



Mandate Trade Union submission to the Joint Committee on Gender Equality on recommendations made by the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

By Mandate Trade Union

Specific responses to the recommendations most relevant to Mandate Trade Union, including an outline of how those recommendations could be implemented.

Mandate Trade Union represents almost 30,000 workers in the retail, bar and administrative sectors across the Republic of Ireland. Our membership approximately 75% female. Our membership is also predominantly low paid and many experience insecure work and working patterns.

Of the 45 recommendations made by the Citizens' Assembly, Mandate has no objection to the vast majority and below you will find our position on each:

1. Recommendations 1-14: no objections
2. Recommendation 15 discusses the use of a Universal Income scheme. Mandate is not opposed to Universal Basic Income, per se. However, it makes more practical sense from an egalitarian perspective to adopt a Universal Basic Services model, which is partly acknowledged through many other elements of the report. For instance, in the Open Letter to the Oireachtas from the Citizens' Assembly, the call for "better public services and social protection [would] advance gender equality." They further state "we are prepared to support and pay higher taxes based on the principle of ability to pay." These are fundamental to Mandate's position on this issue. Taxation must be increased in order to pay for the public services our members need – including healthcare, housing, education, transport and tackling climate change. Diverting finances towards a Universal Basic Income scheme rather than improving universal services would be detrimental in our opinion.
3. Recommendation 16 states: "Address the specific needs of lone parents to incentivise and support them in accessing work or education, including provision of child and after-school care." We believe this recommendation needs to be amended to exclude the word "incentivise". In our experience, particularly in the retail sector, and particularly in relation to lone parents, to "incentivise" a worker to access work or education can mean cuts to incomes or services. No doubt this was not the intention of the Citizens' Assembly, and the subsequent use of the word "support" highlights this.
4. Recommendation 17: no objection
5. Recommendation 18 includes an "opt-out" clause for pensions, presumably focussed again on those who do not have the ability to pay. While we have no objection to an

opt-out clause for workers, there should be no opt-out clause for employers and we would encourage a pensions model similar to the Australian Superannuation System whereby the employer pays the mandatory element while the worker can top up through a voluntary option. We would also follow the Australian model whereby workers' representatives are elected onto the boards of superannuation funds and have a stronger say in how their investments are made, focusing on companies and industries that adhere to socially responsible and non-destructive practices.

6. Recommendation 19 calls for a Universal State Pension so that every resident of Ireland receives a pension upon reaching pension age. Mandate members work in very physical jobs and we would argue that the retirement age should be 65 with the employee having the option to extend beyond that.
7. Recommendations 20-22: no objections
8. Recommendation 23 calls for maternity, paternity and parental leave to be made available to all elected representatives. We would argue that all workers can avail of paid leave in the above respects. It should also be noted that our position is that all protected leave should apply, and that includes maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, parents leave, adoptive leave, and carer's leave.
9. Recommendations 24-31: no objections
10. Recommendation 32 calls on the State to set targets in legislation to reduce hourly gender pay gap (currently 14%) to 9% by 2025 and to 4% by 2030 with a view to eliminating it by 2035. We believe the government must be more ambitious and eliminating the gender pay gap can easily be achieved by 2030. Mandate would also argue that workers have a stronger say in the allocation of hours which becomes a barrier to many female workers increasing their incomes. This can be done in line with the EU Part Time Worker Directive which states that all workers should have the capacity to move from Full Time work to Part Time work, and vice versa.
11. Recommendations 33: no objections
12. Recommendation 34 calls for increases to the minimum wage to align it to the living wage by 2025. This alignment is supported by Mandate Trade Union but it should be to the Living Wage Technical Group's Living Wage, which is based on costs of living and not to an arbitrary figure based on a percentage of the median wage. Further, the implementation to the Living Wage should occur immediately.
13. Recommendation 35 (a) calls for establishing a legal right to collective bargaining to improve wages, working conditions and rights in all sectors. As a Union representing workers in some of the most anti-union workplaces in Ireland, we urge the rapid acceptance of this recommendation. The denial of workers to their right to collectively bargain leaves many workers, mostly female, with no ability to improve their incomes and means many languish in poverty while their employer's profit from this absence of human rights. Also as part of this recommendation (b) the Citizens' Assembly calls for more resourcing for the Workplace Relations Commission for more effective enforcement of current employment laws. We would urge stronger penalties on employers for breaches of employment legislation but we would also argue that inspections for workplace rights compliance, health and safety inspections should be done by trade unions also – through a Right to Access law similar to New Zealand, and this will cost the State nothing. Many countries around the world encourage their citizens to join trade unions, whether that's through the above model in New Zealand with Right to Access, or the Ghent system in

Scandinavian countries, we urge the government to incentivise workers to join their trade unions as a mechanism for achieving gender equality.

14. Recommendations 36-37: no objections

15. While Recommendation 38 calls for more supports to be made available to victims/survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, we believe the government should be more explicit and provide paid domestic violence leave to enable victims to escape vulnerable situations rather than relying on annual leave or unpaid leave.

16. Recommendations 39-45: no objections

We would like to thank the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality for offering Mandate Trade Union the opportunity to set out our position above. Our Union was the first private sector trade union in Ireland to accept women and men on an equal footing more than 120 years ago when it was founded. Since then we have campaigned for gender equality persistently and consistently and have had many successes along the way. Notwithstanding that, we, as a nation, still have much work to do in achieving true equality between women and men and we hope you will look positively upon our observations above.