

Submission to the Citizens Assembly

On Gender Equality



The Irish Federation of University Women (IrFUW) has been in existence for ninety five years. The organisation was established to unite Irish Women Graduates' Association to uphold the aims of Graduate Women Internationally (GWI), of which it is a constituent member. GWI is the leading women and girls' global organisation run by women and for women, advocating women's rights, equality and empowerment for women and girls through access to quality education and training to the highest level. The IrFUW is an all-Ireland network with enduring links of collaboration and friendship between members and universities.

Internationally we are actively involved with the work of the GWI through its consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ESCOSOC), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). In Ireland we support several overseas projects connected to creating opportunities for girls and women who lack opportunities due to conflict situations or natural disasters.

The IrFUW believes that **education** is the key to economic independence for women. We believe that access to Education in its broadest forms, for all women, at every level and stage of their lives, enables women to participate fully and confidently in building the future they envisage, breaks the cycle of poverty and inequality. Education equips women to take positions of leadership and to use their potential in public and private life

We ask that the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality take into account that women greatly outnumber men in low skilled, lower paid jobs, generally with no security of employment. Marginalised women are especially vulnerable in this area.

The IrFUW know that there are strategy plans in place for students that list a range of policy areas spanning the environmental, social and political issues, including gender equality. We strongly feel this needs be developed and proofed to ensure that children and young people in primary, post-primary schools, further and higher education are equipped with the knowledge and skills to prevent and counteract gender bias.

We recommend that the Citizens Assembly in their report to government:

Ensure that potential gender bias is addressed at the earliest possible stages in the educational system. We believe this will have a transformational influence in addressing many other issues, including increasing the engagement of girls with STEM subjects.

To support and resource the women's community sector to advance equality and to support marginalised women to participate in public and political life and in further education at all stages of their lives.

We identify and believe 'that the question of education lies within the domain of Justice' Margaret Mac Curtain.

We call on the Citizens Assembly to include the following recommendations in its report to government the holding of **a referendum** to replace Article 41.2.2 by an article that would include the following principles:

It should be gender neutral

It should be supportive and acknowledge the work, family life and the value of care to Irish society

It should recognise that home, family and community care, done by women and men, give society a support without which the common good of Justice cannot be achieved.

The IrFUW calls on the Citizens Assembly to support in practical terms measures that address the economic inequality experienced by **carers** and to include the following recommendations in its report to government:

Acknowledge the significant contribution of women's unpaid work throughout their lives by legislating for a full and retrospective Homecare credit to enable women to access a full pension and achieve gender equality.

Legislate for funding a comprehensive, affordable, accessible care infrastructure to support citizens at each stage of their lifecycle.

Put equality proofing on a statutory basis to ensure that public resources are shared in a fairer and more equitable way.

The state pension urgently requires reform to tackle structural inequalities and discrimination experienced by many **older women** that include women affected by the state introduction of a marriage bar and rural women, especially those working on the family farm. Many of these women

are only entitled to a qualified state pension that is approximately 70% of the full old age contributory pension scheme.

We recommend that the Citizens Assemble in its report to government recommend the introduction of a universal state pension to guarantee an adequate and fair income in older age

The increasing levels of **violence against women and children**, the inadequate protection there is for domestic violence especially intimate partner violence has now reached a critical level. A high number of sexual crimes are never reported to the authorities.

We ask the Citizens Assembly to urgently identify violence against women as a national crisis and to ask the government to:

Establish a National Facilitator on sexual and domestic gender based violence – and to ringfence funding to specifically to combat violence against women

To ratify the ILO Convention 190 on gender-based violence to address the intersection of violence and women's economic inequality and harassment in the work place

To develop a third National Plan on domestic, sexual and gender based violence to ensure that Ireland fully meets the requirement of the Istanbul Convention

To develop and resource, as a matter of urgency, a National Plan to end Female Genital Mutilation in Ireland

Constitutions are important documents in liberal democracies. They lay down the ground rules about how political power is attained and how it can be exercised* (Gallagher, 1996, p49). We believe that article 41.2 should be replaced by an article that acknowledges the **nobility of care**, the value of care to our society, an article that is inclusive and with gender-neutral wording that respects the true nature of the care that is given so unselfishly in so many areas, by Irish citizens.

Nuala Ryan

Irish Federation of University Women

*In Michael Gallagher and John Coakley. *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 2nd ed . Limerick:PSAI Press