

## **Pauline Cullen Questions**

### **Gender Discrimination**

- **How can the Assembly create real change so that employers are not gender biased when filling new roles and accountable?**

Many submissions made recommendations that included training for employers to address gender discrimination. This would include what is known as gender unconscious or diversity and equality training. This kind of training is used by many public sector organisations and large corporations for staff at all levels, but especially for those who may be in a position where they must evaluate other employees or are placed in charge of recruitment. This training when comprehensive and consistently applied can help make visible taken for granted gender stereotypes that influence employer decision making about how to design jobs and whom to recruit. Trade Unions and women's organisations have specifically argued that employers need to be held accountable to the existing employment equality legislation (Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015) especially when it comes to treating all applicants fairly and not discriminating against women in particular when they take maternity leave or return after a period of leave. Other suggestions in the submissions included measures such as gender-blind application processes where people's gender would not be disclosed in their application materials. The assembly can make recommendations that might ask to strengthen existing legal protections that employees have and/or suggest that initiatives like gender quotas be introduced in some sectors to improve the number of female employees in specific professions and/or men in other female dominated professions. If employers commit to equality and diversity training and are rewarded for good practices and/or sanctioned for poor ones this can help to address gender bias in recruitment. Making sure that those who do the hiring are also a diverse group of people can also help in making sure that gender bias does not play a role in hiring.

### **Work**

- **Could you comment on the adverse effects of the work/life balance for both men and women**

Submissions from individuals and groups were consistent in outlining the constraints that gender segregated work (having jobs mostly considered women's jobs or men's jobs) and the organisation of work according to a male breadwinner model placed on people's capacity to balance life and work. Many jobs assume that a worker is available for long hours and at times that do not fit with the school day or other caring responsibilities. When flexibility is offered by employers, testimony of individuals and organisations indicated that this often suited the employer more than the employee. Long hours and after hours work pressures of deadlines to meet targets, financial obligations, and family

responsibilities can be difficult to reconcile especially if both parents work or have other care duties. Submissions cited research that indicated deteriorating mental and physical health amongst women and men who experience these pressures as a form of work life conflict. Because men are still more likely to work longer hours outside the home, the data suggests that even with changes to ideas and practices associated with male parenting, men will spend less time with children and on unpaid work in the home. Individual submissions from men did emphasise that fathers did want to spend more time with their children and support their female partners in returning to work and advancing their careers, but that their jobs did not allow for that. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) study in 2019 on this issue was cited by many submissions. It detailed how women still do most of the unpaid care work in Ireland. Balancing full time work demands alongside care work can suppress women's career advancement but also reduce their time relative to men's for leisure and rest. Long work hours whether in demanding well paid work, or exhausting low paid work, create significant burdens for many people seeking time for care work, self-care and or to contribute to their communities.

- **How can we tackle the discrimination against part-time workers?**

Submissions particularly from Trade Unions and organisations representing lone parents focused on how best to protect part time workers (who are often women) from discrimination. A central recommendation from both of these sectors was for stronger employment rights for part time workers, and also better regulation of existing rights. Ireland did reform some of its short time working laws that aimed at abolishing zero hour or just in time contracts (workers get a call to come in when it is busy or are sent home when it is quiet). This has worked to an extent, but in work such as hotels, retail and cleaning (largely dominated by women and sometimes where agency work is evident) it can be harder for part-time workers to experience parity in conditions with their fulltime co-workers. Many submissions suggested collective bargaining rights for all workers might improve the situation of part-time workers. Other suggestions include a 4-day working week option, a regularisation of the option to work part-time and or gain access to a 'participation' income linked to service to the community or society.

### **Parental Leave**

- **Have there been suggestions for how can we encourage more men to take up parental leave options and ensure they won't face discrimination at work for doing so? I've heard of too many men being made redundant in the pandemic, after taking paternity or parental leave.**

Submissions cited research that indicates that men have very low rates of taking paternity and or parental leave. The length of leave, payment levels, flexibility, financing, eligibility rules and coordination with childcare services

all interact with perceived 'fatherhood penalty' that keep these rate low. Some employers understand the value of such leave for fathers as an attractive incentive in hiring workers, but this may be most relevant to high paid jobs and some public sector work. Individual submissions from some men did underline this concern, stating that employers were perceived as unsupportive of their male employees taking paternity and parental leave. Solutions to this that featured in some submissions included 'educating' employers in the benefits of extending leave to fathers and or making the state compensate employers who provided such leave. Norway and Sweden (and other Nordic countries) use a father's quota for parental leave in earmarking part of the leave for the father, a benefit that is forfeited if not used by him. This offers strong incentives for fathers to use the leave and has made this choice less controversial over time for employers. If men are made redundant because of taking leave this is grounds for a taking legal action. Stronger employment protections and for some free legal aid to advance a claim may help male workers advance a complaint on these grounds.

### **Male Health and Work**

- **No mention was made of male health and work. Is the male the unrecognised gender?**

Some submissions did indicate that male dominated work can pose risks to health. In these submissions, it was suggested that women would not like these jobs (these included sanitation, construction, agricultural or mining work). Other submissions stated that all physically hazardous work should be better regulated and better paid regardless of what gender is most likely to take it on. Submissions from fathers in particular drew attention to how long hours at work and long commutes meant they suffered work related stress and missed out on valuable time with their families. Please see the full submissions for more on this.

### **What is ILO 190 - International Labour Organization - C190 - Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019?**

The ILO has established new global standards aimed at ending violence and harassment in the world of work. The adoption of Convention No. 190 and a related Recommendation No. 206 recognizes the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment. For more information on the Convention see here:

[https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_711891/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_711891/lang--en/index.htm)