

NWC Key Recommendations



1. Value care

- A referendum on Article 41.2 of the Constitution to replace it with an inclusive and gender-neutral acknowledgement of the value of care

2. Provide public care services across the lifespan

- Public model of Early Years and school age childcare
- Universal social care services for disabled and older people
- Decent pay and conditions for the care workforce

National Women's Council - Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality: Care

Value care

The issue of care is central to women's equality. NWC has long advocated for the need to recognise and value care in our society. Care work is essential to the common good, yet its hugely undervalued. Women continue to do more care and unpaid work in the home, even while working in paid employment.¹

While COVID-19 has seen a renewed focus on the importance of care to a functioning economy and society and the value of giving and receiving care to our wellbeing, it has reinforced gendered patterns of care - women undertook more care for family or friends and women were more likely to report childcare issues or difficulty working from home because of family responsibilities.²

Longstanding societal and cultural expectations and deeply engrained patriarchal norms continue to tell us that care is 'women's work' and our Constitution continues to enshrine such notions. Article 41.2, which refers to a woman's 'life in the home', is sexist and discriminatory. The Article does not reflect the diversity of experiences that women have in modern Ireland; it does not recognise the work which men currently do as carers, nor recognise that men have responsibilities to be carers; it includes a definition of family which does not reflect the reality or diversity of families in Ireland. It presumes a male breadwinner, two parent household where 'woman' stays at home and does not take into account the reality of lone parents, LGBTQI+ families, or blended families.

Article 41.2 has not led to recognition of the value of care work in society. In fact, it provided the cultural and Constitutional background for the marriage bar, the legacy of which we are still dealing with today.

Unpaid care work is often invisible as our society places increasing emphasis on the role of paid work to the exclusion of other forms of work. Amending Art 41.2 provides an opportunity to recognise care in a more gender neutral and inclusive way. When the members of the 2013 Constitutional Convention considered this issue, 88% choose to amend or modify and only 12% favoured a straight deletion. NWC proposes the following statement for consideration by the Assembly:

"The State recognises that care provided by the home, family and community gives society a support without which the common good cannot be achieved"³

Acknowledging care in this way gives recognition to the work done by women and men, every day in Ireland. It invites men to take on more responsibility for care. It extends the definition of care to include care outside the home and in the community and confirms that the State will seek to support carers.

NWC recommends:

- Hold a referendum on Article 41.2 to replace the Article with an inclusive and gender-neutral acknowledgement of the value of care

¹ Russell, H., Grotti, R., McGinnity, F. & Privalko, I. (2019). Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland. IHREC & ESRI

² CSO (2020). The Employment and Life effects of COVID-19 survey

³ The NWCI commissioned a barrister and lecturer in Constitutional Law, Dr. Alan Brady to produce a comprehensive legal analysis of changes in the Constitution which would benefit women, including amending this article. The full document is available at <http://bit.ly/nwci-constitution>

Provide public care services at all stages of the lifecycle

Recent research shows that people in Ireland do more unpaid caring work than anywhere else in the EU.⁴ One of the key factors underpinning this high level of unpaid care is our underinvestment in public services and our reliance on private services. As a fundamental document that sets out Ireland's laws and values, symbolic recognition of the equal role of women and men in care in our Constitution is important **but the most effective way to tackle persistent gender inequalities in care is sustained investment in public services.** The gender gap in care is narrowest in Scandinavian countries where efforts to achieve gender equality have been supported by state investment in social infrastructure.⁵

- **Early Years Education and Care services**

There are well documented deficits in our provision of early years education and care. Affordability impacts most acutely on lone parents, with 60% unable to afford childcare services.⁶ Ireland has among the most expensive fees in the European Union while Early Years professionals (predominantly women) are some of the lowest paid in the economy - 6 out of 10 workers earn less than the Living Wage.⁷

- **Care across the lifespan - Investment in universal, social care services**

The absence of a sufficient state response to supporting disabled and older people to live autonomous lives, leaves family carers, predominantly women, to provide care and forces disabled and older people into a position of dependence on family members. Homecare has been progressively privatised in Ireland to a largely unregulated industry, with high fees, varied quality and poor terms and conditions for workers. Care workers are often migrant women, vulnerable to precarious work and exploitation.

Investment in universal, social care services, such as homecare and Personal Assistance services, are vital to ensure older people and disabled people have the necessary supports to reduce dependence on family and friends and to maintain a private life with dignity.

- **The need for a public model**

Investment in a public model rather than dependence on the market to provide services, is crucial. In a private model, there is a conflict between making services affordable for the public and having good pay and working conditions for care workers. Across Europe, the most important factor in lowering the pay and conditions of care workers is the extent to which care is marketised.⁸ In countries with public early years education and care, services are more affordable, accessible and of higher quality.⁹

NWC recommends:

- Invest in a public model of early years education and care that provides affordability for parents and decent pay and working conditions for the workforce
- Invest in universal, social care services that provide choice and independence for disabled and older people and decent pay and conditions for care workers

⁴ TASC (2020). Cherishing all Equally: The Care Economy TASC

⁵ Russell, H., Grotti, R., McGinnity, F. & Privalko, I. (2019). Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland. IHREC & ESRI

⁶ SVP (2019). Working, parenting and struggling? An analysis of the employment and living conditions of one parent families in Ireland

⁷ Pobal (2019). Annual early years sector profile report 2018/2019.

⁸ TASC (2020). Cherishing all Equally: The Care Economy

⁹ Oireachtas Library and Research Service (2020). Public provision of early childhood education: an overview of the international evidence