

Care Meeting
16th January 2021
Meeting on Care

Chair

Hi everybody, we're now in the feedback session following the session of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality on Saturday the 16th of January and we're going to hear from one rapporteur from each of our breakout groups on the conclusions and the topics discussed by their breakout groups. As usual we are recording this feedback session and we'll upload it to our website so that there's a record of the discussions. I want to start by thanking each of you for agreeing to act as spokesperson for your group and for presenting its findings. I'm going to call on the rapporteurs of the 11 groups starting with group 1.

Breakout Group 1

So first of all, in relation to the early childhood issue we started talking about the issue of cost and it seemed to be big. How much it costs for parents to have their children looked after and one of the immediate things we came up with that would need maybe some kind of recommendations looking at the area of insurance. We're conscious that insurance costs have gone up a lot both for early childhood education after school education etc. so the government might take a look at decreasing insurance in the intervening period.

There would be support within the group there's a lot of support for the idea of a publicly funded early childhood education and care system as opposed to a private one but that if that meant taxes had to be raised well so be it so but there was definitely support for that idea. In order to provide parents with the choice necessary we felt that the whole area the length of parental leave both maternity and paternally needs to be extended and that the actual what should be considered is actually payment for home parents who opt to stay at home to where the children. Payment for those people actual payment should be considered.

In the second half of the day we were all very impressed with the presentations made by the three speakers during the afternoon telling their personal stories and they were very deeply felt and our sympathies go to a lot of the people who spoke but again the issue of pay came up and we felt that the increasing all supports and salaries in the field of care would be one of the main ways that gender equity could be ensured. The pay is vital in terms of attracting and most international studies have proven that. Men are attracted to things that have higher salaries or higher rates of pay.

The issue of education also raised the importance of the education system presenting care as being an appropriate work for men. There were suggestions that there might be programs a transition year period in the end we came down in favour of problems that all age groups that younger children need to be made aware of this and that one of the issues is that it's not enough to just say the education system needs to put things in place. The big issue is the presentation of men and the roles that men play in society even in picture books for early start children younger and younger children the younger you get in this idea the better so early education.

We agreed very much one phrase made a deep impression on us nobody should have to fight for support one of the speakers said so in response to that our group were in favour of the removal of means testing for support, that the movement to a social model of care rather than medical one currently in place for particularly disabled people, the fair deal needs to be made much more expansive to, Brendan Courtney brought that issue up and we certainly would be in favour of that. And we would hope then that more specific recommendations will be available to you in the actual minutes that were taken at the meeting. That's it okay thank you.

Chair

Thank you very much BG1 that was very clear and I certainly agree with you on the impact of the personal videos you would you'd have to be made of stone not to react to what people were telling us so I think again that shows how powerful it is for us to bring the personal experiences to the Assembly. Now from breakout group two. I feel a bit like the euro-vision song contest could we have the verdict of the breakout group number two jury please.

Breakout Group 2

Our recommendations from group two we seem to have concentrated more on the disability and the older person in this one and as far as child care was concerned it has come up before like affordability brought in under public ownership and maybe upskilling of staff on the job but that was basically all we came up on that. But as is there an inequality in the care, we did decide there was definitely an inequality.

The group noted that a majority of care is given by women and to improve the terms and conditions take out means testing for full-time carers and full pension rights for full-time carers was noted by our group. And standard statutory pension rates also. By improving these situations for carers and we note that then maybe more men will take up the care role either in paid or unpaid positions and the Government has a duty of care to all citizens we noted that as well. On the respite end of it, respite needs to be increased and made available to more people in need of respite because it's not fit for purpose. And review the fair deal scheme and make it fit for purpose to include maybe home care and for people in residential if they want to move back home and not be in a residential situation or independent living. And on a side note we noted, we ran out of time so this is really just my view but optimal protocol needs to be brought in ASAP. It's a basic human right for people with disability and until it's enacted on all these other rights for people with disabilities is just hearsay and that was just a side note from our group thank you. It was a really enjoyable day.

Chair

Thank you very much BG2 it's good to hear it was enjoyable as well as challenging. So now we come to break out group three if you can give us your findings please.

Breakout Group 3

So the point one we taught as a group we feel as though carers in Ireland are undervalued. We feel there needs to be a higher pay recognition. On one of the videos think of care alliance said there's 10 billion being saved by the State and by home care so we feel this should really filter back into services pay and support for carers. We also feel there should be a formal voice or a formal voice for carers and there should be tax relief on fees paid for childcare on a per household basis rather than an individual basis and child care should be publicly funded rather than private. We also feel there should be a streamlining and cross-linkage of services past the age of 18.

And we feel there should be more flexible hours in relation to child care to move away from the kind of office nine to five hours coming off a couple of the videos it was it was stressed that some people do need around the clock 24-hour care so we feel it should move to a more flexible environment and an improved home and life working balance.

Chair

Thanks very much BG3 that was very clear and succinct. Next I'm going to invite BG4.

Breakout Group 4

As a group our point number one was a proper education structure brought in at the preschool and child care sector this should be regulated by the government with nationwide inspections a nationwide curriculum and a career development for the educators at this level. Two an educational campaign to redefine the carer and the responsibilities as well as to raise awareness and respect for the job among the public and to initiate conversations.

Three to move from a privatized care system to a public funded one for both child care and the care system that would result in an increased investment from the State and have a system where all carers are assessed in a way that ensures they are not penalized financially for being a carer. Four the need to establish trade unions for both the child care and the care sector in order to advance equality, better pay, better work conditions and to protect all workers including migrant workers. Our final point was to ensure the voices of child care workers, carers and those who receive care are included in all policy decisions especially with regards to the transition from childhood care to adulthood. Thank you.

Chair

Thanks very much BG4 that was very clear. Breakout group five.

Breakout Group 5

Hi so there's going to be some repetition here I think from all the groups points. So the main gap that we identified in child care provision was the affordability and lack of public funding so the group decided then we would suggest a movement towards a publicly funded and managed system and also agree with the recommendation that one percent of GDP should be spent on the child care and early education sector.

Our second point would be improved pay and conditions for care staff so that's for child care, elderly and disabled and also for home care providers. This would place the job into a higher regard. The improved conditions would include basic living wage, a pay scale with promotion opportunities and benefits so that the workers are offered a sustainable career path which is more likely to attract men to the profession then as well. And we also made the note that home care allowances should not be means tested which came up in a few of the groups as well.

Third point was the extension of paid parental leave for both genders and the provision of publicly funded child care classes for the introduction of new parents to basic child care needs and that would allow them then to be more heavily involved in the first year of the child's life. We came up with this idea when we realized that you know you're trained to be a nurse, you're trained to be a doctor, you're trained to be a teacher, parents don't get training as carers even though that they do provide the majority of the care and the majority of care is provided at home.

So the next point then is integration of non-gendered societal roles from an early age especially around the area of care so this might include say lesson plan resources for primary school-aged children, showing role models of both genders in various jobs with the focus on care type jobs so that would be teaching, nursing and carers for child care, disabled people, elderly people. Also later on with the introduction of a TY program focusing specifically on normalizing the provision of care and this might encourage progression to third level and the pursuit of a career in the area again putting that career in higher regard for both men and women.

And then the final shorter point that we had was possibility of introducing gender quotas to enable shared care in sectors that I've mentioned before so that would be teaching, nursing and child care so the choice is there as well for maybe disabled or elderly people if they are more comfortable with the male carer that the choice is there for them.

Chair

Thank you very much BG5 again some very interesting suggestions there some new ones and some reinforcing the messages that are coming from the other groups so this is exactly why the feedback session is so useful. I'm moving on now to feedback group six.

Breakout Group 6

Okay so feedback from group six. The recommendations so recommendation number one is similar to previous recommendations is to introduce a publicly funded universal child care system to cover the early years of child care which also contributions from parents on a mean test basis. Recommendation number two was to introduce a publicly funded universal

healthcare system which is easily accessible to everybody. Number three was to develop and improve career development opportunities for both childcare workers and carers and to introduce a payment structure which would include consideration of the living wage and access to universal pension in order to demonstrate the value that carers do for the State. The next recommendation then was in relation to the extension of income support so the recommendation was to increase income support family leave to cover the first two years of a child's life and make legislative amendments to ensure that people parenting alone can access the same level of support by making parents leave transferable. And one member in our group put forward the recommendation to carry out bi-annual survey on time used to track unpaid work. Thank you.

Chair

Thank you very much BG6 that was extremely clear. Now BG7.

Breakout Group 7

Good afternoon everyone, breakout group seven would like to look at the introduction of an ombudsperson to look at the gender equality to give them a clear role by looking at the existing policies and make sure they're being done. We'd also like the expert group to expand the remit when working at moving away from the market model to the public funded managed child care. We'd like to see that maybe the possibility of integrating these public funded child cares with schools this might help lower costs, insurance, the building overheads and regulations. It could also further clear progression there'll be more facilities and maybe the risk redistribution of staff as needed throughout the day. We'd like the government to commit on the one percent GDP towards childcare. We'd like to see the utilization of all levels of the national framework of qualifications to advance careers and to help to outline career paths in child care maybe to a universal job title so that this advancement is more clear prior to starting the role. More recognition of carers with universal pension entitlements and as recommendation by Ursula Barry increased social protection support for carers and those receiving care, benchmark payments at 35% of average earnings and to allow those seeking part-time work to access job seekers payments. That is it.

Chair

That's great thanks very much BG7, again interesting to hear where the same points are coming through and where there are different nuances. Turning now to break out group eight.

Breakout Group 8

We have a number of points as well so like the first point is we would agree with the recommendation that the government to increase funding to 0.6% within five years to one percent within ten years with it to be provided publicly and ideally co-located with national schools to help with overhead costs and parents to contribute based on affordability. Also with

one department one body responsible for the inspection authorization and oversight of child care. The second point then is in respect and support of respect and support families in their choice of how care is provided at home by extended family or external parent's guardians to be supported during this time with State support and further and future pension, pensions etc. not to be negatively impacted.

And then in relation to elderly and disability provision of suitable housing facilities for older people and those with disabilities to live independently or with supports within their communities so again like step down housing, individual units so that free up housing for others as well as part of that. And then a new model of care to move from dependency to flexible care supports to be put in place with a seamless transition from child services to adult services I think that was part of the one of the videos there where there seemed to be a significant issue between moving from child supports to adult supports and for both carers and child care workers to develop a career structure in line with either nurses or teachers as a percentage of that. Thank you.

Chair

Thanks very much BG8 again very useful to hear all of that. Now BG9.

Breakout Group 9

Hi point number one was public funded and managed early child care and this is to be linked in with the education system so the children can access to support say the psychology and stuff like that needed and that the early educators can access the same contracts and wages as a primary school teacher. Point number two was continuity of services from birth right through the end of life this is a relation of care of the disability. Point number three was educate children and expose them to males carrying out roles that were predominantly female and focus on transition year students. And point number four was carers allowance removed or carers allowance increased, remove means testing and remove the amount of hours that carers can work. And finally point number five was take a look at countries with ideal structures in place and investigate if we can replicate the same here.

Chair

Okay would be nice if we all become blonde by following the Scandinavian model perhaps but we'll see. Thanks very much BG9 again very interesting. Next we have breakout group 10.

Breakout Group 10

Hi thanks for a really great day and it's been great recommendations there. The recommendations from our group have been the government to relax means testing criteria to become eligible for care funding. Next point was the government to regulate licensing with regards to child care one being a hybrid care service model with government and private

services working together in partnership. Not all in the group agreed with this option others felt it was more of a public service option would be better and that maybe the range of service models could be made available. Number three to promote equality in the care and disability sector that terms and conditions salaries and facilities for staff both for both men and women are equal and pay equality with regards to work done and level of education as well. And our fourth was that there is inequality regarding carers in Ireland's system of care for older people and people with disabilities and prioritizing care supports for carers at home so they were ours. Thanks for a great day.

Chair

Okay thanks very much BG10 and waiting very patiently to tell us about breakout group 11.

Breakout Group 11

Yeah we all really enjoyed the day too and agree with what Michael said around that video being so impactful and you know we caught everybody's breath really we almost didn't know what to say. Within our group we felt we strongly felt that there is a crisis in care and that you know Covid has highlighted that and we really need to seize the moment now and to encourage a shift in attitudes around cultures around care and how we value care as a society so here are our recommendations.

Our first recommendation is that we have more investment so more public funding but also more public intervention in the management of care and the State should have the ultimate responsibility around caring. Number two we need to make caring more attractive as a career and this would involve paying people in the sector more in the sectors more providing a career structure. One member who used the term make it a valuable career of substance with a valid career path. Also we felt that maybe there could be awareness campaigns to encourage people to come into the caring professions and there was a feeling especially that there was a need for a need for men especially when into care for the elderly and the care for people with particular needs and so we really needed and wanted to get more men involved.

Our third recommendation was around promotion and it was a something that one member felt very strongly on was the promotion of men's health issues and that it needs to be tackled in the same way as women's health has been. He raised concerns around mental health but also life expectancy and some of us did wonder I guess if men were given the opportunity to take on more caring roles would there be that kind of discrepancy in life expectancy. Number four we wanted more regulation in terms of how money is used and where it's going in the care sector we noted that you know it really should be about quality of care rather than profits and one of our members is involved in caring industry and she noted that there were in some areas were very high profit levels and this didn't seem right this didn't sit right well with us so quality of care is most important and it should not be profit driven.

And our final and fifth recommendation was that care should be person-centered not service centered and we need for there's a need for flexible care options in childcare but also care for people with different needs and also for care for older people and that would be flexible to the needs of individuals and to the needs of families to allow for what we heard about more home

care options or you know caring for more in a kind of a blended setting and that it would also allow for you know respite hours so that caring for somebody in the home would be a viable option. That was our that was what we talked about. Thanks very much.

Chair

Thank you very much BG11 and to everybody and who has taken on the extra responsibility of being a rapporteur several of you said it was a most enjoyable and interesting day and I can just tell that from the kind of recommendations that you must have had very interesting discussions and I'm glad to see that you used all of the material that we gave you as well. That's really I think when the citizens assembly is at its best so we will digest all of this now together with what will come in from the surveys that you're going to respond to and it will all go into the mix of trying to work out what how do we tease out the options for recommendations that we will discuss then later on and as I said next time around we'll be discussing and the constitutional issues. But I want to thank you all very much for what I think has been a very interesting harvest of ideas. Interesting to see how many groups came to the same conclusions also to see the nuances and some of the original ideas that came from one group or the other so even though I haven't been in the breakout groups I can sense the sense of commitment to finding new solutions and also to seizing the opportunity that we now have to try to design a different and better system for the future so this is where I think we will be pitching our recommendations in the months to come. So we'll release you now to what's left of your Saturday afternoon and you'll be getting your videos for the next session within the next 10 days or so be on the lookout for them and again thank you all very much. Stay safe in the meantime and I look forward to seeing you all again in hail and hearty and ready for more work on Saturday the 13th of February so thanks very much. Take care now.