

national collective of  
**community based  
women's  
networks**



**Submission by the  
National Collective of Community Based Women's  
Networks (NCCWN)  
to the  
Joint Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality**

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### **About NCCWN**

The National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN) works nationally and locally through its 17 Women's Community Development Projects based around the country, with 47 staff. NCCWN is funded through the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to support and advance equality for women experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation. The vision of the NCCWN is a just and equal society for women.

*The mission of the NCCWN is to empower and support community-based women who experience disadvantage and marginalisation as a result of barriers to participation and lack of opportunities. This will be achieved by our women's projects bringing about positive and sustainable changes to their lives and society using collective action and feminist approaches, with an emphasis on policy and challenging structures, attitudes and behaviours that marginalise women.*

### **Purpose of the Submission**

The National Collective of Community Based Women's Network (NCCWN) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality. The majority of women we work with experience disadvantage, oppression and marginalisation, sometimes in multiple forms, but specifically because of their gender. The purpose of this submission is to share the knowledge we have gathered over the 20 years of engagement that the NCCWN projects have had with women living in Ireland. We know first-hand the gender inequality and barriers women face and how it negatively impacts on women's lives. Additionally, our years of experience in working with women at a grassroots level has also given rise to identifying what steps are needed to improve and resolve the gender inequality women encounter on a daily basis. This submission is giving the women we work with a voice, a voice that will be heard at a national level and on a public platform. This submission highlights areas where change is badly needed but, crucially, gives recommendations on how that change can be implemented making Ireland a fairer place for all of its citizens.

### **Summary of the Submission**

As previously stated, during the consultation process many women found that the themes in the questionnaire had some important gaps. Below you will find some introductory information around these gaps. What is mentioned here by no means covers all of the issues women in Ireland face on a daily basis.

We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our recommendation that the Government introduces gender-responsive budgeting. Gender-responsive budgeting should be separate from equality budgeting. As discussed below, if gender-equality is to be normalised, an example should be set from the top.

The Government must also reinforce support and capacity building for gender-equality impact assessment within all Government bodies. Each Government department should go through a gender-equality assessment process, and the Government should request a gender-equality impact assessment with all proposals.

The submission also looks at the financial independence of women through addressing issues like employment conditions, childcare, transportation and housing.

NCCWN works with women who are:

- Single mothers
- Women out of employment long term
- Migrant women
- Elderly women
- Rural women
- Minority groups women

While all women experience gender inequalities, single mothers experience compounded effects. Expensive childcare means that they struggle to hold down employment. Single mothers who are migrants may not have access to any networks of support leaving them even more vulnerable. Transportation costs (and ineffectiveness) as well as income inequality means that women and their children are experiencing high degrees of deprivation and inequality.

A number of NCCWN Projects across the country provide childcare alongside other programmes and services. We welcome the childcare provision, as described in **Paragraph 8. “Ireland should:**

**(a) Over the next decade move to a publicly funded, accessible and regulated model of quality, affordable early years and out of hours childcare.**

**(b) Increase the State share of GDP spent on childcare, from the current 0.37% of GDP to at least 1% by no later than 2030 in line with the UNICEF target”.** However, until this has been implemented and the goal achieved, the government should support all efforts by community services, as a decade is a long time to wait, and a whole generation will grow up in poverty, deprivation and isolation if this isn’t addressed now.

To keep women in employment, we support the implementation of **Paragraph 25. “Work places should be required to develop, resource, implement and monitor gender-neutral recruitment and promotion policies and practices including:**

**(a) Specific policies to promote gender equality in leadership positions.**

**(b) A requirement to operate gender-sensitive and anti-discriminatory selection and promotions processes.**

**(c) Equal access to training, assignments and mentoring opportunities for all employees including part-time and remote workers”.** However, a comprehensive monitoring mechanism needs to be developed to observe how these requirements are being adhered to.

Furthermore, women who are in elected office, should be supported in the ways that is outlined in **Paragraph 23. “Improve family-friendly practices for all representatives elected to public office by:**

**(b) Providing flexible working options including remote working and voting and adjusting meeting times and rules to suit caring responsibilities (through legislation or constitutional amendment as required)”.** However, this should not be limited to women in elected office. As per our earlier recommendations, the introduction of flexible working conditions would allow more women to take up work. This could be done by allowing job sharing in positions, allowing staff members to work from home where appropriate. The introduction of a four-day work week and flexibility around starting and finishing times. Allow parents working outside the home the flexibility to leave work early on one day, if needs be, and make it up in the following days. In order for more mothers to

work outside of the home, there is also a vital need for significant changes to happen within the childcare and transportation.

We also welcome **Paragraphs 32. “The State should set targets in legislation to reduce the hourly gender pay gap (currently 14%) to 9% by 2025 and to 4% by 2030 with a view to eliminating it by 2035; and 34. Increase the minimum wage to align it with the living wage by 2025 while considering potential employment impacts on small businesses”**. Monitoring of the gender pay gap should be consistent in the methodology used so that reliable data can be provided, which is not currently being done. Women we work with, whether parents or not, experience high levels of deprivation and marginalisation, often having to perform unpaid carer duties. Many women working on low incomes find themselves in the poverty trap; if they receive a small pay rise they may lose out on much needed benefits, such as a medical card or rent supplement. This results in some women opting to not take the pay rise and staying on the lower income as they would be unable to manage on the little pay increase with the loss of additional allowances or supports.

Lack of public transport, along with the high cost of learning to driving and owning and maintaining a car can also act as a further barrier to women working, this is especially true for women living in rural areas. Moreover, lack of appropriate public transport throughout rural Ireland can completely exclude some women particularly women with disabilities from taking part in society and gaining employment and independence.

The minimum wage should provide a living-wage to everyone, including single women. An increase in minimum wage by itself will not address the breaking-point situation with accommodation in Ireland, and especially in urban areas. Women we work with are experiencing stress and many are on the verge of homelessness. Housing is a human right and should be a key point in the recommendations, not just for victims/survivors of violence but for all women. Derelict and disused housing should be examined and addressed. *Currently, the recommendations don't hold a single mention of housing.*

Women who have been out of employment long-term have a number of challenges they need to overcome and that we work on with them. Access to childcare and transportation have already been mentioned above. Other issues impacting women's return to work is often education. NCCWN provides a variety of educational programmes that focus on raising women's self-esteem, provide networking opportunities, as well as help transition to formal third-level education. Our STEPS programme helps women into gainful employment. These programmes are extremely impactful and should be offered to women across the country. While **Paragraph 16. “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”** addresses the issue on the surface, all women need more formal and informal education opportunities which are mindful of their current emotional, mental and economic needs.

For many women, returning to work is also a social and cultural norms issue. We support the immediate deletion of Article 41.2 as outlined in **Paragraph 3. “Article 41.2 of the Constitution should be deleted and replaced with language that is not gender specific and obliges the State to take reasonable measures to support care within the home and wider community”**. Women and men should be equality encouraged to participate and contribute equally in all spheres of society, be it the labour force or the home.

Other recommendations that impact the social and cultural norms which have an impact on the perception of women and their role in society are **Paragraphs 24, 26, 27, 28 and 38**. Women we work with have expressed that gender norms and stereotypes are imprinted on them from birth and go on well into adulthood. Some of the most prominent examples given were:

- The colours assigned to babies, and the toys given to children growing up
- The subject choices in 'single-sex' secondary schools – girl's schools offering home economics and boys schools offering wood or metal work but not the other way around
- "Boys will be boys" – allowing boys to get away with bad behaviour, the same behaviour a girl would not get away with
- Girls shouldn't whistle, say bad words or climb trees – but boys can
- Toxic masculinity and the pressure put on boys to 'be strong and not show emotions' - Boys shouldn't play with dolls or like fashion – men always have to be in charge
- Only mothers want to stay at home with new babies – current maternity and paternity leave puts all of the early care responsibility on new mothers and leaves out father's
- Having 'mom' and baby/child groups – again leaving dad's left out and mother's feeling the burden of care
- Women are seen as more emotional and less logical than men – men should not be emotional
- The career choices women and men are expected to make – women should not be in jobs dominated by men (e.g.: mechanics/pilots) and men should not be in jobs dominated by women (e.g. childcare worker/nurse)
- Men should be the 'breadwinner' of the household
- A woman should care for the children and 'look after the home'
- The media objectifies women and reinforces all of the above tropes.

In 2019 research conducted by Safe Ireland, *Gender Matters*<sup>1</sup>, around gender equality and gender roles found:

- *Almost two out of three people (64%) responded that women tend to respond to things emotionally while men respond to things more logically*
- *More men (24%) hold the view that men should not admit to having their feelings hurt*
- *26% of young people aged 16 to 25 think that a man should act as head of the household with one in four (25%) expressing the view that men should earn most money to support a family*
- *20% (1 in 5) believe that it is embarrassing for a man to have a job that is usually done by women<sup>2</sup>.*

Discrimination, stereotyping and other forms of gender bias is experienced by Traveller women, LGBTQ+ community, migrant women, women with mental and physical disabilities, and survivors of abuse, who often experience re-traumatisation during medical check-ups, legal proceedings and when exposed to media reporting. The sexist culture needs to change, and an example should be set at all levels of society.

The Government should, without hesitation, proclaim itself a feminist government setting the example we all need to move away from the religious and sexist past.

Addressing cultural norms can also be achieved through women's participation in political life, and we welcome **Paragraph 20. "By the end of 2022:**

**(a) Extend the gender quota for party candidates at general elections to local elections, elections to the Seanad and European Parliament elections and review every 5 years.**

**(b) Increase penalties for parties that do not meet the statutory gender quotas.**

**(c) The 30% threshold should be increased to 40% for women (and 40% for men) for all elections".**

NCCWN Projects work with women to help them into leadership roles through personal development, communication skills and strategies, understanding of Council and Governmental structures, environmental impact affecting women, sustainable development goals and a supportive space. In order to reach the proposed goals, more such opportunities must become available to women across the country, including in rural areas. It is also critical that this is extended to under-represented groups not just affluent communities.

We think **Paragraph 22. "Public funding to cultural, sports, arts and media organisations should be contingent on:**

**(a) A quota of 30% representation of women, and of men, on their Governing bodies by 2025 and 40% by 2030.**

**(b) Published plans to advance gender equality in their organisations.**

**(c) Annual reporting on progress towards agreed quotas on gender representation and funding"** should be expanded. The representation of women should be extended not only within Governing bodies but at all levels of an organisation or industry. Anecdotally, within the Arts Sector in Ireland more women appear to be working as Directors and Curators with the majority of men being the 'career artist'. Reportedly, this is due to the burden of care being on women when they have families and the less stable nature of working as an artist, than say, an office position in the art world. Women also express an overwhelming invisibility within the arts and a constant request to perform for little or no remuneration.