

# PUBLIC CONSULTATION - CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON GENDER EQUALITY 2020

## QUESTIONNAIRE

CA30152

Una McGrath

### 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.

A.

This fixed idea on gender norm is enshrined in the Constitution, thus creating both a stereotype and a barrier in law toward equality between women and men:

Bunreacht na hÉireann Article 41.2 reads: “In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.”

“The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.”

B.

Gender norms are reinforced by schools segregated by gender and/ or by promoting different curriculum and extra-curricular options for boys and girls.

- 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.)

Amend article 41.2 to make it gender-neutral, yet still recognising the importance of care work and the contribution it makes to the common good, and providing for a reasonable level of State support and alternative care models for carers.

Parents are raising and socialising the human beings for the future generation and should have adequate access to affordable/ state-subsidised childcare whether that care takes place in the home or not. Society should value this and view this as a societal issue, not a women's issue, and value it enough to pay for it and value it enough that both men and women partake of it.

One Parent Families, especially where no co-parenting exists, should get additional support recognising the disproportionate care burden on one person and the opportunity costs of not being able to participate as fully as 2-parent families in work/public life while overburdened with care.

Above all, parents of children/adults with special needs assume a mostly unrecognised additional burden with no respite, and should, in addition to all of the above, have fit-for-purpose support and respite, recognising the hi-dependency/ around-the-clock nature of specific care situations.

Those caring for ageing parents and thereby saving the state hospital and nursing home costs, should have appropriate supports/ tax credits/ respite.

B.

Make all curriculum and extra-curricular options available to both boys and girls

## **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).

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

- Opacity of pay masks the gender pay gap.
- Working part-time/ taking parental leave to assume care duties always seems to result in less career and salary growth on return to work and seems to impact the female parent more than the male parent.
- Women have career interruptions due to child birth, we cannot change that. On return to work after childbirth, women often choose part time or flexible roles because they often take the majority role in childcare. This often results

in women being under-employed and hence under-paid.

- The availability, cost and convenience of childcare is a major determinant of whether or not parents can return to work after childbirth.

- 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.)

The State should design and mandate independent gender pay-gap reporting by employers to surface hidden discrimination and unconscious bias in salary growth.

State and employers should incentivise the equal shared uptake by both men and women of parental/paternity/ maternity leave, so that the work-life/ employability of both men and women are equally impacted. While individual preferences may need to be accommodated, aggregate reporting with targets across a company would push the trend in into the right direction.

Specific care and guidelines should be in place to ensure that a carer returning to work is not disadvantaged and their trajectories should be studied and benchmarked against others.

The State should incentivise employers to implement flexible or part-time work including perhaps job-sharing, by for example, reducing employer prsi to 0% for such employment contracts.

The availability, cost and convenience of childcare is a major determinant of whether or not parents can return to work after childbirth. Include a criterion in the planning criteria of industrial parks and office buildings that on-site creche facilities are provided.

Allow tax credits for childcare costs.

### **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 them in law, policy and practice.

- A. The uneven expectation of care plays out in the home – the personal is political – women assume the majority care burden whether working or not. If a child is sick, who stays home, who leaves the meeting, who works late, who gets to travel with work, who gets to network after work?

The uneven burden of care (voluntary and involuntary primary care of children and parents) between men and women, along with inaffordable childcare, is the fundamental barrier to equality.

This erects barriers to even the most determined woman to self-determination, ability to progress a career, have a voice in decisions and participate in public life. Lower participation in public / work life creates a self-perpetuating disadvantage to women because their voices are heard less in decisions while they are busy with care.

- B. One parent families are not all the same, although the state defines them all in one bucket. There is a spectrum of ‘lone parents’ based on degrees of aloneness and co-parenting input.

This ranges from a situation where there zero input by one parent with the other parent assuming 100% of the care duties (0:100), to a full 50:50 co-parenting situation. The experiences between each end of the spectrum are worlds apart even within the ‘One parent family’ cohort.

The 0:100 parenting alone situation is further exacerbated when there is little or no positive family or community support e.g. where the parent lives away/ abroad from the extended family, or where the attitude of ‘you made your bed so lie in it prevails’.

The 0:100 parenting alone scenario effectively means one is a prisoner in one’s own home – one’s ability to work, network after work, participate in public life, have a social outlet, are either extremely curtailed or nil, especially with a young child. One cannot just leave the house without the child! Affordable or subsidised childcare can fill a gap to enable part-time work or at a stretch, full time + commute, but it does not address the other areas. Is a ‘100% care parent’ not supposed to be allowed a hobby, a night out, a chance to stay late at work to meet business partners, to be sick and unable to provide care & attention?

- C. In a court/ maintenance situation, the aspect of care/custody is considered separately to the aspect of financial maintenance of the child, which I believe is largely correctly intentioned. However, where one parent has renounced all, or most of, the duty of care, they cause a human and financial cost due to this lack of participation in shared parenting, to both the caring parent and the child.

The court however does not penalise or charge them for it/ take account of this. The unpaid care provided by the care-parent, caring daytime, evening and night, has no apparent value in proceedings. In court submissions of costs, one cannot claim for 'theoretical costs' not already expended, (usually because one cannot afford them!) – and unaffordability is typically the norm in a one-parent family. Even if the caring parent could afford to pay for a babysitter 3 evenings a week say, to attend education, I doubt a court would even consider this in a child maintenance order? The maximum allowable maintenance in the District court, where most of these orders are expedited, would not even cover 50% of rent, food and daycare costs.

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

A1. Care should be presented and understood as a societal issue, not a women's issue, wherein society decides if it wants to pay for a society with children, a society with ageing parents and the care that goes with that.

A.2 Care should be delivered by both men and women equally. It's also better role-modelling for children

B. the State should make distinctions in definition about the different types of One Parent Families and the concomitant circumstances and impact on the '100% care parent' in terms of access to full/ partial participation in work, public and social spheres, and the impact on the child where participation in work, public and social spheres of their parent is not being enabled.

The Courts should consider the unwritten value of unpaid care provided by the caring parent daytime, evening and night and assign a value to it in maintenance arrangements where one parent has abdicated on care duties/ chooses not to participate in the care of the child.

Where a parent has opted out of all care of the child and the courts cannot apportion a charge for non-participation in care by that parent, the state should give special consideration to the 100% care parent and support them appropriately to mitigate the inherent disadvantage and natural exclusion they experience from work/ public and social life. Otherwise, this disadvantage will more often than not, get passed on to the child and their prospects in the next generation.

#### **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.

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

Gender quotas are suitable as transitional vehicles and take time to bear fruit, to create a tipping point of change in mindset in the group/ orgn/ entity.

Quotas and access to childcare are basic hygiene factors insufficiently enabled. Measurements and targets help to move the needle.

Then, once hygiene factors are satisfied, the barriers are cultural ( eg language used, where emphasis is put on the hard/ soft issues), and unconscious bias – by both men and women.

- 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.)

Wider use of quotas and metrics should be applied to surface the issues. Public communication of same.

Include a criterion in the planning criteria of industrial parks and office buildings that on-site creche facilities are provided. Start with the Dail itself so that women and parents are better represented in government decisions.

I am tired of seeing rooms full of men in suits on tv at government parliaments committees, gatherings, trade talks. Where are the women? Minding their kids?

Allow tax credits for childcare costs.

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

➤ Please outline the reasons for your answer below:

The uneven burden of care of children and of parents, between men and women is the fundamental barrier to equality.

This erects barriers to even the most determined woman to self-determination, ability to progress a career, have a voice in decisions and participate in public life because they are too busy with care. Care consumes not just practical time but also mindshare.

Worse, this care = socialising the next generation of human beings and care at end of life, is not given any value by society. If it was, we would all pay for it and partake of it. And we wouldn't think twice about it. Care is somehow not considered part of 'productive' life, 'productive' achievement is all that seems to matter, the 'hard stuff'. Yet ironically, no productive life could happen or be sustained without the care that supports it, the 'soft stuff'.

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

I am not sure 'gender equality' is the right language around this whole topic. I prefer the language of inclusion, acknowledging that there are similarities and differences between men and women, and AMONGST women or AMONGST men, and acknowledging various gender identifications. Inclusion language enables one to better to design in for difference, maximising for diversity, but be wide enough in design to include all and not exclude. This is a similar approach to design for inclusion

vs ability/ disability. This also avoids looking at one particular gender as the victim or the problem.

If there is any supplementary information or documents that you would like to submit as part of your consultation, please send this to [info@citizensassembly.ie](mailto:info@citizensassembly.ie), with 'Public Consultation Supplementary Information' in the subject line, along with your name to allow us to correctly match any documents with your submission.