



Labour Women Submission to the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality
March 2020

Gender norms and stereotypes:

It is clear that gender norms and stereotypes are pervasive in our society. From birth young girls and boys are told time and time again that different colours, interests, clothes, toys etc. are for different genders. All evidence clearly demonstrates that gender stereotyping has a profound impact on young people's self-perception and therefore on the future they imagine for themselves. By delineating differences between genders we limit individual's capacities to reach their full potential. Subject choices in school, extracurricular activities, career planning, emotional well-being, family life: gender stereotyping shapes decisions in all these areas. **The education system must be reformed to take this into account, so that our young people can make the most of opportunities available to them, regardless of gender.**

Gender stereotyping is particularly pervasive in regards to sports, which continues to be perceived as a predominantly male domain. Research shows that young women tend to drop out of sporting activities in their teens, unlike their male counterparts who often stay involved in sports well into adulthood. One factor that contributes to the high dropout rate of girls in sports is physical change in adolescence, and in particular potential feelings of embarrassment around menstruation and the impact it might have on sports performance. **Programmes need to be funded and put in place in all schools/communities/sporting bodies to combat this fall off in participation.** Beyond this, the imbalance of importance placed on women's sports means that many girls do not see role models in sports media. **Increased funding for women's sports is needed, until a near 50:50 balance is reached.** The national media also needs to commit to the broadcasting of a wide range of women's sporting events, on a par with men's sporting events.

Work:

One of the biggest issues facing women in work is the gender pay gap. **All employers should be obliged to publish their gender pay gap data**, with breakdowns at different levels of seniority required for large companies where to do so will not identify individual salaries etc.

Women disproportionately occupy low paid jobs with low numbers working in the fields of science, technology or manufacturing. Most senior positions are occupied by men. These are structural inequalities in our country which must be addressed through education and quota systems. **Organisations with over 250 employees should be required to have a gender equality policy.**

In relation to maternity leave, employers should be compelled through legislation to pay a percentage of salary during maternity leave. A universal benefit does not equate to 'paid leave'. The lack of maternity leave for public representatives is also a huge barrier for women in politics. If we want increased numbers of women in the Oireachtas and on councils, this is an issue that needs to be addressed.

There is also a pension pay gap emerging in Ireland. In the past many women worked in low paid jobs, or remained at home raising their families, or were forced to leave the workforce early when they got married, this has led to women being disadvantaged in regards to pensions. Caring for a family is work, and should be seen as such. **We need to decrease the minimum number of contributions to be entitled to a full contributory old age pension.**

There should be legislation for minimum numbers of women to be on the boards of any publicly listed companies.

Care:

The issue of childcare is one that disproportionally affects women, who are still seen as the primary caregivers to their children. Childcare in Ireland is prohibitively expensive and is a barrier for many women who wish to return to work but simply cannot afford it. **We need the creation of a state led universal high-quality childcare system.** A system based on profit cannot provide the care our children need. The current model based on subsidising private childcare providers has failed.

Community based childcare is the way forward.

Childcare workers, an overwhelmingly female sector, are poorly paid and often have precarious contracts. If we want a childcare system that is valued and functions well, **we need to ensure better pay and terms and conditions for the childcare and Early Years education sector for all qualified workers.**

In terms of healthcare- while the repeal of the 8th amendment was a huge achievement, there is still a long way to go in ensuring full, accessible reproductive healthcare for women. **Exclusion zones are needed to ensure that women accessing abortions feel safe. We also call for the prompt implementation of the National Maternity Strategy.**

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

Women are still underrepresented in huge areas of Irish society, from the media, to the boardroom, to the Dáil. Labour Women are working to progress the position of women in society until equality has been achieved in all areas and there are no longer structural barriers preventing women's full participation. Any equality should be intersectional, meaning that the visibility and participation of women with disabilities and women from diverse socio-economic, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, including the Traveller community, must also be increased.

Women are 50% of the population, but this is not reflected in the number of women in the Dáil, Seanad and councils around the country. We need to look at the barriers for women's participation in politics, and to fight to remove these barriers. **There is currently a gender quota in place for candidates contesting General Elections but quotas need to apply also to candidates contesting Local Elections.** As written above, maternity leave for public representatives and a functioning childcare system in Ireland are two other ways to increase women's participation in politics.

There is also a gender imbalance in the media and the arts. **Broadcast media organisations should be held to account for gender balance in their programming.** For example, organisations should ensure that they have a balance of men and women presenting at key broadcast times across their schedule.

Special measures should be put in place to increase the profile of women in the arts, such **as the appointment of women to key national posts, targets for gender balance in the awarding of bursaries etc., until a near 50:50 balance is reached.**

Labour Women are working to progress the position of women in society. Until equality has been achieved in all areas and there are no longer structural barriers preventing women's full participation, Labour Women will continue to challenge the societal norms that are hindering gender equality.