



Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality
Sinn Féin Submission

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Contents

Introduction	3
Gender norms and stereotypes	5
Work: gender discrimination and occupational segregation by gender and the gender pay gap	8
Care; paid and unpaid, as a social and family responsibility	12
Women's access to, and representation in public life and decision making	14

Introduction

The Oireachtas Resolution establishing the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality tasked members to make recommendations that advance gender equality by bringing forward proposals that:

- *challenge the remaining barriers and social norms and attitudes that facilitate gender discrimination towards girls and boys, women and men*
- *identify and dismantle economic and salary norms that result in gender inequalities, and reassess the economic value placed on work traditionally held by women*
- *in particular, seek to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in the workplace, politics and public life*
- *recognise the importance of early years parental care and seek to facilitate greater work-life balance*
- *examine the social responsibility of care and women and men's co responsibility for care, especially within the family*
- *scrutinise the structural pay inequalities that result in women being disproportionately represented in low pay sectors*

The resolution provides that proposals may include policy, legislative or constitutional change about the legal requirements and costs versus the potential impact.

The government's provision of 'costs versus the potential impact' should not unduly limit the work of the Assembly.

When the government brought forward the resolution to the Dáil in July 2019 Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald TD welcomed the establishment of a Citizens Assembly and noted her concern that its members had not been tasked with dealing with the specific issue of structural pay inequality for women.

To address this omission Deputy McDonald sought and secured the agreement of the Dáil to include an addition to the work of work Assembly members to *scrutinise the structural pay inequalities that result in women being disproportionately represented in low pay sectors.*

It is important that women themselves determine the solutions to dismantling the barriers they face. On that basis a diversity of women's voices must be included in this process.

Be they migrant women, women from the LGTBI+ and traveller communities, women with a disability, trade unionists, carers or those who have experienced gender and domestic violence or abuse – all experiences must shape the Assembly's recommendations.

Every generation has a current context within which their fight for gender equality takes place. Legislation such as the Equal Status Acts and Employment Equality Acts have had a transformative effect on Irish society. Yet women today face new and indeed old struggles in relation employment, access to a secure long-term home, caring responsibilities and violence in their home.

Sinn Féin would like to thank the Citizens Assembly members, Chairperson and the secretariat. The Citizens Assembly makes real the concept of participatory democracy. The constant challenge for process has been government implementation of the Assembly's recommendations. This needs to change.

Gender norms and stereotypes

Government's role in tackling gender stereotypes

The European Institute for Gender Equality defines gender roles as, '*social and behavioural norms which, within a specific culture, are widely considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex.*'

Gender stereotypes have withered in Ireland over the last fifty years however their roots remain deep. Trinity College Dublin admitted its first female students in 1904. Today girls outperform boys in most leaving certificate subjects.

Yet the 'It's not just for boys! Understanding Gender Differences in STEM' UCD Centre for Economic Research Working Paper¹, found that 40% of boys applied for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses compared to 19% of girls.

The research also found that at Leaving Cert level, boys were three times more likely to study physics and applied maths. Girls were more likely to study chemistry and biology.

One of the explanations for the gender gap in STEM provided by the authors is that Leaving Cert subject choices may in themselves have a subsequent causal effect on STEM entry (either through enabling students to meet programme requirements or by providing them with more information, expertise, or confidence in their STEM abilities).

In response to questions posed by the Irish Times² following publication of the paper the Department of Education and Skills acknowledged that the gender gap at third level was heavily influenced by subject choices, and as a result a review of career guidance was to be undertaken.

This is just one example of the role of government and policy makers in challenging gender stereotypes, and the whole of society value of early intervention.

Gender budgeting

Equality budgeting was introduced by government in Budget 2018 on a pilot basis. The 2019 and 2020 Revised Estimates include 'High Level Metrics' against which progress on specific High-Level Goals identified under Equality Budgeting Themes in the Annual Public Service Performance Reports are measured by. 'An Equality Budgeting Expert Advisory Group has also been established by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

¹ <https://researchrepository.ucd.ie/handle/10197/10632?mode=full>

² <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/school-subjects-strongly-influence-whether-girls-study-stem-at-college-1.3829645>

A recent OECD Scan of Equality Budgeting in Ireland³ found –

- ✓ *Equality is a very broad concept, for which there is no overarching strategy or set of goals in Ireland. This makes it difficult to judge the extent to which equality goals currently being set by departments are in line with real needs or are sufficiently ambitious*
- ✓ *Efforts to engage departments have been hindered by the fact that equality budgeting is not obligatory; departments have limited incentive or capacity to participate, and they are unclear of the ultimate goal of the initiative*
- ✓ *While gender can be a more straightforward construct in terms of data collection, the wider equality brief brings a range of challenges. For example, data and information in the disability space are more complex because they rely on self-disclosure, and there is substantial variation in the range and nature of disabilities*
- ✓ *The government still faces challenges in implementing performance budgeting, on which equality budgeting is built. Stakeholders would like to see performance budgeting go further, with indicators and specific targets that link to key national indicators*

The OCED recommended -

- ✓ *Developing a set of national equality goals and indicators that citizens and policy-makers alike can use as an authoritative frame of reference for policy action, resource prioritisation and accountability*
- ✓ *Expanding equality budgeting beyond the performance budgeting foundation to link it with other robust budget policy tools used in Ireland. This should include expanding ex ante poverty proofing of policies to look at how poverty intersects with different equality dimensions*
- ✓ *Designing a data strategy to support equality budgeting. Such a strategy would focus on improving the extent to which official statistics and administrative data provide insights into equality gaps and assess the impact of different government interventions*
- ✓ *In rolling out the next iteration of equality budgeting, the government should take time to communicate its vision to departments and wider stakeholders so that they understand what the initiative is ultimately trying to achieve and how.*

³ <https://www.oecd.org/gov/budgeting/equality-budgeting-in-ireland.pdf>

In addition to the OECD's observations Sinn Féin suggests that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform partner up with other jurisdictions that have advanced equality and/or gender budgeting for the purpose of knowledge transfer and strengthening the civil services capability and capacity to deliver on existing commitments.

For the Assembly's consideration

- Implement the OECD Scan of Equality Budgeting in Ireland recommendations
- Amend Section 5 Equality Budgeting Expert Advisory Group's Terms of Reference to include experts and/or public servants from other jurisdictions who have successfully advanced equality budgeting in government

Work: gender discrimination and occupational segregation by gender and the gender pay gap

Gender Pay Gap

The gender pay gap is a measure of the difference between men and women's average gross earnings across an organisation or in the labour market. It is expressed as a percentage of men's earnings. Where women disproportionately populate lower paid roles, a gender pay gap (GPG) can exist. The European Commission produces an annual GPG information sheet for each member state country based. The state's current GPG is 13.9%, and EU average gap is 16.2%. We come 18th out of the EU28 and Britain is the 4th highest at 21%.

There are several causes for the gender pay gap. For example, where lower paid roles in an organisation are predominantly populated by women and few are in supervisory or management roles, a gender pay gap can exist.

Much of the public discourse tends to focus on this particular cause through discussions on glass ceilings and women CEOs. If significant numbers of women struggle to make it to even junior management roles, the priority focus on CEO level becomes in real terms immaterial.

These gaps negatively impact career progression, earnings and pension entitlements.

Occupational and educational segregation also results in lower wages for women, for example retail, hospitality and nursing remain female dominated sectors. The promotion of collective bargaining is critical to address these causes of the gender pay and pensions gap.

Gender pay gap reporting is just one strand in a much wider strategy needed to address pay inequality for women. However, reporting will mainstream awareness amongst employers, policy makers and the wider public. Mainstreaming of rights is an important strand in the strategy to achieve them.

The Low Pay Commission also has a role to play in the strategy to tackle the gender pay gap. The 2016 Programme for Government commits to strengthen the role of the Low Pay Commission in relation to the gender pay gap and in work poverty. This commitment has not been delivered on.

In 2015 Sinn Féin submitted a number of amendments to the Low Pay Commission Bill which if accepted by the government would have ensured the Commission played a more relevant and fruitful role for low paid workers and the wider economy.

Sinn Féin's Apprenticeship Reform Proposals⁴ (2018) demonstrate that not enough is being done to ensure greater participation of women in apprenticeships. Current female

⁴ https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2018/2018_Sinn_F%C3%A9in_Apprenticeship_proposals.pdf

participation in apprenticeships is around 4%. Sinn Féin's proposals seek to expand this way of learning into a host of new fields such as green energy, hospitality, financial services, retail and ICT to name but a few. We want to significantly increase the participation rates of women and people with a disability in the apprenticeship system.

Closing the gender pay gap will require a whole of government approach to tackling its root causes. Affordable childcare, the introduction of a living wage, collective bargaining rights, equality proofing of departmental budgets and enhanced educational and income supports for lone parents are just some of the political and policy changes necessary at government level.

For the Assembly's consideration

- Prioritise, strengthen and enact the Gender Pay Gap Reporting legislation
- Strengthen the role of the Low Pay Commission to enable it to consider and make recommendations on eradicating the gender pay gap; addressing economic inequality; the introduction of a living wage; paid and unpaid internships; act as a watchdog of low pay by examining the prevalence of pay two thirds or below of median earnings in the current period in each sector of the economy
- Legislate for and promote the right to collective bargaining
- Review the current bursary offered to employers to take on female apprentices, to determine whether it can be improved or altered to make it more successful.

Structural Pay Inequality

Structural pay inequality limits women's aspirations and opportunities. Women continue to take more time out of the labour market over their lifetime due to child rearing or caring responsibilities. In addition to missed career opportunities or progression this time out of the workforce will reduce a woman's cumulative earnings over the course of her working life.

CSO and ESRI data tells that more women than men earn the minimum wage. The introduction of a Living Wage of €12.30 per hour as recommended by the Living Wage Technical Group would benefit tens of thousands of female workers.

Women earning the minimum wage are usually working part time and are employed in the services sector. Due to parenting or caring responsibilities or because of high childcare costs they often have to reduce their weekly working hours. Again, this limits their opportunities for advancement in work and earning potential.

Occupational and educational segregation result in lower wages for women, for example retail and childcare provision.

We have a gender pension gap of 40% in this state, one of the highest in Europe. Reduced pension payments awarded to women are in effect punishment for taking time out of work to care for family or rear children.

Women working in the public sector also face structural inequalities.

They have secured less than one in five top civil service posts yet make up nearly 60 per cent of the workforce. Research⁵ shows that they represent approximately 75 per cent of entry level posts yet their representation steadily declines as you move up the civil service grades.

Disability Ireland research tells us that twenty-two per cent of people with a disability who are of working age are in employment compared to fifty-three per cent of the general population.

Women living in direct provision; from ethnic minorities, traveller and roma communities; lesbian, transgender or non-binary gender all experience unique forms of discrimination and challenges when seeking employment and in the workplace.

Labour force participation rates for women in the Irish State remain low by international standards.

Central Statistics Office figures show the participation rate for women of a working age in the second quarter of 2019 was 56%. This compares to an EU average of 57.9% and a rate of just over 70% in Germany.

Remote working is one measure that could widen access for women to pursue further education and training, increase participation of older people and people with a disability in the workplace. There is currently no legislation or guidelines governing this area, resulting in varying standards subject to a company's own specific policy.

Women also live with unique health problems such as menopause, endometriosis and Polycystic Ovary Syndrome which come with chronic pain and various symptoms that can negatively impact their employment.

For the Assembly's consideration

- Introduce a Living Wage as recommended by the Living Wage Technical Group
- Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to incorporate in full the recommendations of the ESRI Research Paper 'A Study of Gender in Senior Civil Service Positions in Ireland' into the Civil Service Plan to include Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
- Training Intreo staff to better support women with disabilities who want to enter employment
- Replicate the successful Walk PEER programme to give young people with a disability the opportunities available to those without a disability in work experience and education

⁵ <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/media/file-uploads/2017-12/RS66.pdf>

- A new emphasis on creating opportunities for people with disabilities as part of an ambitious new apprenticeship policy
- Implement the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) 2017-2021
- Provision of public services and supports in a culturally and gender sensitive manner
- Examine the role of remote working in addressing lower female labour force participation rate and introduce guidelines to ensure workers' rights are protected
- Resolve the gender pension gap

Domestic violence is a workplace issue

Domestic violence impacts on an employee's performance at work resulting in lost hours and less productivity.

Co-workers may be aware of a colleague's abuse but in the absence of a workplace policy are unsure on how best to support them. Managers need guidance on how to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and how to respond to a staff member's disclosure.

Employers have a duty of care to their staff and workplace health and safety procedures should include provisions that acknowledge domestic violence. Critically work can also provide a safe and supportive space for victims of abuse.

Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald TD and Workers Rights Spokesperson Maurice Quinlivan TD introduced legislation late last year that provided for ten days statutory domestic violence paid leave.

This entitlement would enable victims of domestic abuse to take the necessary time off work they require to seek support, find accommodation or attend court in a structured and supported environment. It would also address unpredictable absenteeism and reduced productivity for employers.

For the Assembly's consideration

- Introduce legislation that provides for 10 days paid domestic violence leave
- Department of Justice and Equality to develop and roll out an online Creating Workplace Awareness of Domestic Violence information campaign in consultation with private sector employers
- The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) to incorporate in full the recommendations of the Employers' Guidelines on Domestic Abuse within all printed and online staff and management support materials
- A circular to be issued by government Ministers' to agencies under the aegis of her/ his department to implement the Employers' Guidelines on Domestic Abuse
- The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to issue guidance to all non-commercial semi state agencies on the implementation of the Employers' Guidelines on Domestic Abuse

Care; paid and unpaid, as a social and family responsibility

Women still take on more unpaid work than men, such as caring and household work. Figures produced by the EU tell us that women spend on average nearly 60 per cent longer on unpaid care and housework a week than men; as a result one in three women reduce their paid hours to part time in comparison to one in ten men.

The CSO Census of Population (2016) revealed that 195,263 people provide unpaid assistance to others and women made up just over 60% of these carers.

The ESRI and Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission 'Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland' research paper found that the average time spent on care across the whole population is 16 hours per week; 10.6 hours for men and 21.3 hours for women.

Approximately 355,000 carers across the state enable their sick and elderly relatives or friends to remain in their own home. Family Carers Ireland estimate this work in the home saves the state around €10 billion annually.

The National Carers' Strategy published by the Fine Gael/Labour government in 2012 was never implemented nor was it re-visited as had been committed to.

In June 2019, Sinn Féin published a comprehensive policy document⁶ outlining our proposals for Carers ensuring they receive adequate supports, including a decent income while caring.

Research shows that high childcare costs is linked to lower employment among mothers as going back to work simply doesn't pay.

State investment in childcare is less than half that provided by gold standard countries such as Sweden and Denmark.

Parents are spending up to 12% of their disposable income on childcare and for low income and lone parent families the picture is even bleaker. They can pay between 16 and 20 percent for a single child.

The EU Work-life Balance Directive became European Union law in August 2018 and must now be adopted by Member States⁷. One of the provisions of the Directive is the introduction of carers' leave for workers providing personal care or support to a relative. Under the Directive employees are entitled to five days of leave per year. The Directive also provides for enhanced flexible working arrangements to all working parents of children up to at least 8 years old, and all carers.

⁶ https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2019/Empowering_Carers.pdf

⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9438&langId=en#navItem-3>

For the Assembly's consideration

- Transform the current model of early years and childcare provision into a public service delivering affordable care and education of the highest quality to our children and secure public sector employment for childcare workers and streamlined oversight for providers
- Article 41.2 of the Irish Constitution is an outdated provision that directly contradicts the well voiced values of modern Ireland. It is the opinion of Sinn Féin that this provision should be replaced by a gender-neutral article within the Constitution that recognises unpaid care work for its social and economic contribution to the life of the state, and also include the removal of the limitation of the recognition to that unpaid care work performed within the 'home'. This new provision should be supplemented by constitutional protections for wider economic and social rights in a Bill or Charter of Rights.
- Government to develop and publish an updated National Carers' Strategy with a dedicated budget, timeframe and implementation strategy
- Increase the Carers Allowance and Benefit rate
- End the 15-hour rule restricting work or study outside the home and trust Carers to manage their own time
- Increase the annual Carer's Support Grant to €2,000
- Transpose of the EU Work-life Balance Directive into legislation

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

In almost all spheres of leadership women remain a minority. Despite making up 63% of the civil service workforce less than 20% of the top jobs are held by women.

Women continue to be out-numbered by men in both local and national politics in Ireland.

The introduction of gender quota legislation before the 2016 General Elections produced an increase of 6.5 percentage points in female representation in those elections, from 15.7% to 22.2%. Disappointingly just one additional woman was elected to the Dáil in the 2020 general election.

Thirteen of Sinn Féin's 37 TDs (35%) are women compared with Fianna Fáil at 13% and Fine Gael at 17%.

The gender quota legislation did not apply to the 2019 Local Elections, which saw a smaller increase of 3.8 percentage points (to the 2016 general election) in the number of seats taken by women, from 20.1% to 23.9%. Sinn Féin supports the extension of the current 30% gender quota legislation (Dáil) to local elections.

Gender quotas

Sinn Féin supports gender quotas and believes strongly that we need more women involved in politics at every level including in our local and national political institutions.

The blockages to women getting involved in politics are as they have always been; confidence, childcare and culture. Research conducted by the National Women's Council and the 50/50 advocacy group identified money and candidate selection as additional challenges to women's participation in politics.

As a party Sinn Féin has long supported gender quotas. Our strategy is not merely to achieve the quota for women candidates come election time, but to also ensure that we have the maximum number of women in winnable seats.

We have had gender quotas in place within our own internal organisational structures for some time. Our leadership body, the Ard Comhairle, is elected by the party membership at our Ard Fheis from a 50/50 gender balance ballot paper. The same process is applied to the elections of our National Youth Congress Officer Board.

Our party Constitution includes numerous mechanisms to increase the number of women officeholders and women's participation within the party. Not less than 30 per cent of those elected to all officer boards and other elected bodies are women. One third of the local cumann delegates to county leadership bodies, Comhairle Ceantairs, must be women.

For the Assembly's consideration

- Incrementally increase the gender quota provisions for Dáil elections to 50%
- In line with the general election guidelines regarding gender equality that at least 30% of all Ministers and Junior Ministers are men and women
- Introduce gender quotas for local elections in line with general election guidelines
- Introduce family-friendly Oireachtas sittings in common with modern and best parliamentary practice in other jurisdictions
- Seanad reform measures should include fifty per cent female representation and representation from traditionally marginalised, minority or ethnic groups

Gender equality in the media

Research undertaken by the National Women's Council, DCU and the Institute for Future Media & Journalism in 2015 entitled 'Hearing Women's Voices? Exploring women's underrepresentation in current affairs radio programming at peak listening times in Ireland'⁸ highlighted the dearth of women's voices in public and private broadcasting. Women's participation be they journalists/presenters or experts/guests were in the minority. The research also highlighted the gendering of new topics with women's voices heard less frequently in relation to topics that include science and technology, sports, war and conflict.

The Media Pluralism in Europe Monitor research⁹ (2017) found that – *'although gender inequality is increasingly the subject of Irish public discourse this is not necessarily reflected in concrete actions to correct such imbalances within Irish media, especially amongst private media whose boards tend to be male-dominated. Furthermore, the focus on gender inequality in the media continues to obscure the absence of identities – and in particular non-White Irish ethnicities – from the mainstream media in Ireland.*

The Monitor social inclusiveness indicators found that women's access to media is poor. It notes that 'part of the high risk (79%) for access to media for women derives from the lack of available relevant data, which constitutes a risk in and of itself.' To add RTE current affairs programmes to not collect data on female (or minorities) participation.

Former Sinn Féin MEP Lynn Boylan produced a report in 2017 entitled Gender Equality in the Media Sector in the EU.

The report found that while women make up most of the journalism and media graduates in the EU at 68 %, they are still significantly under-represented in the media, especially at decision-making and leadership levels.

⁸ https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Hearing_Womens_Voices_2015_final.pdf

⁹ https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/61144/2018_Ireland.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

It stressed the need for EU Member States and the Commission to promote and ensure the principle of equal pay in accordance with Article 157 TFEU, including by combatting the gender pay and pension gap, reducing precarious work, ensuring accessibility to affordable and quality childcare and better work-life balance policies, and ensuring collective bargaining rights.

The report also called on the Commission and the Member States to tackle precarious employment, including undeclared work and bogus self-employment, in order to ensure that all types of work contracts offer decent working conditions and social protection with proper social security coverage in line with the ILO Decent Work Agenda, Article 9 TFEU, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Social Charter.

Lynn's work also highlighted the disturbing scale of harassment suffered by female journalists. According to an IWMF/International News Safety Institute study at an international level 64.8% of female media workers have experienced intimidation, threats or abuse in relation to their work and 31.7 % of those said that most of the intimidation and abuse occurred in the workplace and was perpetrated by a male boss, supervisor or co-workers.

Crucially the report warns that women cannot be treated as one homogenous group, but that women of different ethnicity, religion, gender alignment or sexual orientation and women with disability face specific gender-based obstacles and sources of stress at the workplace, including harassment, exclusion, discrimination or gender stereotypes.

For the Assembly's consideration

- Introduce measures to avoid discrimination between men and women in companies and bodies that receive public funding
- Implement action programmes which ensure women's involvement in the design and implementation of effective and efficient gender-sensitive policies and programmes within media organisations
- Develop programmes to improve women's skills in STEM subjects that are important for careers in the media sector with a more technical focus, such as sound and audio-visual technicians
- Support and promote women's organisations which are active in the sphere of promoting gender equality in the media, including organisations which support women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence, intersectional discrimination or sexual harassment
- Develop, fund and encourage training on workplace policy related to anti-harassment, equality and diversity, including the use of non-discriminatory language and avoiding gender stereotypes in the media, in order to combat harassment at the workplace; stresses that special attention needs to be paid to training on how the media report cases of violence against women

- Advance the 20x20 campaign to deliver a 20% increase in media coverage of women in sport, 20% increase in female participation at all levels of sport and a 20% increase in attendance at women's games and events

Board membership

The Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Gender Balance on State Boards (2019) found that women continue to be under-represented in the leadership cadres of public and private sector organisations which continues to be the primary pool of candidates for State Boards.

The highest proportion of women on non-commercial states agency boards continues to be in Departments with responsibility for social policy such as Education & Skills, Children & Youth Affairs and Health. An EY survey of 150 private companies last year found that men held 69% of board positions.

For the Assembly's consideration

- Implement in full the recommendations of the Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Gender Balance on State Boards
- The Commission and European Council to adopt and implement the Women on Boards Directive which sets up a quota system in both public and private listed media organisations to ensure women's equal representation at decision-making level