



Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

National Women's Council: Women & Work-Session 1

Hello, I'm here representing the National Women's Council, Ireland's leading national women's membership organisation. NWC has a membership of over 190 groups from large Trades Unions to networks of grass roots women's organisations. NWC's mission is to be a catalyst for change in the achievement of full equality for women.

What are the issues

Globally, Ireland performs poorly on wage and income gender gaps and ranks 56th in the world.¹ This reality has serious implications for a woman's lifetime earnings, her career decisions and her ability to live in older years with a decent income.

Women experience multiple barriers to employment, including discrimination against Traveller women² and African women³ in recruitment and in the workplace; lack of workplace flexibility, discrimination and negative attitudes and stereotypes about disabled women; and a lack of recognition for the work that rural women often do on family farms, impacting on their access to social welfare supports.⁴

The economic cost of being a woman, **the gender pay gap stands at 14%**.⁵ This means that for every hour worked, women earn 86c for every euro earned by men. The gender pay gap is present as soon as women enter the labour force and it persists and increases over the course of women's working lives, almost trebling between the 30's and 40's, when women are stepping away from the workforce for caring responsibilities.

Pay discrimination is one part of the GPG. Other factors include the low number of women at senior level of economic decision making and Ireland's low pay economy. Ireland has one of the highest number of low paid workers among developed countries, with **nearly a quarter (23%) of the workforce designated as low paid** compared to an average among our peers of 15%.⁶

Low paid workers are more likely to be women. It's been estimated that between **60 and 65% of minimum wage workers in Ireland are women**. Due to care responsibilities and a lack of affordable childcare, women are more likely to engage in part time work. Part-time workers account for over **half of all minimum wage workers and approximately 80% of these are female**.

¹ WEF (2019). Global Gender Gap Report 2020

² Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and Economic and Social Research Institute. Who experiences discrimination in Ireland?

³ Kingston at al (2013). Discrimination in the Irish labour market: nationality, ethnicity and the recession. UCD.

⁴ Shortall, S. (2017) Changing Gender Roles in Irish Farm Households: Continuity and Change Irish Geography, 50(2), 175–191

⁵ Eurostat (2019). Gender pay gap statistics.

⁶ OECD (2019). Wage levels statistics. <https://data.oecd.org/earnwage/wage-levels.htm>

Sectors comprised mainly of women workers - childcare, retail, personal and social care services – work recognised during this pandemic as essential, have the highest concentration of low pay workers and precarious terms of employment. Many of these workers are young women, women of colour or migrant women and are the most vulnerable to precarious working conditions.

People in work represent 14% of all those in poverty and 20% of working lone parents are living in poverty⁷. Without social transfers and in-work payments such as Working Family Payment (WFP) many households would not be able to survive. The cost to the state is significant -essentially a subsidy for bad jobs and poor work.

NWC Recommendations for Change

I know that you are considering care in one of your future sessions so I won't go into detail, but it must be said that the unequal division of care is a key barrier to women's equality in the area of work. Women's care responsibilities and barriers to accessing childcare reduce women's opportunities and choices with regard to work. The best way to address this is through **public, universal, accessible and affordable childcare.**

NWC recommends the following additional actions which could result in transformational change for women's economic equality and independence:

- 1. Bringing in legislation on the gender pay gap**
- 2. Making the minimum wage a living wage**
- 3. Establishing quotas for corporate boards**
- 4. Supporting collective bargaining**
- 5. Bringing in a four-day week with no loss of pay**

1. Gender pay gap

The 'unexplained' part of the GPG, pay discrimination was to be addressed by proposed new legislation on wage transparency. The current government must progress this legislation as a matter of priority.

Pay transparency is essential in enabling us to identify if there is a gender pay gap in particular sectors and how it can be addressed. The current lack of transparency and lack of access to gender-disaggregated data are significant barriers to removing pay inequalities between women and men.

NWC ask that you recommend that government bring in legislation on pay transparency as a matter of priority.

2. Living wage

⁷ 21% who were working were living in poverty in 2017, an increase from 9% in 2012

Both the state & business have a role to play in ensuring workers' wages are sufficient to cover the cost of living. By addressing the high cost of essential services like childcare and housing, the cost of living can be reduced. But we must also address low pay.

The Living Wage is calculated to ensure that work provides an income floor which no one should be expected to live below. It is part of an international movement and has been accepted by notable employers, such as Ikea, Aldi and Lidl,

The minimum wage is currently €10.10 per hour⁸, and there is a significant gap to the living wage which is €12.30 per hour.

NWC ask that you recommend to government to increase the minimum wage to the living wage.

3. Quotas for corporate boards

Lower rates of female employment, the concentration of women in lower paid jobs and outside of senior management roles are deeply connected to the lack of gender balance in economic decision-making fora. Women from ethnic minority communities, including Travellers, disabled women and working-class women are all but invisible.

There are targets in place for gender balance on boards, however, these are aspirational. Legislative quotas, on the other hand, are binding. The international evidence is clear that a reliance on targets will not deliver significant progress on gender imbalance on corporate boards, this will require a quota to address the structures, cultures and biases that exclude women.

International research has shown that quotas will open opportunities for women's economic participation and improve the quality and innovation of boards and the profitability of companies.

NWC ask that you recommend a 50% quota for gender balance, with targets for diversity, on all non-state Irish company boards.

4. Collective bargaining

Countries with a high coverage of collective bargaining have a reduced gender pay gap and more flexible work options under secure employment conditions. Women having the right to organise to collectively bargain on their wages is the best route to equal pay.

Research has indicated that countries with a high coverage of collective bargaining tend to have shorter working hours for both women and men, more flexible work options under secure employment conditions, better protection for non-standard workers, as well as a reduced gender pay gap.

In Ireland, legislation is necessary as our laws allow employers to not recognise unions in pay

⁸ Will be rising to €10.20 in Jan 2021



disputes. Unions are often not recognised and joint labour committees don't exist in many of the sectors women predominate. What we critically need in this country is robust and functioning sectoral collective bargaining and wage setting mechanisms across the low paid industries where there is a predominantly female workforce.

NWC ask that you recommend that the government brings in legislation to support collective bargaining

5. Reduced working hours/Four-day week

The new programme for government commits to supporting flexible working - something which Ireland needs to do to comply with an EU Directive on Work Life Balance. To achieve better work life balance for all we must challenge our 'work-first' culture, and instead champion the importance of family time, leisure time, caring work and community work.

NWC is part of the campaign to achieve a four-day week in Ireland with no loss of pay. A four-day week would help to facilitate a more equal distribution of care between women and men, supporting both to play more of a role in child-rearing as well as care of older family members. It would provide greater choice to women in the labour market and help to address the current situation whereby limited possibilities to combine paid work with family responsibilities mean women predominate in low paid, precarious and short-term employment.

NWC ask that you recommend that government begin a national dialogue on reducing working hours & moving to a 4 Day Week

Conclusion

NWC asks you to consider these five key asks: Gender pay gap legislation, the living wage, quotas for corporate boards, support for collective bargaining and the Four Day week when you are making your recommendations to government.

We believe these recommendations represent a clear pathway that would result in real, positive outcomes for gender equality in the area of work.