



Towards a new National Women's Strategy

2017-2020

By

County Wicklow Public Participation Network

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This submission has been researched in collaboration with Little Bray Family Resource and Development Centre, Co Wicklow Comhairle na nOg, Co Wicklow Partnership/Croi Rath Naoi, Co Wicklow Traveller Primary Healthcare Project, and Co Wicklow PPN Member Groups

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Introducing County Wicklow Public Participation Network

County Wicklow Public Participation Network (PPN) was established in July 2014 under the directive of the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government and in accordance with legislation in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (Section 46). Public Participation Networks were established to be an independent structure that would become the main link through which local authorities connect with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in a process to facilitate communities to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system. Co Wicklow PPN has 144 diverse member groups including sports groups, women's groups, older people's groups, tidy towns, LGBT groups, Travellers groups, community councils, resident's associations, youth groups and more. Member groups span the 5 Municipal Areas of Co Wicklow and the 3 PPN colleges which are Social Inclusion, Community & Voluntary and Environment. Some of these groups are networks in their own right.

PPN representatives serve as a voice for the community on structures including: the Local Community Development Committee; Housing & Corporate Estate Strategic Policy Committee; Planning & Development Strategic Policy Committee; Transport, Water & Environment Strategic Policy Committee; Community, Cultural & Social Development Strategic Policy Committee; Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee; Wicklow County Childcare Committee; Co Wicklow Children & Young People's Services Committee; Co Wicklow Local Sports Partnership; Wicklow County Tourism Board; Co Wicklow Volunteer Centre and Co Wicklow Joint Policing Committee.

PPN Representatives strive to ensure that the needs of the community sector are prioritised within local and national policy processes.

Towards a new National Women's Strategy 2017-2020

County Wicklow PPN welcomes the opportunity to participate in the consultations to develop a new National Women's Strategy. This submission has been researched in collaboration with Little Bray Family Resource and Development Centre, Co Wicklow Comhairle na nOg, Co Wicklow Partnership/Croi Rath Naoi, Co Wicklow Traveller Primary Healthcare Project, and Co Wicklow PPN Member Groups.

Co Wicklow PPN wishes to particularly acknowledge Arklow Disability Action Group, Ballyguile Area Women's Group, Connect Bray Neighbourhood Youth Project Life Skills Groups (Bray), Rathnew Women's Group, Little Bray Family Resource & Development Centre Women's Groups, and the young people participating in Co Wicklow Comhairle na nOg.

A Demographic Snapshot of Co Wicklow

According to the 2011 Census of the 136,640 people living in Co Wicklow, 69,098 were females. There were more widows (4,054) than widowers (1,162). Of the 47,798 households in the county, 4,893 were headed by single mothers (compared to 773 headed by single fathers). There were 24,800 women at work compared to 28,107 men. Men made up the majority of most of the social classes (professional workers, skilled manual, semi-skilled and unskilled), however women made up the majority in managerial and technical and non-manual work. Women reported better health than men and women carers (3,237) out-numbered male carers (1,894) by 1,343.

Programme for Partnership Government High Level Objectives to Promote Women & Girl's Equality

It has been proposed that the new Strategy will incorporate the following measures published in the Programme for Partnership Government, which are intended to contribute to the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Ireland:

- Advance socio-economic equality for women and girls
- Improve women's and girl's physical and mental health
- Promote women's and girl's equal and active citizenship
- Advance women in leadership; and
- Embed gender equality in decision making

These objectives were widely agreed, with the first two objectives resonating in particular with the women we spoke to.

The public consultation document posed four questions:

- What do you think are the issues for women and girls in Ireland that are most important to address over the next four years?
- Do you agree with the high level objectives proposed above?
- What outcomes should government aim to achieve?
- What actions could be taken to advance those objectives?

Some responses to these questions related to similar themes and where this has happened we have grouped responses together under a collective heading. However it should be noted that some of the issues were cross cutting of the themes.

Statistics from the Co Wicklow Comhairle na Nog Great Youth Survey 2015

The top three issues for young women (496 respondents) were:

1. Mental health
2. Homeless young people
3. Cyber bullying

Some young women also highlighted the need for information and support on sexual health:

“Condoms available in school bathrooms”

“we should get free condoms in schools”

“snapchat -young people should be taught what's best to do, not 'don't do it' because everyone knows they're going to do it. e.g sending nudes on snapchat, having sex - condoms (free) in school”

“education about sexual abuse, sexual health, STDs etc is lacking in our schools and community”

The lack of facilities for young people was also highlighted:

“there isn't anywhere safe to hang around”

“more places for young people needed, to hang out and meet new people”

“school clubs and groups are important”

What do you think are the issues for women and girls in Ireland that are most important to address over the next four years?

The Impact of Social Media/Networking

Most of the women we spoke to had huge concerns in relation to unhealthy and unsafe perceptions regarding body image. It was felt that the media facilitates unrealistic expectations and that social media in particular can negatively impact on young girls' self-esteem sometimes leading to victimisation and resulting in poor physical and mental health

Respondents said

- Social networking matters affecting anxiety, bullying, self-image/esteem
- Social media image of women is unrealistic/over sexualised
- Social stigma in relation to image leaves young girls vulnerable to bullying
- People are not safe from victimisation due to social media and communications technology

Young People said

- The fact that women in advertisements, video games, films etc. are often photoshopped and oversexualised, leading to body confidence issues among young women and girls across Ireland.

Health, Body Image, Sexuality & Domestic Violence

As above people's perceptions in relation to body image is a huge concern. Some forms of sexuality and sexism are still seen to be an issue witnessed and experienced by some women. Lack of confidence, self-worth and self-esteem was raised as well as the reality of

gender based/domestic violence. Women are concerned that they should have exclusivity on making decisions relating to their reproductive and bodily functions.

Respondents said

- Reproductive rights
- Educating boy's and girl's re: consent/equality etc from an early age
- Mental health, sexual health and body image
- Promote exercise and healthy eating
- Confidence building/ Boosting self-respect
- Amend section 8
- Domestic Violence/Gender based violence
- Sexism

Young People said

• The fear that if they fall pregnant at this young age, there is not much that can be done for them other than to follow through with the pregnancy as we don't have bodily autonomy in Ireland. I feel there's still a lot of taboo around abortion but at the end of the day it's a medical right and we should have the choice. It's insane to me in 2017, that the X case (1992) could happen all over again and another young woman would still be deprived of her right to choice regardless of circumstance.

- Mental Health is a sector that really needs to be worked on in this country for both young men and women. Make services more accessible for all young people
- The fact that, as very well said above, women in Ireland are not able to avail of the abortion service and the freedom of choice that it entails.

Job Opportunities & Advancement in the Workplace

Most of the women and young girls we spoke to strongly feel that there is still a long way to go in relation to equality in the work place. There was fundamental agreement that women are discriminated against in relation to child baring and child minding. The problem of accessing quality affordable childcare was quoted by many.

Respondents said

- Equal opportunities for job prospects and equal pay
- Changing the "glass ceiling" mentality
- Equality/divisible maternity/paternity leave
- Equality in the Workplace
- Ensuring that women are not discriminated against due to family commitments
- Access to education and employment ie: childcare
- Equality is an issue – salaries/opportunities etc.
- Equal opportunities for women in management
- Improve access to childcare to allow women to work
- Young women in a workplace of men (particularly older men) are not seen or treated as equals and are often patronised
- Maternity (including pregnancy, maternity leave, and childcare) puts women at a disadvantage in relation to career development and promotion

- Women are often used for the empathetic roles in society in a way that is more sexist than genuine skills appreciation
- Childcare is a huge barrier to work, earnings and promotions

Young People said

- - In Ireland we still don't have complete wage equality it is imperative that our gender does not determine our wage if we wish for true gender equality in Ireland.
- The fact that women in management roles/ jobs of a high position are not paid an equal salary to that of a man working in the same position.

Education

There was a general feeling that more effort needs to be put in to encouraging equality in schools through de-gendering subjects such as technology, engineering, woodwork and domestic science. The tradition of women being the prime carers in families was seen to be a barrier/challenge to accessing education. Where circumstances denote that women are the primary carers their time is valuable and they become frustrated when supports and courses offered to them are not relevant to them or their jobs environment

Respondents said

- Access to education and employment ie: childcare
- Encourage girl's to continue with sport and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) subjects
- Courses on offer are not always relevant to the individual or the local jobs market

Young People said

- The fact that young women and all young people throughout Ireland are not well-educated enough when it comes to topics such as; mental health, different sexualities and genders etc.

Social & Economic Issues

In general women feel that income equality is not available to them across the economic spectrum and further to this that the ability to earn is negatively impacted if they have children/carers responsibilities.

Respondents said

- Provide socio-economic support for families
- More support for both parents with young families – no penalising fathers or mothers for decisions about staying at home to raise a family
- Price of housing
- Support grandparents who are providing childcare
- Women who are carers can work for 15 hours per week, however there are no jobs that facilitate 15 hours per week
- Lone parent benefit ceases when the child reaches 7 years old after which childcare costs and issues can become a huge challenge/barrier

- There is still (although not as much as there was) a cultural expectation that women should be the main carers and home makers

Young People said

- Homelessness is a huge risk for all young people at the moment especially for those in less financially stable areas. Young women can become very vulnerable when homeless, and are at great risk it's important we protect these girls first and foremost but also reform how the housing schemes are put in place in Ireland.

Civic Engagement, Decision Making & Politics

It was generally felt that the same barriers in relation to women accessing equality in education and the workplace impacted on the poor representation of women participating in decision making and politics.

Respondents said

- Ensure women are facilitated to take part in the decision making process
- Advance female participation on boards in government

Young People said

- I think it's so important that we have more women in politics, media and everything else. If a men can be there so can women.
- Representation is so important for young women, we learn from the people who came before us please prove to us that we can do anything. Representation of minority women is so important also I want to see politicians from all backgrounds not only will it show young girls they can achieve whatever they put their minds too but it will also enhance are national policies as we will have more than one experience and opinion.

Co Wicklow Comhairle na Nog Talk About Women in Minority Groups

I think all minority groups of women are at a greater risk of discrimination, it is extremely important we have legislation to protect these women.

It's important transgender people and people of all different genders are respected and recognised, if they are not recognised or denied rights then we will never have gender equality

I think that Ireland as a nation is becoming better at recognising women who are transgender, lesbian, bisexual etc. but we are still turning a blind eye to the daily challenges that Traveller women in particular face. These women and their families are often looked down at, scorned or considered a "nuisance" or an "eyesore" to society. The label "Traveller" is often used flippantly throughout conversation or as a "joke". I think it is important for the people of Ireland to understand that the hardships that these families have to endure are colossal and that many people don't choose to live this difficult and frowned-upon lifestyle. Traveller women have a hard job in that they have to try to provide for their families, usually without the money or resources to do so. It is vital that these women get some kind of support either from the government or from a voluntary organisation that will give them a little bit of a head start perhaps when it comes to

providing for their families, as there are not many organisations where Travellers can come to for help or advice at present.

Re: Labels: There are always going to be labels for people no matter how hard we try. I think that the want to label yourself comes from the need of an identity but we can often mix that up when we start to label others without knowing their circumstances or background. I think that people should hold their identity with pride i.e: if you classify yourself as transgender (for example), you are entitled to call yourself that no matter what other people label you as. A label shouldn't have to "define a person. We all know that people are more than what they seem or who or what they identify themselves as.

Focus on Traveller Women

According to the National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF) Gender Position Paper, Traveller women have a life expectancy of 11.5 years less than women in the general population and their mortality rate is 3.1 times that of their settled counterparts.

In regard to gender issues, many Traveller women are challenged with similar issues to women in the general population, however Traveller identity and culture strongly influence the experiences of women and young girls in this community. The NTWF reports that "the experience of Traveller woman will sometime be distinctive because she is a woman, sometimes because she is a Traveller, and sometimes because she is both." This suggests that Traveller women can be doubly disadvantaged and therefore in need of extra supports

What outcomes should the government aim to achieve?

The importance of including women in all decision making that affects them whether they are social, economic or environmentally based was articulated strongly. Also to ensure that actions and implications are gender proofed.

Respondents said

- Inclusivity of women
- Reproductive rights
- We need more women to become involved in community issues and politics

What actions could be taken to advance those aims?

The Impact of Social Media/Networking

Education and awareness raising for parents and young people was the universally agreed action to highlight the impact of social media on health and wellbeing.

Respondents said

- Education in the schools from primary re: social media/networking
- Advertising publically across all sectors re: issues and dangers of social networking

Health, Body Image, Sexuality & Domestic Violence

Educating and awareness raising about realistic body image and safety was cited as the most necessary action to support negative impacts on physical and mental wellbeing. Better access to services for those who have problems caused by these issues was also raised as important

Respondents said

- Public campaign particularly aimed at teenagers (health and body image)
- Improved access to counselling

Job Opportunities & Advancement in the Workplace

Access to quality, affordable childcare is the main requirement to address inequality in the workplace along with compulsory policies to address gender equality and consequences for those who do not implement them properly.

Respondents said

- Early childcare support across all sectors (affordable childcare)
- More focus on the salaries of women in childcare
- Provide affordable childcare for women who want to return to work and/or education

Education

Education is key to addressing many of the issues raised in these consultations. It is seen to be necessary for awareness raising, problem identification, solution finding, and the implementation of beneficial initiatives. Educating people in regard to issues was believed to be needed across both genders and all ages. In line with the issues and solutions already reported it is important to reiterate that women & young girls should be involved in the development of the aforementioned processes.

Respondents said

- Educate children at a young age about the importance of equality in the workplace and community
- Establish Mindfulness in school curriculum
- Educate parents in regard to internet safety
- Young girls need to be educated and supported to value themselves
- Educating women to help them see these issues as being important and real and how to address them on an individual basis in everyday life

- Educate girl's on how to cope with media/expectations around body image
- Mental health classes in schools from a young age

Social & Economic Issues

The message we received in our consultations was that men and women are equal contributors to society and should be treated equally. They should support each other to reach their highest potential so that this in turn would support individuals, families, communities and the nation as a whole

Respondents said

- Provide funding for family support/education
- Young girls should be taught that equality is their right (young men should also be taught that and both should be encouraged to work towards it)
- Positive role models in sport, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) and leadership
- More sport/physical activity
- Support parents to encourage children to be comfortable with their sexuality and to make no subject taboo, encouraging girls to know when things are "not okay" and to be able to speak up.
- Couples need to be supported so that they can support each other on a more equal footing

Civic Engagement, Decision Making & Politics

Responses in this category resonated with much that has been stated above. Responses call for the participation of women in all policies and processes that impact on their quality of life, along with a serious commitment by government to make the inclusion and equality of women a priority

Respondents said

- Change in attitude from our leaders to prioritise women's issues in a real way rather than lip service.
- Penalties/state body re: enforcement of equal opportunities/rights for women
- Women's voices being heard
- Dail discussions/referendums
- Policy on gender proofing.
- Collecting and analysing data on an ethnic minority basis will support the equality proofing of policies and practises that impact on Traveller women

Focus on Young Women

Connect Bray Neighbourhood Youth Project Life Skills Groups:

- “I think that there was no equality between men and women but it has changed since back then and has gotten better but there still is sexism going on between men and women. Men and women should have the same rights. Men earn more than women” – Aged 12
- “I think that there is not enough equality in Ireland but it has gotten better over the years. Women now have the right to vote but we still get paid less than men do. Also, in schools, girls do home economics but can’t do woodwork” – Aged 12
- “There has definitely been a change in gender equality over the last years but we are still not perfect” – Aged 13
- “My dad is very high up in his job and his boss is a woman but when my granny was young that wouldn’t be accepted” – Aged 13
- “I am proud to be a woman” – Aged 13
- “We are not quite equal yet” - Aged 12
- “Woodwork is seen as a ‘boy’ subject in a girl’s school while boy’s don’t get the option to do subjects like home economics” – Aged 12
- “We get less pay than men even if you do the same amount of work” – Aged 12

Focus on Women with Disabilities

An estimated one in five women live with disabilities and the prevalence of disability is actually higher among women than men (19.2 versus 12 per cent). Contributing factors include the lower economic and social status of women and girls, gender-based violence and harmful or gender-discriminatory practices. However, disabled women and girls remain at the margins of decision-making and their specific needs were largely invisible until recently, both to advocates of women’s rights and disability rights. In humanitarian contexts, women and girls with disabilities face even more discrimination, adding to an already heightened risk of violence and exploitation.

It is generally well recognised that women and girls with disabilities face multiple discrimination. They not only face discrimination from being disabled, but also – and simply – from being women and girls. Tackling this discrimination is not simply about adding disability and gender together, but it is about giving a comprehensive response to unique forms of discrimination. To address the intersection of gender and disability, UN Women has made sure to include the mainstreaming of gender in the disability dialogue and vice versa.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Committee were called upon to guide state parties on:

1. Data collection and evidence pertaining to women and girls with disabilities
2. Supporting services in the area of violence and abuse

3. Increased cooperation between the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination) and the CRPD Committee
4. Supporting the need for a new gender oriented goal inclusive of women and girls with disabilities in the post-2015 Framework

Article 6 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states the following:

Women and girls with disabilities experience multiple discrimination. Countries must take all appropriate measures to ensure that women with disabilities are able to fully enjoy the rights and freedoms set out in the Convention

Young People Have the Final Word.

What role should young people play in equality for women moving on into the future?

In my opinion it's important that young people (boys and girls) who believe in gender equality identify as feminist and remove the stigma that being a feminist is a negative and aggressive thing. Wanting everyone to be on the same level is not a bad thing, it should be celebrated. Feminism champions men, also it works for the bettering of all people. I would love to see some politicians identify as feminists, it's not a radical idea that everyone should be treated the same regardless of race, skin colour, sexuality, religion, gender or anything else!!

I hope for an Ireland where bodily autonomy is a human right, where homelessness is no longer a problem and a society in which we look after more vulnerable members.

I think that young people really need to make sure that they are educated and fully aware of what all the labels mean before they go and post something about it online or say something nasty to a woman that identifies by any of these labels. I think that each individual young person should always make an effort to accept women's rights and to also accept people who are different to you and/ or have different beliefs to you.