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**Answers to questions arising from CA on Gender Equality Dec 4<sup>th</sup> 2020  
Answered 4<sup>th</sup> Jan 2021, note answers are summary in nature (for brevity).**

**Tax System**

- **What are the specific barriers preventing government from introducing an individualisation tax based system?**

Probably the most cogent obstacle to reform is the likelihood of political resistance from those who advocate for 'women's right to choose not to work outside the home' who argue that by individualising taxation the State would limit the ability of women to stay at home and care for the home if they so choose, and the political parties' reluctance to tackle this. There is also the absence of a loud articulate lobby for individualisation (e.g. politicians might feel that would get little political reward for such a reform). For these reasons incremental reform, including pegging linking or indexing to a relevant figure like average income the credits and transferability of bands to demonstrable care roles, might be the most immediate change likely to pass a political lens.

Specific barriers preventing government from introducing an individualisation tax-based system are also caused by 'inertia' whereby those with power to prevent change do so for a number of reasons. A key reason for resistance to change is often cited as 'cost', in this instance the direct cost of this administrative individualisation is relatively low, but there may be a fear of costs associated with a wider individualisation of social welfare. Bureaucrats are also inclined to protect their administrative and IT systems from too much change, a sense that 'what you know' is better. Some senior civil servants and political class (of a certain age and gender) may also benefit personally from the 'wifely labour' that the system supports.

- **I agree with you for the individual cases should be assessed for all and with means testing's it becomes very stringent and too much form filling. How do we address this without being punished by social welfare?**

If individual cases are assessed for all following existing 'means testings', it would be very stringent and take too much in form filling. In the following link I have argued the focus should be on 'income testing' not means testing, this means using revenue information and paying less attention to small pockets of income (for example only declaring savings over X, and more general self-regulation with post assessment checks. This would be a culture change but a necessary one if we are to shift to a less stigmatising and punishing social welfare system. In some respects, Ireland has actually changed a lot and we should not feel we cannot push for more change, the pandemic shows we need to trust each other, but also how much different households need access to social welfare (the PUP regulated post award with less stigmatising processes). <https://www.socialeurope.eu/renewing-welfare-through-universal-entitlement-lessons-from-covid-19>

## Public perceptions

- **How do we change public perceptions of low paid workers and social welfare recipients?**

I do think the pandemic gives us an opportunity to better understand the wide way many people who are perceived to be 'takers' actually 'give' to our communities, families and society. It also makes us aware of how much we need the work that low paid workers perform. The challenge will be to keep alive and institutionalise that learning in policy and practice. Institutions like the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the Low Pay Commission and the Citizens' Assembly all have different roles to play, as do stronger regulations to protect citizens from exploitative or stigmatizing practices.

I think we also need to recognise how state, media and political practices feed into stigmatising, the social welfare fraud campaigns 'welfare cheats cheat us all' is a good example of stigmatising language which does more harm than good.

## Work & Care

- **How do we take steps towards a society where the couple work less than full-time and are able to share care full-time?**
- **I feel it is often forgotten that not only do women want to enter the workforce in a meaningful way but a lot of men do want to be able to participate in care of their children in a meaningful way, so what recommendations do we need to make to accomplish this?**

I think on the working less side of the equation it has to be a creative combination of remote working, shorter working weeks, more flexible time tabling, long part time hour jobs, this can be supported by tax, welfare and labour law, employers also need training and management support to be confident these new ways of working will not decrease productivity/profit.

On the care side of the equation it has to be a combination of parental and specific maternity and paternity leaves (some paid), along with new forms of social welfare that value socially useful work, particularly care – for example the Participation Income (see NESC 2020).

[http://files.nesc.ie/nesc\\_reports/en/151\\_Future\\_Social\\_Welfare.pdf](http://files.nesc.ie/nesc_reports/en/151_Future_Social_Welfare.pdf)

- **Do job seekers etc also receive allowance for dependent children & how would this be divided**

Yes, job seekers receive allowance for dependent children. Currently payment for the child dependent is paid to the jobseeker (except in certain cases including the one highlighted below). Child Benefit is (unless otherwise stipulated) paid by default to the mother as the primary carer, there are arguments for following this precedent and paying the child dependent allowances direct to the mother. This however may be problematic legally but also it has the disadvantage of reinforcing gendered care patterns.

Ideally a couple might be able to choose whatever *pro rata* combination is paid to either parent, with the default being paid to mother and with a provision that if either parent is not contributing the resource to child wellbeing that the payment can be diverted to one parent (this provision already exists).

- **Should paid parental leave extend beyond the first two years of a child's life?**

Supporting parents with parenting and their care roles certainly extends beyond the first two years of a child's life. As the child's own developmental needs mature there are a wide set of policy instruments that allow us meet to those respective needs.

Thus, we can begin to separate the income needs of the parent from the developmental and care needs to the child and use various policy mixes including tax, welfare, ECEC, and both paid and unpaid parental leave.