Title: Gender Issues and the Irish National Employment Action Plan 2000

Country: Ireland

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Final Report

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Executive Summary

The 1990s decade represents an important period of change in the economic situation of Irish women. The most obvious aspect of that change has been the strong increase in women’s access to and participation in paid employment, most evident in the 25-45 age group. At the same time women’s involvement in a range of educational, training, employment and community development programmes has risen significantly, bringing more and more women out from the private and into the public spheres of Irish economic life. A number of key factors have contributed to this process of change. Firstly, Irish women (in the younger and middle age groups) have been exercising greater control over their fertility, having fewer children, and consequently fewer and shorter interruptions to their formal labour market activity. Linked to this are changes in women’s life expectations, reflected in increased demands for economic independence, educational and training qualifications and career development opportunities. Secondly, the Irish economy has undergone a sustained period of high economic growth resulting in a dramatic expansion of employment, particularly women’s employment.

While these developments represent a definite move towards greater gender equality in terms of the levels of women’s and men’s participation in economic life, critical areas of gender inequality persist and are being reproduced (and even intensified) despite the process of economic change. There is a significant gender equality deficit in Ireland. Women are heavily concentrated into the lower end of the jobs hierarchy, into low paid work often classified as unskilled and among those living in poverty. The gender pay gap remains very wide and a large proportion of the new jobs that women are accessing are part-time and/or in the lowest paid areas of retail, tourism, personal services and clerical work. Investment in support services for women to enter, remain or re-enter paid employment is extremely low. As a consequence childcare and other care services are in crisis and many women, who might otherwise be available to meet job vacancies and skill shortages, are prevented from so doing.

The Irish Employment Action Plan (EAP) has placed its emphasis on tackling and preventing the drift towards long-term unemployment through a local employment service, programmes targeted at early school leavers and older unemployed workers. There is a definite lack of recognition within the Irish EAP that its emphasis on the registered long-term unemployed is not gender neutral. Women are under-represented among the registered long-term unemployed in Ireland. Targeting women’s labour market disadvantage requires a much more complex and flexible targeting strategy than is currently reflected in the EAP. While important new initiatives on gender mainstreaming have been put in place in the context of Ireland’s National Development Plan 2000-2006 (linked to EU Structural Fund requirements) gender equality objectives remain largely unaddressed in the first three pillars of the EAP. In fact, here is little direct emphasis on gender equality within the first three pillars of the plan where the overwhelming majority of its expenditure is concentrated.

The fourth pillar aimed at strengthening equal opportunities includes the allocation of important additional resources to childcare services in recognition of the increasing crisis in care provision in the context of rapidly expanding female employment. It also earmarks a new budget line for positive action measures with respect to women’s employment. However, no specific or consistent strategy is articulated within the EAP
towards women’s latent or potential additional labour supply and no specific targets or indicators to monitor progress towards greater gender equality in employment are specified. Only 2% of the total budget under the Plan are assigned to the fourth pillar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irish EAP 2000 Expenditure on Four Pillars</th>
<th>Euro Amount</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pillar 1 Improving Employability</td>
<td>1329.2</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillar 2 Developing Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>241.3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillar 3 Encouraging Adaptability</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillar 4 Strengthening Equal Opportunities</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Pillars TOTAL</td>
<td>1640.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the legislative framework for gender equality is being strengthened by the introduction of an Equal Status Bill which protects against discrimination in the provision of goods and services, at the same time the Irish government continues to take a minimalist approach to the provision for leave entitlements. Provision for maternity leave in Ireland (fourteen weeks paid and four weeks unpaid leave) is at the lowest end of the EU scale and parental leave (introduced on foot of the EU Directive) was finally introduced in 1998 but on an unpaid basis. Following a challenge by the Irish Congress of Trades Unions, restrictions on its applicability in relation to children under a five years of age and born or adopted after June 1996 have been deemed to be in breach of the EU Directive in a Reasoned Opinion issued by the European Commission in April 2000. Amended legislation is currently being prepared.

New institutional systems for gender mainstreaming, in particular the adoption of gender impact assessment guidelines and an increased commitment to the development of gender dis-aggregated data have the potential to strengthen the commitment to gender mainstreaming within the Irish policy-making process and to tackling the significant gender equality deficit. It is essential that mechanisms for gender mainstreaming are applied in a manner which provides for public access and accountability. Other important initiatives, for example in relation to gender equality in public employment, provide an opportunity to begin to effectively address the high level of vertical segregation which characterises Irish employment. For this to be successful, the stated commitment to specific targets and definite timescales needs to be implemented in full.

Irish women’s increased employment rate is less a result of the implementation of specifically targeted employment policies than of women’s determination to pursue greater economic independence and equality of opportunity in a period of economic growth. There is a lack of recognition of the persistence of gender inequalities in Ireland and of the need for urgent action in relation to: crisis in child and other care services; the gender pay gap; severe under-representation of women in middle and higher level jobs; under-provision of leave entitlements; increasing proportions of women among those living in poverty; situations of women experiencing multiple disadvantage. Unless more attention and resources are directed towards addressing gender inequalities in these areas, progress towards greater equality is likely to be both piecemeal and limited.
While the gender equality deficit in Ireland is clearly considerable, certain measures which have been taken are, or will have, a positive impact on equal opportunities between women and men:

**Measures which are or will positively impact on equal opportunities between women and men.**

| Measure |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| **Introduction of Minimum Wage.** | **Aimed at Improving Gender Mainstreaming** | **Monitored for Gender Impact** | **Aimed at closing Gender Gaps** |
| | Yes - partially | | Not directly |
| **Expansion of Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme.** | | | Yes – particularly in relation to reconciling work and family life |
| **Greater individualisation of tax allowances and bands.** | | | Yes – particularly in relation to married women’s labour market participation rate. |
| **Introduction of Gender Impact Assessment Guidelines to be applied across the National Development Plan.** | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **New budget line for positive action measures addressing gender gaps.** | | | Yes – particularly in relation to occupational segregation. |
| **Equal Status legislation which protects against gender and other forms of discrimination in service provision.** | Yes | | Yes – particularly in relation to service access and provision. |
| **Introduction of Parental Leave** | | | Yes – particularly in relation to reconciliation of work and family life - but limited impact due to unpaid nature. |
Section 1 : Identifying the Gender Equality Deficit and the Need for Action

i. Employment trends

The Irish economy has undergone a sustained period of high economic growth over the second half of the 1990s. Economic output and employment have both grown at an unprecedented rate generating an extremely rapid rate of change on the labour market. This change has affected both the level of, and the gender composition of, employment. During the 1990’s, Irish GNP has grown by two-thirds in real terms and net employment growth has been 37%. Over the last five years, the annual average rate of GNP real growth has been 8%, while the numbers at work have increased at an annual average rate of 5%.

Between 1995 and 1999, the population of working age in the Irish economy grew by 228,000 or 8.5%. The rate of growth of the labour force was significantly higher at 17.9% (256,000) over the same time period while employment growth was even faster still at 30.4% (370,500). This strong employment growth has been reflected in an increased participation rate, rising from 53.6% in 1995 to 57.9% in 1999 and a corresponding growth in the employment rate which went from 47.1 to 54.6% over the same period. This represents a growth of 7.5 percentage points over a five year period. At the same time unemployment fell from 12.2% to 5.7% - over 40% of unemployment was long-term 1999.

Table 1 Labour Market Trends 1995-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
<th>Employment Rate</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>54.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ratios calculated on basis of population of 15+

The nature of employment in Ireland continues to change. One-third of the net addition to employment between 1992 and 1998 consisted of part-time jobs. One in six of those in the labour force are in part-time employment and over 70% of these are women. Given that women account for just over 40% of the labour force, their representation among part-timers is extremely high. Part-time employment has more than doubled among women and men over this period, but among men the increase was from a much lower base (see Tables 2 & 3).
ii. Employment opportunities for women

From a traditional position of a comparatively low rate of participation on the formal labour market, Irish women’s employment rate has risen dramatically over the last decade now reaching the EU average rate of female employment. In the early 1980s only just over one-third of working-age women in Ireland were on the formal labour market – by 1999 46% of women of working age were in the labour force. Two out of five of those in employment today are women.

Women’s participation rate has grown at a much faster rate than men’s resulting in a narrowing of the gender gap. Women’s participation rate rose from 39.7 in 1995 to 46.0 in 1999 while men’s rate rose from 68.0 to 70.2. This has brought about a significant narrowing of the traditionally wide gap between women’s and men’s labour force participation in the Irish economy from 28.3 in 1995 to 25.8 in 1997 and to 24.2 in 1999. At the same time the gender gap in the employment rate of women and men has reduced from 24.9 in 1995 to 23.1 in 1997 to 22.7 in 1999. Despite this significant narrowing of the gender gap it remains wide. Irish women’s employment rate at 70% of men’s ranks Ireland in 11th position among the EU fifteen Member States in relation to the ratio of female to male employment rates. (NESF 2000) There is very little difference in the recorded unemployment rates among Irish women and men.

While the significance of the narrowing of the gender gap should not be underestimated, it is evident that women’s latent or potential labour market supply remains considerable and under appropriate conditions women’s employment rate could rise much higher than its current 43.4% level.

iii. Areas of job growth

While the Irish economy has experienced a high rate of job growth over recent years, the situation is very different within different economic sectors. The strongest growth has been in the services sector among indigenous firms, although there has also been growth in manufacturing (among both indigenous and foreign-owned companies). Key sub-sectors which have experienced the highest rates of growth have been computer software, electronics and call centres. Irish-owned industries, such as consumer food and engineering have also shown considerable growth. Forecasts for further job growth to 2009 estimate a further 20% expansion of employment (356,000 net additional jobs). (Central Statistics Office October 1999; ESRI 1999).

The Economic and Social Research Institute forecasts the bulk (64%) of the increase in employment to take place in ‘high skilled areas’, highlighting in particular three sub-sectors: other market services, high-tech manufacturing and education & health (ESRI 1999). Specific occupational groups are expected to show high rates of growth between 1997-2003: professionals (32%); proprietors in services (29%); catering occupations (29%); managers (27%); sales workers (25%). (FAS/ESRI 1999 Manpower Forecasting Project) At the same time agricultural employment continues its decline and certain traditional manufacturing sectors such as clothing and some food processing experience ongoing job losses. Over half of the forecast additional
employment (58%) is anticipated to comprise a further expansion in the number and proportion of women in paid employment. This indicates a significant latent female labour supply co-existing alongside a relatively high level of job vacancies together with skill and general labour shortages. Forecasts for sub-sectoral growth are not carried out on a gender dis-aggregated basis but past trends would indicate that professional, catering and sales occupations have a high female share. (Dept of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Expert Group on Future Skills 2000).

iv. Gender pay gap

Women earn on average 71% of men’s average earnings in Ireland, representing a wide and persistent gender pay gap. The disproportionate concentration of women workers in the lower paid sub-sectors of the services sector and in part-time and temporary employment plays a crucial role in determining women’s low paid position.

A recent study of the impact of the newly introduced Minimum Wage estimated that over half of those falling below the £4.40 minimum (set in April 2000) were women, one-third of whom were working less than 30 hours a week and were under 25 years. Clerical and service workers (the vast majority of whom are women) were heavily over-represented among those below the minimum. The study concluded that 13.5% of all employees who were being paid below the minimum could positively benefit, if the minimum rate were strongly enforced. (Economic and Social Research Institute 1999)

Despite the fact that the Minimum Wage has been introduced in April 2000, those on low pay are still frequently drawn into the tax net. Single earners on the minimum rate are subject to taxation and many women (single and in couple households) are subject to high taxation on extremely low earnings. (see below)

Vertical and horizontal segregation is a strong feature of the Irish labour market and both contribute to the wide gap between women’s and men’s earnings. For example, while 64% of civil servants are women, less than 10% of the top jobs are occupied by women. (Humphreys et al 1999; Dept of Taoiseach. Strategic Management Initiative Equality Working Group).

v. Care support infrastructure

The lack of a comprehensive policy framework for childcare services and childcare supports acts as a critical barrier to many women in entering and re-entering paid employment. While there has been some important additional investment in childcare services in disadvantaged areas, and linked to training programmes and other community development activities, public provision of childcare is minimal in Ireland. £23 million was allocated in Budget 2000 for an expansion of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (for disadvantaged areas) and a £10 million grant scheme for the capital upgrading of childcare facilities was introduced. Over the course of the National Development Plan (2000-2006) a total of £250 million is to be spent on the Equal Opportunities Childcare programme. While this additional
resource allocation is important, it will not have a significant impact on the level of unmet demand for childcare services. Recent studies have projected between a 25% and 50% increase in demand for childcare services by the year 2011. (Goodbody Economic Consultants 1998) For women in low income households or whose wage expectations are low, the crisis in affordable, accessible childcare services is particularly acute. It has been estimated that Irish parents spend 20% of their income on childcare compared to an average of 8% in the EU as whole.

“ Ireland has amongst the highest childcare costs (as a proportion of average earnings) in the European Union, exceeded only by the U.K, and Greece. Average costs in Ireland are 20 per cent of average earnings whilst the mean for other European countries is 8%.” Goodbodies Economic Consultants 1998.

The crisis in childcare provision has received much greater recognition over the last two years due mainly to an increasing concern with labour shortages in a period of accelerated economic growth but also to extensive lobbying from women’s groups and other organisations. Support structures for other care needs are also at an extremely low level, adding a particular burden to women in rural areas where private or voluntary services may not be accessible. For many women, elder care responsibilities become particularly critical just as their responsibilities for young children decrease.

Data from the Quarterly National Household Survey indicates that a large number of women, over 70,000 who had previously held a regular job had given it up for domestic or family reasons. (Central Statistics Office QNHS, 1998 Q2). Domestic and family responsibilities constitutes the most frequently cited reason women give for leaving a regular job, for not looking for a job (among those who want a job) and for working part-time (by part-time women workers). (Dept of Social Community and Family Affairs 2000, Central Statistics Office QNHS, 1998 Q2).

“ Significant numbers of women seem to make choices about the nature of their participation in the labour market based on what may either be a need or a desire to combine such participation with family responsibilities. In a situation where there is a lack of adequate and affordable childcare provision, such decisions may have to be made on the basis of need even where the desire might be otherwise. The acknowledged unavailability of affordable childcare in Ireland therefore represents a significant barrier to the full and equal participation by women in the labour market, and by extension in labour market programmes.” Dept of Social Community and Family Affairs, 2000.

vi. Access to Training, Education and Employment Programmes

Women have steadily increased their representation in education, training and employment schemes throughout the 1990s but there also remain important areas of under-representation. Women accounted for 44% of participants on a selection of twenty-four education, training and employment schemes analysed by the Work Research Centre in 1998. (WRC 1998) Participation rates of women emerged in this study as highly uneven, ranging from 66% on educational programmes to 39% on
training and employment programmes. In State training courses operated by FAS, the National Training Authority, women’s participation rates vary enormously from 96% on Return to Work Courses to 1% on Apprenticeship Courses. On the important Specific Skills Training Programme, women accounted for 42% of participants in 1998, while continuing to be heavily under-represented on courses linked to heavy manufacturing and construction industries.

51.0% of participants on core employment schemes, such as the Community Employment Scheme, were women in 1998 compared to 37.4% in 1995 and 45.7% in 1997. Broadly defined eligibility criteria provide much greater access to the Community Employment Scheme than to the Back to Work Schemes which is much more narrowly based on access through registration as unemployed. Women have accounted for only 14% of those who had participated on this scheme by April 1999. (Dept of Social Community and Family Affairs 1999). Figures from the Green Paper on Adult Education show that women account for 50% of literacy students and 80% of community education participants. (Green Paper on Adult Education 1998).

Adult education is particularly important to women in Ireland but it remains a seriously under-resourced part of the educational system. Educational qualifications are crucial to women’s access to the labour market, a point strongly made by in Report 2000, a Report on the Women’s Education Initiative, a pilot programme of projects involving educationally disadvantaged women:

“for men educational levels do not, to a great extent, determine whether or not they are in the labour force. However in the case of women, there are three times more women who have second level qualifications working than educationally disadvantaged women working.” Report 2000, Women’s Education Initiative.

vii. Social protection and tax and benefits

Some changes in the operation of the taxation and benefit system have taken place which have had a positive impact on the marginal tax rates of women earners in two earner households. However, even with such changes, a marginal tax rate of 40% is the average rate applied to women second earners. The combined effect of high marginal tax rates and the high cost of childcare has a particular strong disincentive on married women’s participation in paid employment. In addition a special tax allowance and tax band is available to a married couple where one person remains full-time in the home. While Budget 2000 provided for a greater individualisation of income tax provisions, there continues to be a significant level of discouragement to women potential paid workers.

Within the social welfare system, a lack of individual entitlements based on a continued ‘household system’ approach means that many women in household in which their male partners are on welfare are restricted to extremely low earnings (usually in low paid part-time employment) or else their partners are subjected to reduced payments. Where a spouse of an unemployed person is working, for example, earnings over £70 per week result in progressive reductions of unemployment benefit. At weekly earnings of £135, all unemployment benefits and Child Dependent
Allowances are withdrawn. (Dept of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Expert Group on Future Skills 2000) It is generally women who are negatively affected by this situation.

Personal income taxation levels remain high and consequently penalise those on low incomes. Single people on low incomes pay tax on earnings of £110 per week – one-third of the average industrial wage. Such taxation of low incomes particularly disadvantages women who are the majority of low earners.

viii. Provision for Leave Entitlements

Ireland has a very inadequate system of provision for leave. Entitlement to maternity leave is restricted to fourteen week paid leave (four weeks of which are to be taken before the birth) and four week unpaid leave, paid at 70% of earnings. This low level of provision places Ireland at the lowest end of the EU spectrum of maternity leave provision. New entitlement to parental leave was finally brought in during 1998, based on the EU Directive on Parental Leave. In a similar vein to its approach to maternity leave, Ireland has taken a minimalist approach to parental leave. It has introduced on a highly limited, restricted and unpaid basis. Following a challenge by the Irish Congress of Trades Unions, restrictions on its applicability in relation to children under a five years of age and born or adopted after June 1996 have been deemed to be in breach of the EU Directive in a Reasoned Opinion issued by the European Commission in April 2000. Amended legislation is currently being prepared but there is no indication that paid paternity leave will be introduced as part of this process.

This lack of proper provision for leave entitlement for family and care purposes places a particularly severe burden of combining work and family responsibilities on Irish women workers. A recent qualitative research study focused on new mothers concluded:

"Despite demonstrating strong and continuing commitment to their jobs, women expressed concerns about the impact of their status as new mothers on promotion prospects...(some) indicated that the pressures of the dual burdens of work and new motherhood were too difficult to sustain on a full-time basis and they were withdrawing reluctantly from the workplace."

Employment Equality Agency 1999

ix. Disadvantaged women

Specific groups of women experience particular disadvantage in Irish society. Among those estimated as living in persistent poverty (about 15% of the population), the majority are women. Elderly women and women lone parents represent some of the most economically disadvantaged groups, together with other vulnerable minorities: women travellers, women refugees and asylum seekers and homeless women.

On a more general level, women with low levels of educational attainment in low to middle income households experience definite disadvantage on the labour market and
have a very low labour force participation rate. Lone parents (of whom about 87% are women) also have a low participation rate although this has increased in recent years, due largely to improved access to labour market schemes. Significant labour market disadvantage is also experienced by women with three or more children. For many of these women who are categorised as ‘economically inactive’ access to education, training and employment schemes can be problematic where eligibility criteria are based on unemployment registration.

“There are 42,800 women engaged in home duties in Ireland whose highest level of educational attainment is primary education (1st level) and a further 26,100 whose highest level in Junior Certificate or its equivalent (lower 2nd Level). This gives a total of 69,000 women who are classed as having a low level of educational attainment. However, these women are denied access to many adult education programmes by the current live register requirements.”


Section 2 : Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming

Towards the end of 1999, the Irish government published its National Development Plan 2000-2006, comprising six Operational Programmes (the Economic and Social Infrastructure, Productive Sector, Employment and Human Resources Development, Co-Operation with Northern Ireland, and two Regional Programmes.). The Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme encompasses a detailed statement of Irish employment policy cross-referenced to, and substantially over-lapping with, the Irish Employment Action Plan. EU Structural Funds provide a significant proportion (%) of the funding for the Irish National Development Plan (NDP) and consequently regulations governing gender mainstreaming in EU Structural Fund expenditure apply. The Irish government has, however, gone beyond the strict requirements of EU Structural Funds and made a decision that gender equality is to be mainstreamed across the entire plan, including those aspects funded solely from national resources. This means that Irish employment policy, as articulated within the NDP, is to be subject to a new system of gender mainstreaming over the period 2000-2006, and this process affects both current and future Employment Action Plans.

The achievement of equal opportunities between women and men has been defined as a horizontal principle in the Irish National Development Plan (paragraph 13.20, NDP).

In support of this commitment the NDP provides for the following elements:

Equal opportunities between men and women is specified as a core objective and central element of different Programmes and Sub-Programmes:

- Equal opportunities is identified as an objective of the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme (paragraph 5.20, NDP) and also as a core element of the Social Inclusion Sub-Programme
within the two Regional Programmes (paragraphs 7.64 and 8.63 and 10.23 NDP).

- The acknowledgement of the impact of equal opportunities between women and men in spending on infrastructure and productive investment (paragraphs 4.124/5, 6.115, NDP).

A range of different mechanisms (see below) for implementing this commitment to gender equality have been provided for within the NDP and these are reinforced by the adoption in March 2000 of Gender Impact Assessment Guidelines (see ‘Best Practice’ discussion below), together with relevant forms which have to be applied and completed in respect of the overwhelming majority of measures funded under the NDP.

Equal Opportunities commitments and initiatives within the Irish Employment Action Plan 2000 (EAP 2000) are clearly placed in the context of these important NDP provisions and in its statement of Irish employment strategy this is clearly acknowledged:

“ The strategy for 2000 also re-affirms the commitment in national policy to the provision of equal opportunities for women and disadvantaged categories in education, training and employment...The achievement of equal opportunities between women and men is a horizontal principle of the national Development Plan. As an aid to the implementation of the commitments on gender equality set out in the NDP, the Government adopted Gender Impact Assessment Guidelines in March 2000 for application across NDP measures. Accordingly the completion of the Gender Impact Assessment Form will be required in relation to actions in the Employment Action Plan which are funded through the NDP.”

Irish EAP 2000.

Equal opportunities is further identified as an aspect of one of six key objectives of labour market policy specified within the Irish Employment Action Plan 2000. These objectives are:

- To promote both employment growth and employment for all who seek it, and the effective elimination of long term unemployment,
- To address skills and labour shortages in the economy by mobilising labour supply,
- To enhance labour quality through education, training and, in particular, lifelong learning,
- To strengthen the preventative approach to minimise unemployment and prevent the drift into long term unemployment,
- To support increased female participation, equal opportunities and a balanced increase in immigration,
- To promote social inclusion with particular reference to the re-integration of the socially excluded and, in particular, the long term unemployed into the open labour market.

Irish EAP 2000
Despite the horizontal commitment to gender equality in the NDP and the new EU guideline on mainstreaming gender equality, these objectives of Irish employment strategy are formulated in such a way as to give rise to a number of concerns from a gender equality perspective. Three of the six objectives refer to the long term unemployed, among whom women have traditionally been under-represented in Ireland, linked in part to the household nature of the social welfare system as well as wider cultural and social norms. Women account for only 27.6% of the long-term unemployed despite the fact that they make up 42% of the labour force. This is a clear indication of women’s under-representation in this group which constitutes the primary focal point of employment strategy.

There is no specific reference made within these core objectives to the many, overwhelmingly women, who have been off the labour market for a prolonged period of time due largely to care responsibilities and under-provision of care services. While there is a clear concern to mobilise additional labour supply there is no direct connection made to women’s substantial latent labour supply. There is a separate reference to increasing female participation but this is placed together with increasing immigration and is not linked to the broader questions of labour supply and labour and skill shortages. In fact data on changes in potential Irish supply included in an Appendix to the EAP is not presented on a gender dis-aggregated basis.

Women entering paid employment have accounted for the majority of the increase in the Irish employment rate over recent years yet Irish employment strategy continues to favour targeting the traditional (predominantly) male registered long term unemployed over women and others that experience more complex and diverse forms of labour market disadvantage.

**Pillar 1 : Employability**

The core feature of Irish employment strategy in relation to Pillar 1 Employability has been a preventative approach targeted at those who have been registered as unemployed for a period of six months, based on referrals for interviews aimed at matching each individual with potential training or employment opportunities. Those under twenty-five years of age made up the majority of those referred – women accounting for about 42% of the total. A similar percentage (53%) of young women and men were placed in jobs or training following interviews, although more young men were placed in jobs (32%) compared to young women (26%). Similar patterns were evident among the 25-34 age groups.

Another aspect of policy under the Employability Pillar has been reform of the taxation system (Guidelines 3 & 4) aimed at enhancing the benefit of employment to employees. Certain key changes in this regard have had a definite and significant positive impact on women’s earnings from employment, particularly married women. A new system of tax credits has reduced the regressive nature of the previous system of tax allowances. At the same time a greater degree of individualisation of taxation bands (introduced in Budget 2000) has resulted in a situation in which the penalising tax rates which have applied to married women in the past have been significantly lessened. Further reforms in this direction are indicated for Budget 2001. Political controversy concerning the situation of one-earner married couple in the wake of these budgetary changes resulted in a compensatory tax allowance being provided
where one spouse remains full-time in the home. The introduction of the National Minimum Wage with effect from April 1st 2000 has the potential (if fully enforced) to raise the earnings of around 13% of the workforce on the lowest pay levels – the majority of whom are women – while tax reforms have gradually begun to remove a proportion of the large numbers of low paid workers from the tax net.

Measures to increase and enhance labour supply receive much attention under this Pillar but despite recognition of women’s potential, specific measures to activate women are not identified.

“A further dimension of policies is to increase participation rates in the labour force. Female participation rates, particularly of women returners, are a particular target.”

Irish EAP 2000.

Specified actions planned for 2000 to implement Guideline 9 on labour market integration include reference to providing training and employment opportunities to the long term unemployed, people with disabilities, travellers, refugees, immigrants and drug users but no specific mention of women returners.

**Pillar 2 : Entrepreneurship**

There is no reference to gender equality within the policy or actions specified under the Entrepreneurship Pillar, despite the severe under-representation of women among employers and self-employed in Ireland. There is no reference to the very low percentage (12%) of women among those participating in the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme or to the issues which have been identified concerning obstacles to women in Business (Third Report of the Fourth Joint Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights 1996; Second Commission on Status of Women 1993, NESF 1997).

**Pillar 3 : Adaptability**

Policy under the Adaptability Pillar highlights the importance of creating a family-friendly workplace, the opportunity to reconcile work and family life and the development of “an accessible, affordable, quality childcare infrastructure”. Action specified to achieve these aims (under Guideline 15) is the establishment of a committee involving the social partners to develop a National Framework for supporting voluntary family-friendly policies at enterprise level. Employers and Trade Union organisations have agreed that equality of opportunity and family-friendly working arrangements will form aspects of possible partnership initiatives at firm level. Also under Guideline 15 a number of specific commitments are made to:

- introduce a Bill to implement the EU Directive on Part-time Work by June 2000
- implement the Directive on Fixed-term Work by July 2001
- introduce a Carers Leave Bill later in 2000 linked to the Carer’s Benefit Scheme providing for an entitlement for employees to leave their employment temporarily for a period of 15 months to provide full-time care where needed for an elderly or disabled person.
- endorse the Teleworking National Advisory Council’s Code of Practice.
- introduce teleworking options and policy into public sector employment.

A range of measures in relation to lifelong learning (Guideline 17) are identified under this Pillar and while a) the reconciliation of learning and family life is referred to and b) the importance of flexibility and diversity of provision is recognised no specific reference to gender equality is included. A task Force to develop initiatives aimed at the low paid is also specified and while this has the potential to positively benefit women no timescale or specific actions are proposed.

**Pillar 4 : Equality between Women and Men**

A number of important initiatives to support, implement and monitor gender mainstreaming have been put in place by the government largely in the context of the National Development Plan and these are highlighted under the Equality Pillar of the Irish EAP. These are analysed in the following section dealing with gender mainstreaming. In addition a number of specific actions on gender equality are included in the EAP:

a) A programme of positive action measures for women and a budget of £23 million covering initiatives on:
   - tackling vertical and horizontal segregation on the labour market
   - encouraging entrepreneurship and career development
   - gender balance in decision-making
   - family-friendly projects and responsibility sharing
   - research and information campaign to women returners
   - innovative projects for specially disadvantaged women, particularly women over 50 years of age.


c) Enactment of Equal Status Bill in May 2000 providing protection against discrimination in service provision on nine grounds (including gender, age, disability, race, sexual orientation and religion).

d) Specific budget (unspecified) for promoting equal opportunities at Firm Level under the new Partnership Agreement.

e) A statement that the recommendations of a Consultative Group which will consider a forthcoming study on pay differentials will be considered.


g) Significantly increased resources to the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme aimed at increasing the level and quality of provision of childcare. The National childcare Co-ordinating Committee is charged with the task of facilitating integrated national and local childcare strategies. A budget of £250 million has been allocated over the period of the NDP 2000-2006 aimed at supporting;
- capital grants to community-based facilities
- grants towards staffing costs in community-based facilities
- national voluntary childcare organisations
- local childcare network initiatives
- after-school childcare services
- community-based out-of-school childcare services

h) Recommendations of the Report on Access by Women to the Labour Market will be progressed ‘without delay’. No timescale, budget or allocation of responsibility is associated with this commitment.

### iii) Mechanisms for implementing gender mainstreaming

A range of important new mechanisms for implementing gender mainstreaming have been introduced in the context of Ireland's commitment to gender mainstreaming within the National Development Plan (NDP) and which apply to actions under the EAP funded by the NDP. These mechanisms comprise project selection procedures and criteria, sex differentiated indicators, requirements for gender balance and representation of equal opportunities interests on all monitoring committees and are specified in the following manner:

- The requirement that the impact on gender equality be explicitly incorporated into the project selection procedures of all implementing bodies under the National Development Plan (paragraph 12.14, NDP);

- The intention that indicators will require sex differentiated outcomes ‘where the nature of the assistance permits’ (paragraph 12.12, NDP);

- The commitment to promote gender balance on all Monitoring Committees (paragraph 12.8, NDP);

- The commitment to include representation of the equal opportunities interest on all Monitoring Committees and the CSF, to be drawn from a relevant Government Department or appropriate statutory body (paragraph 12.8, NDP);

- It will be mandatory to include equal opportunities among the project selection criteria for all measures (paragraph 13.37, NDP);

Specific new structures are to be established to co-ordinate the implementation of gender mainstreaming within the NDP:

1. An Equal Opportunities Promotion and Monitoring Unit has been established under the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to monitor gender mainstreaming generally and to advise on the development of appropriate indicators in this regard. The Unit will act as a reference point for data sources and is in the process of compiling a list of the main sources of gender disaggregated data for Departments and implementing agencies. It is intended that
gender dis-aggregated data will be made publicly available through a new Web Site. This Unit has an advisory, information and training role as well as its monitoring function. (paragraph 13.37, NDP).

2. An Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Co-ordination Committee, chaired by the Dept of justice, Equality and Law Reform is to be set up to co-ordinate the achievement of equality objectives in the different areas of the NDP. (paragraph 13.37, NDP).

To aid Departments and implementing bodies in incorporating equal opportunities into the policy framework of the NDP, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has initiated a preliminary programme of training for policy makers on gender mainstreaming.

iv) **Adequacy of proposals for monitoring gender equality impacts of specific policy programmes.**

New institutional arrangements for mainstreaming gender equality are at a very early stage of implementation in Ireland and it will take some time to consider their impact. There are however a number of immediate concerns from a gender equality perspective:

a) At the present time there are no arrangements or systems in place for public access to the outcome of gender impact assessment or mainstreaming processes. Gender impact guidelines are being applied by different government departments and relevant agencies but the contents of this process are not available in the public domain. It remains to be seen whether requests under Freedom of Information Act provisions would bring the content of this process into the public arena where women’s organisations, researchers, policy interest and other could comment on and assess their relevance and comprehensiveness.

b) The Equal Opportunities Monitoring Unit within the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform is seriously under-resourced in its capacity to provide necessary data and advice which could adequately service the gender mainstreaming process across the entire policy-making system.

c) Insufficient investment has been made to date in the development of an appropriate body of expertise across the policy-making system which would enable gender mainstreaming to be fully and properly implemented.

d) While the decision to specify equal opportunities as a core horizontal principle in economic and social policy making, this commitment is likely to remain more theoretical and aspirational than practical without the requisite resources.
Section 3 : Assessing the Priority Accorded to Gender Equality

A number of critical priority areas for action to address the gender equality deficit in Ireland receive little attention under the Irish EAP while certain other areas are receiving greater attention as well as additional resource allocation. The introduction of the Minimum Wage is an important and welcome initiative, but the Plan contains no specific strategy to address the gender pay gap. The Minimum Wage which could potentially benefit low paid women workers is itself rapidly being overtaken by rising wage levels and an increasing inflation rate (latest figures put the annual inflation rate at 5%).

Changes in the taxation system will definitely benefit married women in two-earner households and further moves towards individualisation of tax allowances and tax bands will strengthen this effect. But there are also significant contradictions contained within the process of reform, particular with respect to the introduction of a compensatory tax allowance where one partner of a married couple is full time engaged in home duties. This tax allowance which benefits directly the working spouse (generally male) is not available to co-habiting couples and is not linked to child or other care responsibilities. Married couples with and without children benefit - so long as one is full-time in the home. Also, while taxation provisions have been targeted for individualisation, welfare benefits remain largely untouched, and continue to operate largely as a household-based system, based on one adult claimant (usually male) and other adults (usually women) classified as dependants. This situation leaves many women, particularly those in low income and welfare dependent households trapped into low paid part-time work options. A greater individualisation of welfare entitlements is needed, but with transitional arrangements for women currently dependent on derived benefits.

Important additional investment in childcare is being provided for in the EAP but the scale of the crisis in supply means that there will continue to be a high level of unmet demand for child and other care services. Under-provision, together with the high cost of childcare mean that many women, particularly those with more than one young child, are not in a position to access paid employment unless their wage expectations are high (linked to high skill or educational qualifications). Combining work and family responsibilities is also made difficult by the continuing low level of provision for leave and, with the exception of a promised review of maternity leave legislation, there is no indication that leave entitlements will be improved in the short or medium term future. In this context, certain sectors of employment, for example the public sector, will be specially attractive to women linked to their greater provision for flexibility in relation to leave, job sharing, flexi-time etc. Other aspects of gender inequality in employment, such as the severe under-representation of women in the upper levels of the jobs hierarchy, are also unlikely to be significant altered under current Irish employment strategy. The allocation of a specific budget for positive action measures is an important and welcome development but it is critical that an overall strategy for addressing vertical segregation be put in place.
A definite strategy towards women's latent labour supply also needs to be articulated and applied consistently across the Irish EAP. The dominant focus of the EAP is on those who are long-term registered as unemployed a category in which women are under-represented for a number of specific reasons. There is a clear danger that this emphasis through the Plan will result in the marginalisation of women generally or of specific groups of women within Irish employment strategy.

Finally, it is crucial that more attention is paid to the process of monitoring gender equality within Irish employment strategy based on the development of specific targets, linked to timescales for their achievement and indicators of progress. Data is critical to this process and it is essential that a real commitment to gender dis-aggregated data within the Irish policy-making system be made. In this context, it is unacceptable that data continues to be presented within the Irish EAP which is not dis-aggregated by gender.

Section 4 : Priority Areas for Future Action and Identification of Best Practice.

i) Priority areas for action

There are a number of critical or priority areas for action in order to successfully tackle the gender deficit in Irish society :

- The level of low pay among women, leading to a persistence of a wide gender pay gap.

- The lack of a comprehensive care support infrastructure.

- The concentration of women at the lower end of the jobs hierarchy i.e. high level of vertical occupational segregation.

- Inadequate provision for family and parental leave.

- Women's access to education, training and employment-related schemes and programmes.

- Individualisation of women's entitlement to welfare payments with transitional arrangements for women currently dependent on derived benefits.

- Development of a comprehensive system of gender disaggregated data.

- Provision of adequate resources for gender mainstreaming within the Irish policy-making process.

- Establishment of definite targets – timescales – monitoring systems with regard to gender equality.
Examples of best practice.

While gender mainstreaming is at an early point of development within the Irish policy-making system, a number of important initiatives have been taken which have the potential to strengthen both the commitment to greater gender equality and to addressing the gender equality deficit. The following examples indicate a greater recognition within the institutional and policy-making system of the need to develop strategic approaches to gender equality as part of a stated commitment to gender mainstreaming.

Example 1: Gender Impact Assessment Guidelines

Gender Impact Assessment Guidelines were adopted by the Irish Cabinet in March 2000 and are to be applied to the Operation Programmes and Measures under the Irish National Development Plan, including the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme. This means that these Guidelines are also being applied to those actions under the Employment Action Plan which are funded under the National Development Plan (NDP). The following steps/questions are to be completed with respect to almost every area of expenditure under the NDP:

Step One: Outline the current position of men and women in the area which this expenditure activity will address.

a) Who are the current beneficiaries of this area of expenditure activity? (Beneficiaries include users of the facility, or participants)?

b) How many are women? How many are men?

c) What data source did you use to determine these figures?

Step Two: What factors lead to women and men being affected differentially in the area being addressed by this expenditure activity?

a) Identify the factors which lead to the differential impact on women and men.

Step Three: How can the factors which lead to women or men being affected differentially be addressed and changed?

a) How can the policy proposal/measure respond to the factors identified in Step 2 above?

b) Where considered appropriate, what actions do you propose in this regard?
Example 2: Strategic Management Initiative Equality Working Group in the Civil Service

In March 1995 a Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) was launched by the Irish government aimed at reviewing decision-making systems, allocation of responsibility and accountability with a view to bringing forward proposals for modernising systems and practices, including personnel and financial management within the Irish civil service. A co-ordinating Group of Secretaries across the different government departments was given responsibility for its implementation. An Equality Committee was set up as part of the Human Resource Management aspect of the SMI and this Committee immediately commissioned research on 'Gender Imbalance in the Irish Civil Service at Higher Executive Officer Level (HEO) and Above'. Conclusions from this research highlighted the way in which women enter the civil service at lower levels than men, progress more slowly, are paid less, are concentrated in operational areas, are less likely to be in high profile positions and more likely to be balancing work and family responsibilities. (Humphreys et al 1999). As a result of this research an Equality Working Group was set up aimed at implementing a strategic approach to gender equality linked to positive action based on specific targets in seven areas: recruitment, placement/mobility, training/staff development, promotion, work & family, language & sexual harassment and policy delivery. Each government department is currently in the process of setting goals and allocating resources to their achievement under the overall co-ordination of the Equality Working Group.
Table 2  Employment by Gender (15-64 years) 1992, 1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1992</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>Change 92-98</th>
<th>% Change 92-98</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women in Employment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- full-time</td>
<td>416.2</td>
<td>594.6</td>
<td>178.4</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- part-time</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>179.2</td>
<td>103.5</td>
<td>136%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men in Employment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- full-time</td>
<td>749.0</td>
<td>899.9</td>
<td>150.9</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- part-time</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>145%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total in Employment</strong></td>
<td>1165.2</td>
<td>1494.5</td>
<td>329.2</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- full-time</td>
<td>1060.8</td>
<td>1244.9</td>
<td>184.1</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- part-time</td>
<td>104.4</td>
<td>249.6</td>
<td>145.2</td>
<td>139%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3  Employment Status by Gender, 1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Females %</th>
<th>Males %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-Time</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-Time</td>
<td>7.25%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References

Dept of Education and Science : Green Paper on Adult Education.
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National Economic and Social Forum (1997) : Self-Employment, Enterprise and Social Inclusion. NESF.
Third Report of the Fourth Joint Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights 1996;