

Submission to Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality

Submitted by: Mna Glasa/Green Women, The Green Party, 16/17 Suffolk Street, D02 AT85 Ireland. March 2020.

Introduction

The mission of Mna Glasa is to promote gender equality in the Green Party and the Irish Political system. It is open to all people who see the need to rebalance the political power structures between women and men in society. Mna Glasa was founded in 2017 by Catherine Martin TD. Membership is open to all people in the Green Party/ Comhaontas Glas. Mna Glasa has a strong, active membership with a pragmatic approach. It facilitates training for women, holds meetings and acts as a network point for women within the Green Party. It also has a seat on policy council and in 2019 updated the Women's Policy of the Green Party/Comhaontas Glas to reflect women's experiences and needs in Ireland at that point.

Mna Glasa is a member of the NWCI and is affiliated with The European Greens. Its membership includes women and men of many ages, diverse backgrounds and walks of life.

Mna Glasa welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality. We believe that all adults and children in Ireland should be treated equally. We strive to create an Ireland in which our differences are celebrated in an inclusive and positive way.

All of society has a role to play in unravelling this inequality, through direct action, education, information and positive role models.

We are happy to be contacted.

Colette Finn, Co Chair Mna Glasa

Lyn Hagin Meade, Mna Glasa

Catherine Martin TD and numerous others in the Green Party.

Care

The issue of care is central to women's equality in Ireland.

It is important that our society recognises the essential nature of care that takes place in Ireland in home and community settings and the role it plays in our lives at many life stages.

Irish women do most of the unpaid work of care¹ in the home, domestic work and meal preparation, childcare, caring for the elderly and the disabled. This means women cannot participate in paid work, education, political, or civic activities, or other activities of their choosing.

Ireland has one of the highest childcare costs in Europe, while Irish childcare workers are among the lowest paid workers in Ireland. Meanwhile having lower than average labour force participation rates for women².

Recommendations:

- Article 41.2 of the constitution is problematic due to its outdated and limited wording it does not reflect the reality of families or care in Ireland. We propose that a referendum to replace article 41.2 of the Constitution with a gender neutral and inclusive statement on the value of care be undertaken.
- Maternity and adoptive leave for local government councillors and government representatives (TDs, Senators)
- Early years care that ensures proper wages for the childcare workforce
- A quality, affordable childcare service for all who wish to avail of it.
- There is an increase in the level of paid parental leave in order to allow men to share with women in caring for children or relatives and running homes.
- Increased support for childcare, in particular community childcare, so that playgroups and crèches are available not just to women taking up work outside the home but also to women working in the home to help early socialisation for the children and to reduce social isolation for both children and parents.

¹ Russell, H., Grotti, R., McGinnity, F. & Privalko, I. (2019). Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland. IHREC & ESRI

² 21 NESC (2019). Gender, family and class issues in Ireland's social welfare system

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- Adequate incentives be established to help women get back to training, education or work to help put an end to the poverty trap of unpaid care work. There should be fully financed childcare as part of back to work or training schemes.
- Accreditation in contributory pensions for women caring or working in the home so that women in later life are not penalised for broken employment records or caring for children or elderly

Economic Equality

The gender pay gap in Ireland stands at 14%³. This pay gap is partly a function of how work done by women is traditionally viewed as easy and not requiring high remuneration. This can change when men enter those professions and vice versa. For example men were traditionally the secretary to the Chief Executive and were paid well. When women took on that role it was devalued and salaries rates decreased. Also our economic system counts activity in the economy. For historical reasons only paid work is accounted for in economic indicators e.g. GDP. This totally underestimates the foundational support given by many (mostly women) to support those working in paid employment.

Recommendations:

- That research is conducted into the reasons why women make up the majority of lower level roles in the civil service, while men account for the majority of the higher income roles
- A Gender Equality impact statement be introduced alongside the Budget each year, to ensure transparency and gender equality in all budgetary measures. All future budgets should be gender proofed.
- Gender proofing. New 'tracking' measurements should be introduced to monitor changes in quality of life, community development and the environmental well-being of everyone
- A minimum guaranteed income 'living wage' should be established for those carrying out unpaid care work in the home and community.

³ WEF (2019). Global Gender Gap Report 2020

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- As women are unequally affected by consumer taxes, we recommend a review of taxation that is gender informed.
- Women receive contributory pension credits throughout the full lifecycle of their working life, including times when they are away from the traditional 'paid' workforce because of child rearing, looking after elderly relatives or other 'unpaid' duties. In other words, these 'unpaid' times should be valued equally.
- A Refundable Tax Credit system is introduced that would differ from other forms of income support, and would be particularly beneficial to women at risk of poverty, in that it is paid:
 - To individuals rather than households.
 - Irrespective of any income from other sources.
 - Without conditions.

Leadership

For women to continue towards a more equal participation in Ireland, women must be visible and included in decision making and leadership processes in the areas of business and governance.

We note that in many political structures, for example in the Dáil and local government, session meetings take place at times that conflict with family life.

Recommendations:

- The introduction of gender quotas for both business boards and for local government.
- Structures of decision-making bodies such as Partnerships or City and County Boards are reviewed to ensure that meeting times during the day, particularly, do not preclude women from taking part or do not detract from family life.
- Affordable childcare facilities are provided for local government representatives.

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- Leadership, assertiveness, public speaking and politics are taught to all students in schools.

Violence against women

Violence against women is a serious violation of the human rights of Irish women today.

Ending violence is critical to women's success and full, equal participation in all aspects of society.

Recommendations:

- People likely to work with women under threat of violence, such as Gardaí, GPs, teachers and social workers, are given full and supported training in the detection of different traits and forms of violence.
- Recognising that domestic violence against women is often a significant factor in the lives of women who are homeless we recommend making available integrated help in the form of accommodation, mental health services and community supports for women.
- Legislate for the establishment of a dedicated and integrated family court.
- Funding to combat violence against women
- Develop and resource a National Action Plan to end Female Genital Mutilation.
- Public awareness should be increased through media campaigns, school and college education programmes and community outreach.

Conclusion

Women's talents, expertise, leadership and experience must be afforded the same opportunities for economic security and earning, removal of barriers to leadership, recognition of the essential work of care to society and ending violence against women.

We recommend that the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality consider:

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- Recognising the value of care in our constitution and legislation
- Investing in public services and social infrastructure as an investment in society not an expenditure for the home.
- Gender proofing our tax, pensions and spending to ensure that it is fair and equal
- Introducing quotas on boards and in local government
- Increasing women's accessibility to leadership through affordable childcare and maternity leave
- A Referendum on 41.2 -2 to replace the Article with an inclusive and gender-neutral acknowledgement of the value of care