

Unite response to the Recommendations made by the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

General

1. Unite the Union represents women working in all sectors of the economy from hospitality to financial services. We welcome this opportunity to respond to the recommendations made by the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality. Our response should be read in conjunction with Unite's March 2020 [submission to the Assembly](#), which highlighted some of the issues of concern to our members and working women in general.
2. It is Unite's view that Increasing women's labour force participation rates, tackling gender occupational segregation and putting more money into the pockets of women workers both by addressing the gender pay gap and ending the scourge of low pay would benefit not only individual women and their families, but also the communities in which they live and the economy as a whole.
3. All the evidence indicates that collective bargaining raises wages and improves working conditions in general, and disproportionately benefits women by addressing low pay, raising overall wage levels and shrinking the gender pay gap. Unite therefore particularly welcomes Recommendation 35, to establish a legal right to collective bargaining and to increase the resourcing of the Workplace Relations Commission to improve enforcement of current employment laws.

Commentary on specific Recommendations

Care

4. Unite **welcomes Recommendations 4 to 12**. We note that implementation of **Recommendation 4** (improving the terms and conditions of those in full-time employment as carers) would be facilitated by ensuring that carers have the right to bargain collectively.
5. With regard to **Recommendation 6** (carers' pensions), Unite endorses the view of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions that the paid contribution condition for the State Pension (Contributory) should be abolished for applicants providing long-term care.

Social Protection

6. In respect of **Recommendations 13 to 19**, Unite reiterates the call made in our Submission to the Assembly for an increased focus on the interaction of employment and social protection policies, especially for groups most at risk of poverty such as lone parents.
7. With regard to pensions (**Recommendations 17 to 19**), Unite urges that the commitment made by the previous Government to benchmark the State Pension payment rate at 34% of average annual earnings be delivered on.

Leadership in Politics, Public Life and the Workplace

8. With regard to **Recommendation 25** (that workplaces be required to develop, resource, implement and monitor gender-neutral recruitment and promotion policies and practices), Unite notes that implementation of this Recommendation would be facilitated by extending the Public Sector Duty pursuant to Section 42 of the 2014 Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act to the private sector.

Pay and Workplace Conditions

9. Unite endorses the targets proposed in **Recommendation 32** for reducing the gender pay gap. While Unite welcomes enactment of the 2021 Gender Pay Gap Information Act, it remains our view that the timeline for reducing the threshold number of employees to which the legislation applies is too long, and that there should be a phased reduction to 20 employees rather than the 50 employees currently provided for in the legislation.
10. Unite welcomes **Recommendation 34** to increase the minimum wage to align it with the living wage by 2025.
11. Unite strongly supports **Recommendation 35** to establish a legal right to collective bargaining and increase the resourcing of the Workplace Relations Commission to improve enforcement of current employment laws. As an initial step, Unite recommends that the Irish Government support the proposed EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages, which would require member states to take action to increase to 70 per cent the number of workers who benefit from collective bargaining.
12. With regard to **Recommendation 36** (access to flexible working), Unite endorses the recent concerns expressed by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions regarding the 2022 Right to Request Remote Working Bill which is weighted in favour of the employer and fails to guarantee fair procedure while balancing employer and employee needs. Unite argues that the legislation must extend the right to request remote working to all workers, including agency and temporary workers, and that the process of applying must be made less onerous. Employers should be mandated to respond to requests within four weeks, and to justify any refusals on objective grounds that relate to the real needs of the business and are appropriate and proportionate having regard to all the circumstances of the business and the employee. The legislation must also provide workers with a meaningful appeal process providing a right to challenge the substantive grounds for an employer's refusal.
13. With regard to improving gender equality in the workplace, Unite would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our call, made most recently in our Submission to the Review of the Equality Acts, for the Employment Equality Acts (1998 – 2015) be amended to entitle all employees to select an equality representative to represent them on equality matters with their employer, promote diversity within the workplace, and ensure that workers are fully informed regarding their rights under the Acts, analogous to the provisions governing safety representatives in Section 25 of the 2005 Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act.

ENDS – March 2022