

Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

Placing the CARE economy at the Centre of Irish Society Part 1



Ursula Barry
Emeritus Associate Professor,
Gender Studies, UCD
ursula.barry@ucd.ie

Nature of care and care work



Centrality of care economy

**Everyone, at different
stages of life, cares for
others or has care
needs provided by
others**

Care provision systems differ in different countries

Care needs are looked after by a mixture of systems of provision:

- Marketplace
- State
- Families/communities

The **State** in Ireland plays a very **limited** role

Demographic changes

- should have placed **care** more centrally on **policy agenda**

- **ageing** population - longer **life expectancy**
- smaller **family size** – fewer **childrearing** years
- more **women** in **paid work**
- **dual income** households – **cost of housing**
- longer **hours** of work
- demand for **flexible** work
- **migration**

And.....**COVID-19**

COVID-19

- significant
consequences
for **care** and
care services

- **rethinking**
and **revaluing**
care??

Pandemic highlighted **societies** as
inter-dependent & care-dependent

- serious curtailment of **care** and **educational** services
- **sudden withdrawal** of full spectrum of care **supports**
- increase in **unpaid work** in the home
- over **70%** of **frontline workers** are women
- specific sectors of economy with **high vulnerability**

Care economy
is central to
every
discussion on
gender
equality in
Ireland

Making **care visible** and tackling the **disadvantage** associated with taking on **care responsibilities**:

- reforms of **social protection**
- **re-evaluation** of care work
- **sharing care** responsibilities
- achieving **work-life balance**

Historically, in
Ireland:

**Lack of State
responsibility for
and funding of
care**

Are we now in
crisis of care?

Qualitatively different response
needed:

- **gendered nature of care - contested**
- over-reliance on **unpaid work**
- fewer **family carers**
- **migrant** care workers
- question of **new models of care**
- need for significant **additional funding**

Some dimensions of care & caring

**Importance of
principle of
decongregation** has
been highlighted by
Covid-19

**Support for
both family and
non-family care**

Care needs of children

Early childhood - after-school care
- special needs

Care needs of older people

Home-based care - supported
housing - residential care

Care needs of people with disabilities

Adapted housing - independent
living - home-based care - physical
& intellectual disability

Also: day centres; respite care; age-specific;
physical and mental health; 24-hour care.

Principles of new model of care

From system of
dependency to
one of **flexible**
care supports

- Respect for the **dignity** and **autonomy** of care recipients
- **Recognition** of needs of carers & their **families**
- Independent **adaptive** and **supportive** housing
- Important **role** of **community**, **voluntary** and **NGO** sector
- **One-to-one** assistance services and **long-term** needs

Question of care
was centrally
involved in the
setting up of this
Citizens'
Assembly on
Gender Equality

Linked to a debate about the
Irish Constitution and
Constitutional Convention

Question of **rigid definitions of**
women's role and no mention of
men's role within the
Constitution (Article 41.2)

Debate took place on **placing a**
value on care into the
Constitution

Question: What should happen to this article 42.1 of the Constitution?

1. 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.

2. 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.

Possible recommendations:

Article 41.2 from Irish Constitution should:

- remain as is
- deleted
- amended to more gender-neutral language
- changed to a specific focus on care and caring

Suggestions put forward by Constitutional Convention, IHREC, UN Human Rights Commission and National Women's Council of Ireland and others.

Note: Citizen Assembly will consider these questions at its February 2021 Meeting.