 180 women and 275 children seek emergency accommodation every month and in 2021 more than 3,000 requests for refuge could not be met by services.

⁹ This includes responding the particular needs of Traveller and Roma women, disabled women, migrant women, women in addiction and women exiting prostitution and sex trafficking.

Finally, it is of fundamental importance that the movement for gender equality is advanced through the State's education system¹⁰ and targeted measures are put in place to tackle the harmful impact of pornography on children and young people.

Suggested inquiry

- What processes are in place to ensure the full implementation of the Third National Strategy, including implementation and monitoring structures, performance indicators and timelines, in addition to costings and financial resourcing of the Strategy? Please provide an update on the new DSGBV agency, with particular reference to the administration of costing and funding to frontline services and supports. Are multi-annual ring-fenced funding arrangements going to be established?
- Please provide detailed information on the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence and explain what systems are in place to collect systematic, up to date and disaggregated data to effectively inform the legal and policy frameworks regulating the prevention, response and prosecution of DSGBV?
- What measures is the State taking to ensure compliance with the Istanbul Convention, including with respect to the provision of refuge spaces to support victims and survivors of domestic violence?
- What steps are being taken to ensure that the Habitual Residence Condition does not act as a barrier to accessing supports for victims-survivors of DSGBV?
- In the context of the introduction of new hate crime and incitement to violence or hatred, legislation which identifies "gender" as a protected ground, how does the State plan on countering and preventing misogynistic hate crime? Will the State commit to introducing an Action Plan Against Hate to implement and complement new legislation, aimed at addressing the roots of hate through education, training and awareness raising? Will such a plan have targeted actions to address hate crime and hate speech against women, including women from other protected groups such as Roma, Travellers, LGBTI community and disabled women?
- What legal and policy measures are being taken to prevent, protect and prosecute TFGBV and to ensure effective regulation of private intermediaries in the ICT sector? What measures are in place to increase digital literacy among women and girls and to implement information and education campaigns in preventing TFGBV across society?
- Please provide details on the framework the State has in place to ensure effective protection of older persons and adults at risk from abuse, including domestic and sexual abuse, in all settings? Please provide an update on the progress of the State's proposed National Adult Safeguarding Policy and related legislative framework? Please outline the measures taken to address the failings and harms identified by the HSE in the 'Emily' case¹¹ and to extend reparations to the women who suffered abuse?

¹⁰ The Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curricula has the potential to transform young people's perceptions of gender and gender stereotypes and prevent gender-based violence. It is critical that all schools are supported to deliver the junior and senior SPHE cycles in full, that the curriculum is fully inclusive, taking account of the particular needs of minority and marginalised groups. Teachers must also receive ongoing training, and a whole school approach developed to embed the values of gender equality in the structures and ethos of the school.

¹¹ See <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/media/pressrel/hse-publish-emily-reports.html>

Justice for victims-survivors of DSGBV

(Article 2, 15)

- Enhance collaboration between the three legal processes/courts regarding domestic and sexual violence (Criminal Justice, Family Law and Child Care Processes)
- Resource court and non-court support for victims-survivors reporting domestic and sexual abuse, including free legal advice, training programmes for those coming into contact with victims-survivors and physical court environments
- Increase the number of judges, in line with the OECD¹² and the Judicial Planning Working Group report to address one of the main causes of the court system delays and its attritional effect on victims-survivors
- Ensure that the national scheme for compensation of victims-survivors of domestic and sexual abuse fulfils the State's EU and international legal obligations and is accessible to, and appropriately accommodates the particular experiences and needs of victims-survivors of domestic and sexual abuse

Current context

In line with the Third National Strategy's Implementation Plan, NWC and the Department of Justice commissioned research focusing on the Intersection of the Criminal Justice, Private Family Law and Public Law Child Care Processes in Relation to Domestic and Sexual Violence. This report¹³ highlights the urgent need for reforms¹⁴ across the justice system for victims-survivors reporting domestic and sexual abuse.¹⁵

Suggested inquiry

- What actions have been taken by the State to enhance coordination and collaboration across the various legal processes/courts to better support victims-survivors of DSGBV? What court and non-court supports are available for victims-survivors and what measures are being taken to enhance and adequately fund these supports? How does the State plan to increase its number of judges, in line with the OECD and Judicial Planning Working Group report?
- How has the State addressed the redress and justice rights of victims-survivors of domestic and sexual abuse to ensure compliance with its legal obligations? When does the State expect to take measures to improve and/or replace the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme¹⁶ and how does it intend to ensure any such scheme appropriately meets the needs of victims-

¹² OECD (2023) Modernising Staffing and Court Management Practices in Ireland: Towards a More Responsive and Resilient Justice System.

¹³ O Egan, N. and O'Malley Dunlop, E. (2023) A Report on the Intersection of the Criminal Justice, Private Family Law and Public Law Child Care Processes in Relation to Domestic and Sexual Violence.

¹⁴ The actions required by the State, include among others, an expansion of training and support for professionals whom victim-survivors encounter such as the judiciary, legal professionals and members of An Garda Síochána. Free legal advice must be provided, acknowledging the gendered nature and constraints that are experienced by victim-survivors of all gender-based violent crimes in accessing legal advice. Physical court environments require investment for the provision of sufficient waiting and consultation rooms, and separate facilities for victim-survivors of domestic or sexual violence.

¹⁵ The current system means that the onus is on victims-survivors to navigate three separate legal systems simultaneously, causing significant trauma and revictimisation. The report stems from the Department of Justice initiative Supporting a Victim's Journey outlining the range of supports needed for victim-survivors through the justice process, followed from the recommendations of the O'Malley Review. It is key that measures in the 'Supporting a Victim's Journey Plan' are extended to all victim-survivors of all forms of DSGBV.

¹⁶ See [gov.ie - Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie - Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (www.gov.ie))

survivors of domestic and sexual abuse in respect of both its application procedure, eligibility conditions and outcomes?

Prostitution

(Article 6)

- Ensure women in prostitution have access to safety, health care, support and exit routes, in line with the Third National Strategy, including the provision of dedicated safe accommodation and access to housing^{17, 18}
- Implement the recommendations set out in the Implementation of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, Part IV – An Interim Review (2020)¹⁹, including on exit routes and supports for victims; legislation, training and enforcement; public awareness and education; and evidence and research
- Ensure the speedy completion and publication of the official State review of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017
- Provide ongoing education and training to all those who come into contact with victims-survivors of prostitution, including An Garda Síochána, DPP, legal practitioners, health care professionals, and the Judiciary
- Improve data collection by state bodies through the development of a common identifier system for all gender-based violent crime, capturing the many types of violence women in prostitution encounter
- Legislate to criminalise the practice of ‘sex for rent’ as well as the advertising of these arrangements which exploits and harms vulnerable women seeking housing and ensure access to housing through the provision of secure, affordable accommodation for all women²⁰
- Enhance national policy and legislation, including on training on exploitation for State agencies and the development of procedures and safeguards in residential care units to combat child sexual exploitation, recognising that trafficking and sexual exploitation of children and young

¹⁷ In September 2023 UN Special Rapporteurs called on the Irish Government to take urgent steps to ensure access to housing and assistance for victims-survivors of trafficking. They recognised measures taken to establish a new Referral Mechanism to fulfil Ireland’s obligations to protect the human rights of victims of trafficking, and the publication of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking) Bill 2023. However, it was recommended that further measures were urgently needed to ensure effective access to assistance and protection measures, including safe housing. This includes the provision of dedicated safe accommodation for victims of trafficking and to implement a statutory framework for assistance measures, including medical assistance, psycho-social support, and legal aid, in partnership with civil society organisations.

¹⁸ In its 2017 concluding observations, the Committee recommended that the State provide information in its next periodic report, following the scheduled review of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015, three years after its entry into force, on its impact in addressing the exploitation of prostitution in the State party and intensify the implementation of programmes for women who wish to leave prostitution by providing exit programmes, including alternative income-generating opportunities.

¹⁹ Shannon, G. (2020) The Implementation of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, Part IV – An Interim Review <https://immigrantcouncil.ie/sites/default/files/202001/2020HLWGInterimReportSOA2017ByGeoffreyShannon.pdf>.

²⁰ The housing crisis in Ireland creates a perfect environment for the exploitation of tenants, and the placing of advertisements by prospective landlords offering discounted or free accommodation in return for sex has become a not uncommon occurrence. While it is currently a criminal offence to purchase sex in Ireland, sex for rent is not covered by the legislation.

people has been identified as a common feature, particularly among children in residential care settings²¹

Current context

The Third National Strategy is ground-breaking in its recognition of the inherent violence and abuse of commercial sexual exploitation of women in the sex trade and the establishment of strategies to ensure those, primarily women, in prostitution have access to safety, health care, support and exit routes.²² Fully resourced services and supports for those who are in, or who wish to leave, prostitution is essential. The pathways should include but are not limited to financial and legal supports, regularisation of immigration status; access to housing (emergency and social housing) and social protection; education and training programmes; access to free healthcare including mental health supports, and access to justice.

Suggested inquiry

- What processes and structures have been established to ensure the full and effective implementation of the commitments set out in the Third National Strategy to support women in prostitution, including the provision of exit routes?
- What steps have been taken to fully implement the recommendations set out in Implementation of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, Part IV – An Interim Review (2020)? When will the State compete and publish its review of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017?
- What measures are in place to ensure that all refugees are resourced to appropriately respond to the intersecting needs of all women, including women exiting prostitution and sex trafficking?
- How is the State tackling the issue of ‘sex for rent’ arrangements and how does it plan to eliminate this harmful and exploitative practice? How is the state planning to address the housing and homelessness emergency that continues to have a devastating impact on women and families throughout Ireland?
- Following the publication in June 2023 of ‘The Protecting Against Predators study, by the Sexual Exploitation Research Project at University College Dublin, what measures has the State taken to tackle trafficking and sexual exploitation of children and young people, particularly to protect and safeguard children in residential care settings?

²¹ As of July 2023, there have been 14 cases of children in the care of the State suspected of being sexually exploited to date this year, according to new figures from Tusla, the child and family agency. Last year the agency reported 20 such suspected cases to gardaí. Research published in June 2023 by University College Dublin identified that teenage girls in State care were being targeted for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Tusla only started to record cases of suspected exploitation separately to reports of sexual abuse at the start of 2021, after concerns came to light several months beforehand about one alleged abuse ring targeting a group of girls in care.

²² Government of Ireland (2022) Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual & Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

(Articles 2, 3, 5, 12, 16)

- Legislate on the extraterritorial application of section 2 of the Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012
- Implement the commitments and actions set out in the Third National Strategy, as they relate to FGM and explicitly include FGM in the implementation of every goal of the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
- Fund and co-design a national campaign on FGM in collaboration with specialist support services
- Include a module on FGM in training delivered to frontline DSGBV services
- Pursue the adoption of a targeted National Action Plan to Combat FGM in collaboration with relevant specialist services
- Implement a strong monitoring mechanism to evaluate the implementation of the legal and policy framework with the goal of eliminating FGM

Current context

Despite the absence of CSO data on the prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM), it is estimated that 5,790 women and girls residing in Ireland have undergone FGM.²³ Although FGM is clearly recognised as a form of gender-based violence within the Third National Strategy on DSGBV, actions relating to FGM must be incorporated in all pillars of the Strategy under the term all ‘forms of DSGBV’ including training for professionals, public awareness raising, and supports services for victim-survivors.

There is also a fundamental need to adopt a comprehensive National Action Plan on FGM to prevent and effectively respond to this type of violence.²⁴ In 2015, a National Steering Committee comprised primarily of civil society groups and led by AkiDWA, proposed a National Action Plan²⁵ to combat FGM (2016-2019) based on 5 strategic themes, namely prevention, protection, provision of support, prosecution and promotion of the eradication of FGM globally. This proposed Action Plan has to date not been considered for implementation by the State.

Suggested inquiry

- How is the State addressing the issue of FGM through national policy, legislation and service delivery, having particular regard to the recommendations set out in the National Action Plan to Combat FGM (2016-2019)?
- What specific measures have been taken by the State to raise awareness of FGM and ensure health and DSGBV staff are appropriately trained in addressing the needs of women and girls subjected to FGM?

²³ AkiDWA website, Female Genital Mutilation - Prevalence of FGM, available at <https://akidwa.ie/female-genital-mutilation/>.

²⁴ Any adopted Action Plan must include commitments to enhance the provision of services in the area of FGM. Currently, there is only one free specialised Migrant women’s health clinic offering FGM support service, which is located in Dublin. Moreover, support services are not provided with systematic, cultural and gender-sensitive training to address this type of DSGBV, and there is an overall lack of inter-agency response to FGM.

²⁵ AkiDWA (2015) Towards a National Action Plan to Combat Female Genital Mutilation (2016 – 2019).

Health

(Article 12)

- Accelerate progress towards a universal model of healthcare provision which appropriately meets the needs of all women and girls, including those most marginalised in society (Traveller and Roma women and girls, disabled women and girls, women in prison, trans women)
- Develop and resource, through ring-fenced funding, phase 2 of the national Women's Health Action Plan with a focus on clear actions, indicators and robust implementation mechanisms to ensure the plan is realised in full
- Resource and implement the recommendations of the O'Shea Abortion Services Review²⁶ to enhance access to services for women in all communities across the country
- Provide abortion care for all who need it in Ireland and enact legislation to allow for safe access zones²⁷
- Establish a new woman-centred, state-of-the-art National Maternity Hospital which has its own governance and budgetary independence
- Continue the rollout of the universal free contraception scheme to promote reproductive justice for all women
- Develop the Assisted Human Reproduction Regulatory Authority and expand access to public tertiary infertility services, including IVF
- Invest in mental health so that all women and girls have access to gender-sensitive mental health services, including the establishment of a Mother and Baby Unit
- Invest, through multiannual funding, in disability services that are essential to the right to independent living, including Personal Assistant Services, home supports, alternative forms of respite and personalised budgets

Current context

The Sláintecare Progress Report 2022 identifies a number of challenges^{28,29} in advancing the strategy's vision of a universal health and social care system - where everyone has equitable access to services based on their need. The provision of universal healthcare is no doubt a feminist issue due to the structural inequalities that women face, particularly minority women,³⁰ in accessing timely healthcare that appropriately meets their needs. It is of critical importance that the 2023 Sláintecare Action Plan³¹

²⁶ O' Shea, M. (2023) The Independent Review of the Operation of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018.

²⁷ In July 2023, the Irish Government gave approval for legislation on 100m safe access zones around healthcare services providing abortion. Anti-abortion protests continue to take place outside services, therefore, it is imperative that legislation is enacted quickly to address this issue.

²⁸ Government of Ireland (2023) Sláintecare Progress Report 2022.

²⁹ The Government itself has recognised that acute hospital scheduled care waiting lists are unacceptably long and plans to remove private practice from public hospitals has been delayed considerably. There are considerable and ongoing challenges with the recruitment of health care workers due to a shortage of supply, which is only expected to worsen. This has a detrimental impact on the delivery of key service reforms, including the development of services and supports within the community and primary care settings. This includes supports which promote independence, dignity and respect for disabled and older people.

³⁰ Marginalised women are more likely to face lifetime health problems and die younger because of systemic health inequalities. They are particularly reliant on the public healthcare system and face significant barriers to timely care in a privatised system.

³¹ Government of Ireland (2023) Sláintecare Action Plan 2023.

is implemented in full in order to accelerate progress on Sláintecare and advance real improvements on access, affordability and quality in Ireland's health and social care services.

Despite, abortion provision being in operation in Ireland since 2019, there are significant legal barriers for women in accessing abortion care across the country. At least 860 women travelled from Ireland to the UK to access abortion since the Eighth Amendment was repealed.³² An independent review³³ on the State's abortion laws published earlier this year recommended 60 operational changes to enable access to care at home. However, there is significant uncertainty on the political commitment to ensure implementation of the review in full.³⁴ It is critical that the State progress the development of abortion policy, in line with independent expert analysis, including from the WHO as a fundamental aspect of reproductive healthcare.

Free contraception for women aged 17-30³⁵ has been a welcome development and must be built on to ensure access for all ages. Universal access to contraception is fundamental to reproductive health and critical for achieving gender equality.³⁶ The allocation of €10m by Government to commence publicly funded IVF in September 2023 was a landmark moment for women and couples. However this progress must also continue to enable a meaningful expansion in access to these essential services and expedite delivery of a fully public model.

Finally, Government must invest in the development of gender sensitive mental health services, including the expansion of specialist eating disorder services, trauma informed care, perinatal mental health and the reconfiguring of child and adolescent mental health services.^{37,38} Despite commitments to develop Ireland's first Mother and Baby Unit, there has been no allocation of funding to progress this vital service.^{39, 40}

³² <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/2023/06/27/why-are-so-many-irish-women-still-travelling-to-the-uk-for-abortions/>

³³ O' Shea, M. (2013).

³⁴ The review shed light on critical shortcomings in current abortion provision, particularly in terms of the postcode lottery for services; the absence of abortion services in eight of our 19 maternity units, the impact of the mandatory three-day wait ; the strict 12 week gestational limit , the continuing criminalisation of abortion and the need to balance conscientious objection, with the right to access reproductive healthcare.

³⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/ce3ad-minister-for-health-announces-that-free-contraception-is-now-available-for-17-30-year-olds>.

³⁶ In the NHS (UK), free contraception is available to all, including adolescents. To promote reproductive rights, women must have real contraceptive choice and access to the most effective forms of contraception. This is particularly pertinent in the context of the rising costs of living and ensuring marginalised groups of women benefit from targeted initiatives.

³⁷ An independent review of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in the State has said it cannot currently provide an assurance to parents or guardians in all parts of Ireland that their children have access to a safe, effective and evidence-based service. The report published in July 2023 by the then Inspector of Mental Health Services identified numerous failings in the system. These included a lack of governance in some areas; a failure to manage risk, a failure to fund and recruit key staff, and a failure to look at alternative models of providing services, when recruitment becomes difficult. Some teams were not monitoring antipsychotic medication, in accordance with international standards and the report notes that there are no national standards in place. The review found unacceptable variations in the number of children on waiting lists and the length of the waiting lists varied across Community Health Organisations. This resulted in a lack of staff to conduct therapeutic interventions. Some teams had no consultant psychiatrists and work was being covered by a number of different locums, which affected continuity of care

³⁸ Increased investment in mental health is required (10% of the total health budget as recommended by Sláintecare) in addition to reinstatement of a national lead for mental health within the HSE to ensure strategic and budgetary oversight and leadership to reform Ireland's mental health system, as envisaged in Sharing the Vision, Ireland's national mental health policy.

³⁹ In the absence of a MBU, mothers with severe and complex mental health difficulties are supported in general mental health inpatient units without their babies, contrary to best-practice, and this separation can have a profound adverse impact on parent-infant attachment.

⁴⁰ See <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/personal/pq/2023-pq-responses/may-2023/pq-25435-23-mark-ward.pdf>.

Suggested inquiry

- To what extent has Sláintecare, Ireland’s strategy for universal health for care all, been fulfilled, having particular regard to the most recent Sláintecare Progress Report and Action Plans? What is the current status of the multi annual strategy due to commence in 2024 and what budgetary commitments and associated timeframes have been set to implement Sláintecare in full?
- How does the State respond to the particular health needs of minority and marginalised communities? More specifically, what actions are being taken to address concerns of healthcare provision for trans people, including trans women, in Ireland?
- What is the current status on implementation of the O’Shea Abortion Services Review? What are the next steps to ensure its full and effective implementation? What action is being taken to ensure that no woman has to travel to access abortion in Ireland? What action is being taken to ensure that all Maternity Hospitals provide full and comprehensive abortion services? When will legislation be enacted to provide for safe access zones?
- What is the current status on establishment of the new national maternity hospital?
- What measures have and will continue to be taken to ensure mental health priorities and services are gender sensitive and that women’s mental health is specifically and sufficiently addressed in the implementation of Ireland’s mental health policy *Sharing the Vision*? Can the State provide a date for the establishment of a Mother and Baby Unit, as committed to as part of the National Model of Care for Specialist Perinatal Mental Health?

Care (paid and unpaid)

(Article 5, 11, 13, 16)

- Amend Ireland’s Constitution as it relates to family, care and gender equality, in line with recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality report⁴¹
- Deliver a universal public model of early years education and school age childcare
- Deliver universal social care services (to be publicly funded and publicly delivered) including an expansion of services and supports for older people and people with disabilities
- Establish a Commission on Care, to look at the vital role of care, paid and unpaid, in Ireland

Current context

A referendum to update the Irish Constitution on family, care and gender equality was proposed to take place in November 2023 and is now likely postponed until early 2024.⁴² The outdated language on ‘women’s duties in the home’ within the Constitution reflects deep gender inequalities which continue to persist in Irish society. The upcoming referendum is an opportunity to remove the limits on women from the Constitution and instead recognise the value of care in all of its forms, in the home and in the wider community. Women continue to carry a disproportionate share of care work, paid and unpaid, and it is critical that this essential work is recognised, valued and that the State takes

⁴¹ Joint Committee on Gender Equality (2022) Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality.

⁴² See <https://www.rte.ie/news/politics/2023/0924/1407051-women-home-referendum/>

appropriate measures to fund and resource care supports. It is also imperative that in the proposed amended legislation, the State recognises and protects all families equally, including but not limited to the marital family.

The Irish Government must commit to the development and delivery of a universal public model of early years education and school age childcare. The sector has relied increasingly on private providers, however, international evidence shows that a public, not-for-profit, childcare model is the best way to ensure access to affordable, quality childcare for families and decent pay and conditions for workers.⁴³ Universal public services must also be delivered in the area of social care to improve and expand the provision of services and supports for older and disabled women and girls (including home support and a range of independent living options).⁴⁴ Despite a commitment to the establishment of a commission to examine care and supports for older people, progress on this has been slow. As of July 2023, discussions regarding the commission's scope were ongoing.⁴⁵

Suggested inquiry

- What is the current status of the Irish Constitution as it relates to family, care and gender equality? Has a referendum taken place to amend the Constitution? What provisions were/will be included in the referendum?
- Is the State committed to the delivery of a universal childcare model which is publicly funded and publicly delivered? When will this model be implemented?
- What steps are being taken to move to a fully universal model of social services? What range of services and supports are being provided to ensure the dignity, respect and independence of individuals accessing services, including older people and disabled people are promoted and protected?
- What is the State's timeframe for the establishment of a Commission of Care? What is the proposed scope of the new Commission?

Housing (Article 13)

- Gender-proof all homeless and housing strategies and budgets
- Increase housing options for women and their families, including through State-led housing for the provision of public, affordable and cost-rental homes, in addition to enhanced protections in the private rental sector
- Support the housing needs of women with disabilities and older women, including those living in nursing homes and other congregated settings

⁴³ Despite record state investment in the childcare sector in 2023, the sector is still in crisis with many children and families unable to access appropriate childcare due to the limited number of spaces available (particularly for under 2s) and the high costs of childcare across the country. Despite advancements on the reduction of fees for parents, childcare costs in Ireland are still among the highest in Europe. These challenges are further compounded for single-parent families (mainly led by women) and Traveller and Roma women, with low participation rates of these groups in Childcare/Early Years schemes reflecting the inaccessible nature of current options.

⁴⁴ It is imperative that through the development and delivery of all services and supports, the rights of the individual are placed at the centre and the focus is on promoting the individual's autonomy, independence and dignity. Currently, there are ongoing challenges with increasing home support waiting lists and a lack of provision in many areas of the country.

⁴⁵ See <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2023-07-25/1296/>

- Implement the White Paper on ending Direct Provision in Ireland
- Establish gender-sensitive support services for women living in homelessness
- Amend section 2 of the Housing Act 1988 so that victims-survivors of domestic violence who cannot return home are recognised as homeless and update the Act so that domestic violence is recognised as a priority for accessing social housing

Current context

The housing and homelessness emergency continues to have a devastating impact on women and families throughout Ireland. Ireland has one of the highest rates of female homelessness in the EU with figures likely an underestimation as women living in refuge accommodation, direct provision and disabled people living in institutionalised settings are not included.⁴⁶ A recent report by the Mercy Law Resource Centre identified domestic violence as a leading cause of homelessness, particularly among women.^{47,48} Lone parent families, 86% of whom are headed by women, are the highest proportion of families living in emergency accommodation.^{49,50} Women are more reliant on the social housing system and outside of single adults, lone parents are the most common family type on housing waiting lists.⁵¹ Ireland’s housing strategy remains over-reliant on the private sector and targeted actions⁵² are required by the State to tackle the growing housing and homelessness crisis. Ireland needs housing policy that delivers secure, affordable accommodation and is gender proofed to appropriately meet the particular needs of women and girls.

Suggested inquiry

- What measures has the State taken to reduce the number of women and girls entering homelessness and promote long term, secure tenancies? To what degree is the provision of State-led public, affordable and cost-rental housing a feature of plans to tackle housing and homelessness issues, given women’s greater reliance on the state housing system?
- What actions are being taken to address the impact of housing insecurity on lone parent families? Will a Taskforce be established to address this growing problem?

⁴⁶ In addition, women with children are more likely to move around, staying with family and friends rather than going to homeless accommodation in the early stages of homelessness. Traveller and Roma families forced to live on roadsides are also excluded from official statistics.

⁴⁷ Mercy Law Resource Centre (2023) Social Housing, Domestic Violence and the Public Sector Duty.

⁴⁸ The report found that domestic violence can often result in individuals having to leaving to leave their homes and victims-survivors can experience a multitude of challenges in securing adequate alternative accommodation. The report highlighted a number of barriers for victims and survivors in accessing social housing, such as a lack of available social housing; aspects of the eligibility criteria for social housing supports such as “local connection”; and the complexities caused by applying for social housing without a formal separation. These issues are further compounded by the fact that victims-survivors being housed in domestic violence refuges are not included in homeless figures. This is hugely problematic in terms of effectively planning for and meeting the housing needs of this vulnerable cohort of women and girls. The report further highlights the need for significant increases in the number of refuge accommodation beds across the country, which is further outlined in the domestic violence section of this submission.

⁴⁹ ESRI (2021) Monitoring Adequate Housing in Ireland.

⁵⁰ Of families made homeless since the ending of the private rental eviction ban in March 2023, lone parent families make up 70%.

⁵¹ The Housing Agency (2021) Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2020 Key findings.

⁵² Specific measures that have been called for by leading housing organisations include the introduction of rent controls, private rent inspections and the banning of evictions for at least two years to reduce the numbers entering homelessness. Additional actions that must be taken by Government include retaining public land for the provision of housing, increasing Approved Housing Bodies and Local Authorities ownership of housing stock and developing a Secure Tenancy Model in the private rental sector to create genuine long-term tenancies.

- To what extent are the housing needs of older women and women and girls with disabilities being met, including through the appropriate resourcing and implementation of national policy and service delivery in this area?
- What is the current status on the White Paper on ending Direct Provision in Ireland?
- Will the State update the Housing Act 1988, in line with recommendations of the Mercy Law Centre report on social housing, domestic violence and the public sector duty to support the housing needs of victims- survivors?

Employment

- Recognise and value unpaid work as a meaningful contribution to society
- Address the gender pay gap, and the gender pensions gap
- Improve paid family leave entitlements to enhance the balance between work, family, social and community life and to shift towards a more gender equal burden of unpaid care responsibilities
- Improve employment outcomes for all women, including through enhanced pay and conditions across the care and community sectors (where women are disproportionately represented, and work is insecure and low paid)
- Enhance collective bargaining across the labour market, particularly in industries with a high level of female employment, in order to raise wages and improve working conditions
- Develop the Traveller and Roma Training, Employment and Enterprise Strategy in a timely fashion to combat the chronic unemployment levels impacting Traveller and Roma women

Current context

The current employment and social protection system does not properly recognise and value care responsibilities, which alienates many women from the labour market and limits their participation at varying levels. Lone parents, migrants and ethnic minority women, Traveller and Roma women, disabled women and young women also experience heightened barriers to labour market participation. It is imperative that the State create the conditions in which women can access decent, secure work that is also compatible with care responsibilities.⁵³ This includes enhanced flexible working and family leave entitlements.⁵⁴ Action must also be taken to improve pay, conditions and collective bargaining⁵⁵ across the labour market, particularly in sectors with a high level of female

⁵³ This is essential is valuing care provided both inside the home and the broad and extensive range of care provided in the wider community. Women continue to bear primary responsibility for unpaid care while workers, predominantly women, across the care sectors, are among the lowest paid in the economy, a key contributor to the gender pay gap.

⁵⁴ Payments for family leave in Ireland are much lower than EU norms and there is a larger gap between the end of paid leave and the start of early years education services. Payments in most OECD countries offer at least 50% of average earnings, with many offering 100%, while in Ireland less than a third of average earnings are replaced. Family leave payments must be increased and linked to earnings to keep up with inflation but also to begin the process of bringing payments more in line with EU norms.

⁵⁵ In 2024 the Irish government will transpose the EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages. This directive requires Ireland to implement a national action plan on collective bargaining coverage. Currently, collective bargaining coverage is relatively low in the Irish labour market compared to other EU countries. It is critical for women that the State takes the appropriate measures through the transposition of this Directive to enhance collective bargaining rights. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's in its July 2023 policy statement on care recommends that the State take immediate action to address the ongoing absence of a statutory right to collective bargaining, and adopt measures to increase trade union membership

employment. For many women paid work is no guarantee of income adequacy as women predominate in sectors characterised by low paid and precarious work.⁵⁶ The latest EUROSTAT figures show the latest gender pay gap for Ireland is 11.3%⁵⁷ - this has serious implications for a woman's lifetime earnings, her life and career decisions, and her ability to live in older years with a decent income. The Irish Government must support women to access decent work opportunities, and all labour activation policies must be gender and equality-proofed.⁵⁸

Suggested inquiry

- What steps has the State taken to improve working conditions for women and enhance family leave entitlements, with particular reference to - piloting a participation income for unpaid care and resource a time use survey to gather updated data on time spent on unpaid work; funding a pilot of the four-day week model in the public sector; increasing family leave benefits and examining the implementation of a percentage-of-earnings model of leave/benefit?
- What action is being taken by the State to address the ongoing gender pay gap, and improve working conditions for women, particularly in the care and community sectors?
- What plans does the State have to increase trade union membership so that women workers can engage in collective bargaining on an equal footing with organised employer representatives and bodies?

Social Protection

(Article 13)

- Establish the minimum essential standard of living as the benchmark for social protection payments, including pensions
- Enhance targeted social protection supports for particular groups, such as lone parents, young women, carers, disabled women, Traveller and Roma women, and asylum seekers
- Deliver a universal State pension system for all regardless of employment record, benchmarked to a level which ensures a minimum essential standard of living
- Adopt a fully individualised social protection system so that women are treated as individuals, rather than dependents of their partners

Current context

The gendered structural inequalities in our labour and social protection systems have been compounded by the cost-of-living crisis, the pandemic, and the climate emergency, which all continue

across the care sector. It is of fundamental importance that the Irish Government enhance collective bargaining across the labour market, particularly in industries with a high level of female employment, in order to raise wages and improve working conditions.

⁵⁶ 6 out of 10 low paid workers are women with young people and lone parents more likely to be low paid or National Minimum Wage (NMW) workers. According to the CSO, in 2021 median weekly earnings for males were €711.87 compared with €570.22 for females, a differential of 19%. Furthermore, almost half of women earn less than €20,000 a year.

⁵⁷ See <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2023-02-08/4/>

⁵⁸ The Committee made a number of recommendations on employment in its concluding observations 2017 including that the State must take concrete measures to reduce the gender pay gap by enforcing the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and intensifying the use of wage surveys.

to impact women disproportionately hard.⁵⁹ This is particularly true for minority and marginalised women who face multiple and intersectional discrimination and inequalities⁶⁰. According to the ESRI, only full-time employment is effective in lifting families out of poverty.⁶¹ This is hugely problematic for women who bear primary responsibility for unpaid care, and in particular certain groups such as lone parents, who often cannot reconcile full time work with childcare.

In recent years, one-off payments have been provided by the State to address the cost-of-living crisis. However, an over-reliance on this form of non-core spending will not protect women from poverty, or tackle income and wealth inequality in the long-term. There is an onus on the State to reform the social protection system to appropriately support all women through an individualised⁶² model of payments. Secure, predictable increases in social protection that ensure a minimum essential standard of living for all are needed. Social protection payments must also be reformed to better support the most marginalised groups in society, including through the adjustment of income disregards, and eligibility thresholds.

Furthermore, as women are more likely to be in low paid, part time jobs on precarious contracts, this makes it difficult to collect sufficient PRSI contributions to be eligible for the full Contributory State Pension. The introduction of a universal state pension is the best way to support women and those who encounter barriers to the labour market, including disabled people, carers, lone parents, Travellers and Roma.

Suggested inquiry

- What action is the State taking to reduce the risk of poverty and ensure the most marginalised women and girls living in Ireland are supported through its social protection system? What action is being taken to individualise the social protection system so women have independent

⁵⁹ Women bore the brunt of decisions to cut social protection payments during the austerity years and women are more likely than men to be lone parents, to be outside the paid labour market due to unpaid caring responsibilities, and to benefit more from child-related supports.

⁶⁰ Lone parent households, 86% of whom are headed by women, are nearly three times more likely to be living in consistent poverty than the general population. People unable to work due to long-standing health problems continue to be at a much greater risk of poverty than the general population, even before the additional cost of disability is taken into account. Women living in rural areas experience further challenges, with rural households having greater levels of income inadequacy than urban households. Among those aged 65 and over, 15% of men and 25% of women are at risk of poverty. Women are also at greater risk of energy poverty due to their lower average incomes – with lone parents, older women living alone, disabled people and carers particularly affected.

⁶¹ Maître, B., Russel, H., Smyth, E. (2021) *The Dynamics of Child Poverty in Ireland: Evidence from GUI*.

⁶² The 'male breadwinner' nature of our social protection system is evidenced by the concept of the 'qualified adult' or adult dependent. Under this system, payments to two parent families comprise a payment for the main claimant and a Qualified Adult payment to additional adults in the household. Child dependent payments are also payable to the main claimant.⁹⁶ This system creates a relationship of dependency for Qualified Adults. They do not receive an income in their own right and are excluded from accessing many active labour market programmes that require a core social protection payment as a condition of eligibility. Data from the Department of Social Protection shows that of the 124,521 people who received a top up for a Qualified Adult in April 2021, 83% are men. Women represent the vast majority of those who are dependent adults in our social protection system.⁹⁷ Though appearing to be 'gender neutral', the gendered effects of this system have clear implications for women's economic independence. The Department of Social Protection's Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 commits to examining the feasibility of individualising payments, through the provision of a direct payment to the second 'dependent' adult in a household, with a view to reducing co-dependency and improving employment and earnings outcomes. The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality also recommended that we adopt a fully individualised social protection system to reflect the diversity of today's lives and to promote an equal division of paid work and care. The Covid-19 income supports have demonstrated that it is possible to administer payments in an individualised way. We now have an opportunity to abolish the system of dependency and implement an individualised approach, based on equality 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.

access to all payments and are not considered as qualified adults? What specific steps are being taken to establish the minimum essential standard of living as the benchmark for social protection payments?

- Will the State deliver a Universal Pension system? This must be benchmarked to maintain the relative value of the State pension compared to earnings growth and price inflation.
- In the interim – prior to the delivery of a Universal Pension system, will the State provide for retrospective contributions, including: for those caring more than 20 years to ensure a full State Pension (Contributory); to allow access for women born before 01/09/1946 to the Homemaker’s and Home Caring Periods schemes; and a once-off, ring-fenced retrospective scheme in acknowledgement of the injustices of the marriage bar?

Child Maintenance

- Establish a Statutory Child Maintenance Agency through the provision of multi-annual funding
- Ensure the State assumes liability for child maintenance
- Decouple child maintenance from social protection payments, treating it as a non-means tested, non-taxable income for children

Current context

Child maintenance plays an important role in protecting against poverty,⁶³ and the current system must be reformed – including by the setting up of a statutory Child Maintenance Agency.⁶⁴ As there is currently no state agency, pursuit of maintenance is left up to the claiming parent. A 2022 survey of lone parents in Ireland found that only 35% are receiving maintenance without arrears.⁶⁵ A Statutory Child Maintenance Agency would take the issue of child maintenance out of the adversarial court system, reduce the burden on women to litigate for child maintenance orders and act as an anti-poverty measure. Unlike other jurisdictions, child maintenance in Ireland is seen largely as a personal, parental obligation and therefore, a matter of private family law.

Suggested inquiry

- What measures are being taken by the State to establish a Statutory Child Maintenance Agency, taking account of the significant issue with child maintenance arrears and the impact of this on women and their families?

⁶³ International experience indicates that where child maintenance is a reliable source of income, there was a 30% reduction in the poverty gap.

⁶⁴ A Statutory Child Maintenance Agency has been called for by the Joint Committee on Social Protection in its Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland and by the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Report of the Child Maintenance Review Group in November 2022 highlighted the need for “immediate and radical reform” of the current system in relation to Child Maintenance, and a majority of the group supported the setting up of a statutory Child Maintenance Agency.

⁶⁵ Spark Ireland Campaign (2022) Child maintenance survey.

National Strategy for Women and Girls

(Article 2)

- Develop and implement a new National Strategy for Women and Girls, in line with the report of the Citizen’s Assembly on Gender Equality
- A cross-departmental approach is essential to achieving gender equality – all legislative, policy and budgetary proposals must be gender and equality proofed

Current context

There has been significant shortfalls in the implementation of the current National Strategy for Women and Girls (2017-2020). An independent report⁶⁶ on evaluation of the implementation processes⁶⁷ of three equality strategies, including the NSWG, identified a number of these gaps.⁶⁸ The development of a new strategy is an opportunity to further develop and progress key actions for women and girls on a range of issues to advance their equality. It will require enhanced collaboration with key stakeholders, robust implementation and monitoring mechanisms, development of clear actions and indicators and allocation of appropriate resources.

Suggested inquiry

- What is the State’s timeline for publication of a new National Strategy for Women and Girls? What steps will be taken in the development of the new Strategy, having particular regard to engagement and consultation with key stakeholders and the development of clear actions, indicators and timelines?
- When will the State complete a full evaluation of the progress made on each of the actions committed to under the current Strategy, building on the independent evaluation of implementation processes published in July 2023?

Women’s Leadership and Participation

(Article 7)

- Increase funding to the women’s community sector to enhance women’s leadership and participation, providing secure multi-annual funding arrangements⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Centre for Effective Services (2023) Realising the promise of national equality policy: An evaluation of the processes of implementation of three national equality strategies.

⁶⁷ Importantly, the report published today, does not evaluate the achievement of strategy objectives or the implementation of individual strategy actions. It is vitally important that in addition to the development of any new strategy for women and girls, the Department completes a full and comprehensive evaluation of progress made on each of the actions committed to in the current strategy. This process will be necessary to ensure effective planning for any new strategy, including the development of new or existing actions and indicators.

⁶⁸ These included a lack of prioritisation and clarity on implementation of strategy actions; the absence of clear implementation plans; the lack of an intersectional approach across and within the strategies, including for example, on meeting the particular needs of migrant women and the lack of opportunity to amend strategy actions and respond to emerging needs, as required.

⁶⁹ In its concluding observations 2017, the Committee recommended the State take appropriate measures to restore funding for non-governmental organizations working in the field of women’s rights so as to enable them to continue to contribute to the implementation of the Convention.

- Women in rural communities experience additional barriers to participation, due to an underinvestment in social and public infrastructure. Investment into rural communities, in particular, should be monitored and reported on with gender and equality disaggregated data
- Ringfence specific funding in future Peace Plus 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
- Invest in inclusive and representative government, increasing the numbers of women in local and national politics, and provide for statutory gender quotas of 40% for local elections⁷⁰

Current context

Underinvestment in the community development sector and local women’s organisations have exacerbated social exclusion across the island. Many women’s groups have experienced reduced capacity for collective action, political analysis and for grassroots community development that can address the persistent inequalities in local communities and support women’s representation and participation.⁷¹ Critically, this extends to women’s participation in peacebuilding and reconciliation which has been shown to have considerably positive and successful outcomes^{72, 73}.

Ensuring that the voices of women are included in decision making forums and that their contribution is supported and resourced is key to tackling gender inequalities. Local government offers a unique opportunity to strengthen women’s participation in decision making processes and improve the representation of their interests. Yet men hold 76% of local government seats.⁷⁴ Ireland is on the cusp of the next Local Elections 2024 and urgent action is required to ensure that we have equal numbers of women and men on ballot papers in every local electoral area in the country. This will require the implementation of gender quotas, supporting women’s participation in local politics, and further investment in targeted measures to ensure local government is accessible to all.⁷⁵ Overall, women

⁷⁰ The Committee in its 2017 concluding observations recommended that the State party increase the use of temporary special measures, including statutory quotas, in all areas covered by the Convention in which women are underrepresented, such as in local government elections, decision-making positions in public administration, private companies and academia.

⁷¹ Overall, funding for women’s community organisations has been cut by 14.5% since 2008. While 83 out of 121 Family Resource Centres are not receiving a minimum level of core funding to remain operational. The Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme, the national social inclusion programme, had a budget of €84.7m in 2008 and in 2023 had a budget of €44m. This gap needs to be urgently addressed in the Government’s design of the new SICAP programme 2024+.

⁷² Council on Foreign Relations (2022) Women’s Participation in Peace Processes.

⁷³ Women have been historically underrepresented in peacebuilding and decision-making spaces. Despite the many celebrations surrounding the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement this year, women’s contribution to conflict prevention and peace remains undervalued and under-resourced. The benefit of women’s voices in peacebuilding and reconciliation, is well documented. Evidence demonstrates that supporting the inclusion of women in peace processes, both in official negotiating roles and grassroots efforts, significantly contributes to reaching lasting peace agreements and sustained peace. In the wake of Brexit, the loss of EU funding to civil society organisations in the North has led to the closure of women’s centres and schemes, negatively impacting some of the most marginalised groups in our society. The ongoing vacuum created by a lack of a functioning Executive continues to create a climate of precariousness among community organisations. The role of community and women’s groups is crucial in supporting the participation of women from different backgrounds, and in particular women most distant from decision making processes, into political and public life including Traveller and Roma, migrant and refugee women, disabled women, young women and LGBTQ+ women.

⁷⁴ Central Statistics Office (2020) Women and Men in Ireland 2019.

⁷⁵ Legislation and practical measures to ensure the inclusion of marginalised women, including Traveller and Roma women, working class women, disabled women, migrant women, the LGBTQ+ community and women in rural communities, must be introduced. Measures must be introduced to adequately resource local councils to develop more family friendly policies and procedures. This also means providing practical support for councillors with caring responsibilities allowing care costs to be included as an eligible expense. Women councillors have sought to increase their influence through the development of local and regional caucuses across Ireland, enabling women to transcend party lines to share their experiences and support one another in running for and assuming elected office. Women’s caucuses have proven to be important in securing progress on women’s issues in local government across Ireland, and funding for these caucuses must be sustained.

must be supported to take up leadership roles in every sphere of society, including in national politics, EU and international positions, as well as in the private, public and community and voluntary sector⁷⁶.

Suggested inquiry

- Following the austerity cuts and their significant impact on women's groups, what steps are being taken by the State to ensure that such organisations are receiving appropriate funding from the State, including the provision of secure, multi-annual funding arrangements?
- What measures are being implemented to increase the numbers of women in local and national politics in every community? In particular, what action is being taken to introduce maternity leave for members of the Irish Parliament and the allowance of childcare costs as an expenditure category for local councillors?
- The Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 introduced gender quotas into the Irish electoral system, and in 2023 the quota shifted from 30% to 40%. Are these targets being met? What funding is in place for local and regional women's caucuses? What measures has the State implemented to ensure this funding is sustainable and secure?
- Will the State commit to the allocation of funding and completion of a comprehensive gender and equality audit of all local, rural and community decision making structures?

Climate Justice

(Article 2, 3, 13)

- Gender, equality and poverty proof all climate policies and budgets
- Invest in public/active transport infrastructure, emphasising rural investment, safety and accessibility
- Increase research capacity to analyse the gendered effects of energy/transport poverty
- Invest in a Just Transition for Women, including the establishment of a statutory Just Transition Commission
- Deliver Energy Justice, increasing investment in retrofitting schemes, increasing the fuel allowance and expanding eligibility for the scheme, and setting clear targets for reducing energy poverty in the National Energy Poverty Action Plan

Current context

Women are more likely to be hardest hit by the impacts of climate emergency, in Ireland and globally⁷⁷. Women continue to have lower incomes, less wealth, fewer resources, all while shouldering the greater share of unpaid care responsibilities. Along with this, care work is key to how women experience their lives and the impacts of the climate crisis which affect energy and housing, food and transport. Women's input is essential in ensuring that future climate action does not worsen existing gender inequality. Women and marginalised communities must be supported to strengthen their resilience and capacity to respond to climate policies that disadvantage and exclude their voices and

⁷⁶ Jobs in the community sector, predominantly held by women, continue to be insecure and low paid. Women working in this sector do not experience similar benefits to their female peers in the public and private sectors. Despite the significant progress made to narrow the gender pay gap, women leaders in the voluntary, community and charitable sector are being paid an average of 5.67% less than their male counterparts.

⁷⁷ European Parliament (2015) The Gender Dimension of Climate Justice.

lived experiences. Climate breakdown, crisis mitigation and adaptation policies and associated investment have gender-differentiated impacts, and they can be powerful instruments for tackling social as well as environmental inequalities. All climate policies and investment should be gender, equality and poverty-proofed.⁷⁸ Additional measures must be actioned by the State including to invest in a just transition for women⁷⁹, invest in safe, accessible, low-carbon public and active transport infrastructure⁸⁰, and deliver energy justice⁸¹.

Suggested inquiry

- What measures is the State taking to fulfil its obligations relating to climate justice and in particular to achieve a feminist climate justice approach?

Please contact Kate Mitchell, Head of Development and Policy at +353 85 858 5209 or via email at Katem@nwci.ie for further information.

ENDS.

⁷⁸ Gender, equality and poverty-proof all climate policies and investment. Centre economic success on socio-economic and environmental equality and wellbeing. End direct and indirect state fossil fuel subsidies.

⁷⁹ Prioritise establishment and resourcing of the overdue statutory Just Transition Commission and centre the voices of women, incorporating issues such as the valuation of care work. Expand approaches and incentives to diversify, care for and restore climate and biodiversity friendly land use, farm practices and food production. Increase the agency of women in agriculture to fully participate through increased funding and equal access to resources and schemes such as Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) and LEADER.

⁸⁰ Invest in research into sustainable mobility to incorporate a gender analysis of public and active transport into transport planning and investment. Prioritise and increase investment in public transport and active travel infrastructure, with emphasis on rural transport and making transport safer, more accessible and low-carbon. Reduce the cost of public transport for people who struggle to access it.

⁸¹ Target and increase investment in retrofitting schemes and measures, prioritising those vulnerable to energy poverty, particularly lone parents, the Traveller and Roma communities, older women living alone, disabled women and carers. Increase the Fuel Allowance in line with cost-of-living increases and expand eligibility. Develop research capacity to analyse the gendered effects of energy poverty. Set clear targets for reducing energy poverty in the National Energy Poverty Action Plan.