

PUBLIC CONSULTATION - CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON GENDER EQUALITY 2020

QUESTIONNAIRE

CA30165

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Theme 1: Gender norms and stereotypes

Gender norms and stereotypes as barriers to gender equality

Fixed ideas about what women and men should do in the home or at work are learned by girls and boys in early childhood and throughout their lives. These ideas or gender stereotypes affect their choices in school and as they enter careers and contribute to a lack of progress toward equality between women and men. This limits not only the jobs that women and men consider or are available to them, but also can exclude women and men from social roles and tasks.

- Please outline what you see as the key barriers/ obstacles and challenges to gender equality under this theme in law, policy and practice.

It is the most natural thing in the world for women and men to want a family and it is this which lies at the heart of civil society. However, too often, careers and working life seems to be designed against family life in practice, with women too often bearing the brunt of this inequality. The law is trying to keep up, as evidenced by parental leave statutes for both men and women, however, the challenge is to provide quality child care services staffed by people with high-quality professional qualifications and paid properly so as to attract the best and the brightest (maybe praimry education associate degrees?). This needs to be provided to everyone in the state across the board, so that single parents can have the same supports available to them as working parents.

- Please identify the steps to be taken to address the issues raised and who should address them (e.g. the state, private sector, education system etc.)

To provide the professional qualification, the university sector might provide a 2-year professional qualification for child care workers, vetted of course, and paid for by the state through taxation. The private sector, on a sliding scale according to profits, might also offset the costs of the child care as part of its benefits package, but it should be overseen by the state in the way the Scandinavian countries manage to do this.

Theme 2: Work: Occupational segregation by gender, gender discrimination and the gender pay gap

Women and men are often concentrated into different kinds of jobs and within the same occupations, women are often in work that is less well paid and has less opportunities for career advancement. Women often work in areas where they can work part-time so as to fit in with their caring responsibilities. While many men work in low paid jobs, many professions dominated by women are also low paid, and professions that have become female-dominated have become lower paid. This worsens the gender pay gap (the average difference between the wages of women and men who are working).

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AS with so many of these issues, while the law and policy may strive to overcome these inequalities, in practice, these inequalities stubbornly persist. This underscores just how pervasive gender roles are. In this area, I think more representations of men and women in roles that are seen as non-traditional might help socialise people into accepting that anyone with the right aptitude and training can be successful in the role of their choosing. If I can single out one person who represents this idea it is the National Archivist Catriona Crowe--she represents competency and intelligence that somehow transcends her gender, makes it irrelevant. If we can have more examples of public role models like her, I think it might bring about positive, progressive attitudinal change.

- Please identify the steps to be taken to address the issues raised and who should address them (e.g. the state, private sector, education system etc.)

I would argue that this might be best approached in the media and entertainment sectors. More interviews with female judges, solicitors, members of the Dail and the Senate, etc., where they talk about how they got where they are today. I think this is the best way to change attitudes, more representation in the public sphere. And I don't think this has to be prescriptive...I genuinely think people want to see these representations. So, more funding would go a long way.

Theme 3. Care, paid and unpaid, as a social and family responsibility

Care -- the social responsibility of care and women and men's co responsibility for care, especially within the family

Women remain disproportionately responsible for unpaid care and often work in poorly paid care work. For working parents or lone parents, balancing paid work with parenting and or caring for older and dependent adults presents significant challenges. Women are most disadvantaged by these challenges, yet men also suffer from lack of opportunities to share parenting and caring roles. Despite recent legislation and policy initiatives to support early years parental care, inequalities in the distribution of unpaid care continue between women and men. The cost of childcare has been identified as a particular barrier to work for women alongside responsibilities of caring for older relatives and dependent adults.

- Please outline what you see as the key barriers/ obstacles and challenges to gender equality under this theme in law, policy and practice.

As stated in Theme 1, I think the best system is child care provided by the state, as in Scandinavian models. Also, better care of the elderly, both of which requires proper taxation. I think a change in attitude is required in this instance as well because we are first and foremost human, and we have families--Irish citizens are more than just workers and that family life can be complex. Proper funding for child care and elderly care would go a long way towards helping struggling families cope with the challenges that come with looking after family members.

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Again, this is best funded by the state through taxation to provide more support and programmes, such as day care centres for elderly relatives. I understand that these work very well all around--good for those who have to work and good for the elderly themselves as it gets them out of the house and allows them to socialise with others.

Theme 4: Women's access to, and representation in, public life and decision making

Ensure women's participation and representation in decision-making and leadership in the workplace, political and public life

Women are systematically underrepresented in leadership in economic and political decision-making. Despite the introduction of a candidate gender quota (through the system of party funding) for national political office, and initiatives to support women's access to corporate decision-making roles, men continue to dominate leadership

positions. There are also issues to be considered around how media represents women and men.

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Behind every successful leader is someone who supports him or her. That is a fact. Those who achieve such heights are usually those who don't have to worry about keeping a home, raising children, etc., and such ambition, focus and determination to one's career is rewarded to those who can manage their lives in this way. That more women than men provide that support is a by-product of historical forces which are stubbornly persistent. Is there a way to design a fairer system? Perhaps only if we get used to the idea that men themselves may choose to become supporters of women's careers. And some men do, such as Hilary Mantel and the late Maeve Binchy, whose partners both supported their successful careers, freeing them up to do what they do best. But when you have Daniel Craig being mocked for being seen in public for carrying his new born daughter in a papoose, this suggests that we have a long way to go to address this persistent inequality.

- Please identify the steps to be taken to address the issues raised and who should address them (e.g. the state, private sector, education system etc.)

Ambitious people are to be encouraged, because it can lead to great breakthroughs in all sectors and there is no reason whatsoever that women should be discouraged. In fact, more women in leadership might actually help make our systems fundamentally fairer because of the insights women have into living in the world as a woman. At the educational level, we need to teach girls and boys that anyone can choose to do whatever they want. More representations is good, and we're seeing that now with docs such as Herstory. This means that extraordinary women can take their place within the history books alongside the famous men we all know about. This is good and healthy. For employers, all they need to do is get better and recognising talent and ambition in everyone. It is, after all, better for their bottom line, which is the language they understand. And, it wouldn't hurt to explore more deeply too how toxic leadership at the top can actually do great damage to an organisation, so it matters who reaches the uppermost positions very much as well.

5. Where does gender inequality impact most?

To conclude we would be interested in your response to the following question: In which area do you think gender inequality matters most?

Please rank the following in order of importance, 1 being the most important:

- Paid work 5
- Home & family life 1
- Education 2
- Politics and public life 4
- Media 3
- Caring for others 6
- Other – please elaborate

➤ Please outline the reasons for your answer below:

My reasons for ranking these in this manner is because my belief that the earliest socialisations tend to be the ones that make the greatest impressions, and these are those experiences in the home, the gender roles we witness first-hand at home. After that, this may be augmented or ameliorated by what we are taught in school, followed very closely by what we see reflected to us via media representations. When we are a little older, the leaders we see in politics and public life matter more, followed by what we experience later in our working lives and the family life we choose. So I answered this based upon what I understand about the process of socialisation as a person matures in life. I might also add that the earliest exposures to gender roles might be rejected once the child learns about other ways to live, so education and media today (as opposed to, say, 70 years ago when my parents were youngsters in rural Galway) helps children see that there are more choices available to them today.

➤ Please include any further comments or observations you may have here.

I am interested in becoming part of this Citizen's Assembly because I am keenly interested in gender equality and participatory democracy. As such, I would regard this as a valuable learning experience.