

Labour Women

Pre-Budget Submission

Budget 2015

September 2014





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Introduction

Recent economic figures have shown that there has been a fundamental shift in the direction of the Irish economy. However, while increased employment and increased growth are certainly achievements to be proud of, we must remember that economic growth is not an end in and of itself. Instead we must remember that the restoration of the public finances is merely a necessary step in our campaign to see a better and more equal social order which values the dignity of every single person on our island. Our decisions in our last 18 months in government must be driven by the unwavering belief that the role of government is to ensure that every person living here is afforded the opportunity to fully participate in society regardless of gender, race or disability. This is why Labour Women have chosen to focus our pre-budget submission on the barriers which prevent women and other marginalised groups from full participation in society whether that is due to appalling living conditions in the case of people living in direct provision or the lack of proper access to child care which serves as a barrier to women returning to work. We are calling today on the parliamentary party and Labour in government today to rise above the endless clamour for tax cuts and to instead choose to reinvest in people.

Sinead Ahern

Chair, Labour Women

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1. Childcare

In June 2014 the European Commission's Country Specific Recommendations¹ revealed that Ireland has some of the highest fees in the EU for early childhood education and care for children under three. According to OECD figures from earlier this year, Ireland is one of the two most expensive countries in the world for childcare, with the average family of two spending 40 per cent of the average wage on childcare costs.

In the aforementioned Report, The European Commission has listed the following as a recommendation for Ireland:

Recommendation #4

Tackle low work intensity of households and address the poverty risk of children through tapered withdrawal of benefits and supplementary payments upon return to employment. Facilitate female labour market participation by improving access to more affordable and full-time childcare, particularly for low income families.

According to 2013 figures, the average fee for childcare nationally was €152 per child per week. For a two-child family, that amounts to almost €16,000 per year. The affordability of childcare is a significant barrier to parents in finding employment and avoiding the risk of poverty. The CSO Report from 2011 entitled, Women and Men in Ireland showed that the employment rate for men and women without children was 84.8% and 85.7% respectively, whereas when a man's youngest child was aged 4-5 years old this rate dropped to 73.8% (a drop of 11 percentage points) and the same rate dropped to 51.5% for women who's youngest child was aged 4-5 (a drop of 24 percentage points). This shows clearly that women are more likely to drop out of the workforce once they have children, and in higher numbers than men.

Investment in childcare and early education is not only crucial for the future development of the child but it also facilitates parents, especially mothers, either to remain in or take up employment. It is clear that the current set-up in Ireland is not working to facilitate parents, particularly mothers to combine work and family life.

¹ Building growth: Country-specific recommendations 2014 Ireland, 2 June 2014
http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2014/csr2014_ireland_en.pdf

Recommendation:

- Labour Women is calling on the Government to undertake a full cost-benefit analysis on models of support for parents such as tax exemptions, tax credits and refundable credits thus ensuring that work pays for parents who combine work with formal childcare in Ireland.

Early Childhood Care and Education Year

Labour Women welcomed the introduction of a year's free childcare for pre-school children. The Free Pre School Year was introduced in 2010 and it has been very successful, with almost 96 per cent of eligible children taking up their place this year.

This scheme has begun to introduce some equity for children and has very positive social benefits. It provides children with a good start in education and for parents it ensures that irrespective of their financial situation their child can enjoy the benefits of early learning.

Evidence clearly demonstrates that the investment in the ECCE year reaps rewards especially for disadvantaged children if they have access to quality care. Quality care in these circumstances however relates not just to the care received by the children but also to the working conditions of the predominantly female employees in this sector. Any investment in Early Childcare and Education must include sufficient resources for staff and ensure that the pay scales in this sector are of an adequate and decent rate, with genuine progression opportunities available within the sector.

We need to ensure that our children are provided with the best quality childcare that is within the means of all. There is no doubt that this will require considerable investment, however the outcomes of such investment will mean that it will repay itself in terms of increased participation in the workforce by parents, particularly mothers, and enhanced opportunities and outcomes for children.

Recommendations:

- Labour Women is calling for the Free Pre School Year Scheme to be extended to two years, allowing children under 3 years to avail of the scheme.
- Ensure that quality care relates not only to the needs of the children but also to the working conditions and pay rates of the employees in the sector.
- In addition, Labour Women recommends that in the longer term, public pre-schools should be developed with the goal of pre-school care ultimately being provided by the state rather than in private establishments.

2. Direct Provision

While our Pre-Budget Submission focuses in the main on government spending, its goal is also to ensure that people living in our communities and in our society are afforded a certain standard of living. In light of this, we have included a number of Recommendations in relation to the Direct

Provision system which has been in place in Ireland since 1999 and has accommodated over 51,800 people since then. The Direct Provision centres today are in danger of becoming the Mother and Baby Homes of the future, where people look back and ask how this was allowed to happen. Men, women, children and sometimes entire families are forced to live in institutional centres for an average length of 4 years while their asylum applications are processed and finalised. Labour Women believes that Direct Provision should only be a short term solution for people as they await decisions on their asylum applications.

The lack of dignity afforded to these people in their living conditions needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency and Labour Women notes that Minister Aodhan O'Riordain TD has stated that one of his first priorities in this role is to tackle the Direct Provision system and we look forward to supporting him in this important work.

Recommendations:

- Labour Women is calling for immediate reform of the Direct Provision system, to take place after an urgent review of the Direct Provision system, which takes account of international best practice in dealing with asylum seekers and which seeks the views and experiences of those living and working within the Direct Provision system. This review will propose alternative systems and processes to deal with asylum seekers who come to Ireland in a dignified and respectful way.
- Labour Women is calling for the allowance rates of €19.10 per week for adults and €9.60 per week for children to be increased.
- Labour Women recommends that the right to work and access to third level education of residents in the Direct Provision system be reviewed.

It is clear that as a State we need to ensure that a better system is in place for processing asylum applications without inordinate delays. This will require that resources are allocated to this area and requires that underlying all decisions relating to this process is a determination that all asylum seekers are treated with respect and afforded the dignity and equality that we would expect for Irish citizens.

3. Pensions and Gender

Women are still at a disadvantage in building up contributions towards their pension; this is not just an historic issue. It is also due in part to the fact that women are less likely to be in a financial position to invest in a private pension. According to the CSO Report, *Women and Men in Ireland 2011*, 51% of women had no pension provision, either occupational or personal.

State Pension

Over 40 years after the end of the marriage bar the gender gap in pensions is still too high. Currently just under 60% of women qualify for State Contributory Pension; this compares to over 80% of men. Part of this is due to historical issues dating from the marriage bar when women were forced out of the workplace.

Many working women today are in low paid or part time employment. In 2011, 36% of women were in part-time work, often casual or insecure, making it difficult to build up consistent pension contributions. Women are more likely than men to rely on state pensions and therefore if state pensions are not adequate, women lose relatively more than men.

Recommendations:

- Labour Women recommends that women who left work as a result of the marriage bar should be paid an individualised pension at the full pension rate.
- Maintain the rate of the Contributory and Non Contributory Pensions
- Ask that the Department of Finance introduce the Home-Makers scheme without delay.

Recognising Carers

Labour Women is calling for carers, both women and men, to be able to maintain pension contribution records during key stages of care. Labour Women is calling on the government to adopt gender neutral policies that encourage equal sharing of any care obligations by both women and men.

Recommendation:

- No government policy should disadvantage anyone who takes time away from employment to care for family members.

Equality proof pensions

Currently only 16% of those on a full Contributory Pension are women. While the full contributory pension has been protected, reduced rate pensions have been cut and contributory thresholds have been raised. These measures have had an inequitable impact on women and highlight the need for equality proofing of all future budgetary measures. Gender equality in pensions requires that the pension model used does not exacerbate gender inequalities already in the system. The aim of future pension reform should be to eliminate all discrimination.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that the pensions system as a whole is not predicated on male lifetime patterns of work and earnings.
- All proposed pension reforms should be gender proofed.
- We support the call that the National Women's Council of Ireland should have formal representation in key pension's policy institutions such as the pensions board.

4. Family Leave

At a recent seminar on 'Families and Work', Professor Peter Moss referred to Ireland's family leave policies as being "maternalist" in that they assume that women are responsible for the care of very young children. Ireland currently is one of nine European countries that has no paternity leave whatsoever.

Evidence suggests that paid maternity leave is an effective policy in influencing mothers to stay at home from work and care for their infant in the early weeks and months of that baby's life. In order to promote or extend parental care of an infant, extending paid leave for parents is clearly the most viable way of doing this.

The duration of Paid Maternity leave has been extended over successive decades. However, there has been no introduction of paid paternity leave for fathers. In order to increase gender equality in employment and in the sharing of parenting duties at home, Labour Women is calling on the government to introduce paid paternity leave for fathers.

The introduction of paid paternity leave would mean that any disadvantage in the labour market from breaks around childbirth, which are currently solely borne by women would be more equally shared by parents. The introduction of this type of family leave would also encourage the sharing of childcare duties amongst parents.

Recommendation:

- Labour Women is calling on the government to introduce paid Paternity Leave in Ireland.

5. Maternity Care

While not a traditional topic for a Pre-Budget Submission, this subject is one of huge importance to Labour Women members. In December 2013, Labour Party Conference in Killarney unanimously carried a Central Council motion on maternity services. A similar motion was subsequently carried at Labour Women's Conference in February 2014, which mandated the group to campaign on the relevant issues, with particular reference to recent high-profile deficiencies in maternity services in Ireland. The text of the motion is reproduced at the end of this document.

Review of Maternity Services

Central to this campaign is the call on government to undertake a major review of the services available to pregnant women and their babies, taking into account the many and diverse preferences of women regarding place and type of birth. This must include home as well as hospital, and in the latter setting, a choice could be available between traditional consultant-led and midwife-led care in the ante, intra and post-partum period, expanding on the "Domino" system available in some hospitals.

Ultimately it boils down to giving women a choice in this key stage of their lives and it has become crystal clear that the lack of regard for women's choices in the manner of their deliveries and their maternity care has resulted in the denigration of these women and degrading treatment and lack of empathy and respect for their wishes and preferences to be given due regard or even listened to has led to preventable tragic consequences for a number of women.

The lack of acceptable evidence-based internationally accredited standards of care in our maternity services must be addressed and measures taken to achieve the highest standard of professional care to mothers and babies. These standards must be applicable to all Irish maternity hospitals and maternity units in regional and general hospitals, and be rolled out to include home births where these are desired.

Mothers must be reassured of excellence in the care they receive regardless of their choice of birthplace, and a major mind-set rethink is needed to support home births where these are requested and there are no contraindications that place mother or infant lives at risk. Home births are presently a rarity in Ireland and are thwarted by the medical model of birth, which prevails, as is

evident by the fact that independent midwives no longer have indemnity insurance covered by the INMO.

Over the past decade maternity services in Ireland have come under significant pressure. A 2008 review of staffing levels in the maternity hospitals in the greater Dublin Area reported that the then staffing levels were not *'adequate to meet the RCOG (Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists guidelines, the BAPM standards or the Birth rite Plus recommendations'*². In addition a number of high profile and tragic cases have highlighted instances where there have been significant lapses in appropriate standards of care resulting in loss of life.³

Many recent quality reviews have highlighted a dearth of appropriately trained staff in maternity services across the state with many regions falling significantly short of the recommended ratio of one consultant per 350 live births.⁴ A KPMG report examining maternity services in the greater Dublin area in 2008 noted that the region would require a further 20 obstetricians, 221 midwives, 20 neonatal nurses and 35 theatre staff to meet demand.⁵ A review of staffing levels across maternity services should be undertaken and staffing levels should be increased where a lack of staff may lead to increased risk of adverse outcomes.

The report investigating perinatal deaths over a five year period in Portlaoise described a system of overstretched staff and an under-resourced maternity unit where the care was sub-optimal and the treatment of the families was deemed unacceptable and compounded their distress. The INMO is looking at the staffing levels and calls for adequate staffing in all hospital settings was the theme of their 2014 Annual Delegate Conference. It is surely more than coincidence that these tragedies all occurred since the recruitment ban came into force six years ago in the HSE and public sector.⁶

Recommendations:

- Labour Women is calling on the staffing levels in all the maternity units to be addressed based on optimal internationally recognised staff: patient ratios.

² HSE/KPMG (2008). *Independent review of maternity and gynaecology services in the Greater Dublin Area*. Dublin: HSE.http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/services/Hospitals/Independent_Review_of_Maternity_and_Gynaecology_Services_in_the_greater_Dublin_area_.pdf

³ Investigation into the safety, quality and standards of services provided by the Health Service Executive to patients, including pregnant women, at risk of clinical deterioration, including those provided in University Hospital Galway, and as reflected in the care and treatment provided to Savita Halappanavar

⁴ *The Future of Maternity and Gynaecology Services in Ireland 2006 – 2016*

⁵ *Independent Review of Maternity and Gynaecology Services in the Greater Dublin Area*

22 August 2008

⁶ <http://static.rasset.ie/documents/news/portlaoise-perinatal-deaths.pdf>

- Labour Women is calling on the government to establish a major review of the Irish Maternity Care system across all areas.

Consent

While the issue of consent is not necessarily a concern for a Pre-Budget Submission, recent events mean that it would be remiss of us not to include a reference to the calls to Repeal the 8th Amendment.

Two recent cases have highlighted issues around pregnant women's rights to refuse consent for medical intervention; Hamilton Vs HSE⁷ and the recent highly publicised case of 'Migrant Y'. Furthermore the national consent policy references article 40.3.3 of the constitution and notes that '*there is significant legal uncertainty regarding the extent of a pregnant woman's right to refuse treatment in circumstances in which the refusal would put the life of a viable foetus at serious risk. In such circumstances, legal advice should be sought as to whether an application to the High Court is necessary*'.⁸

Labour Women is calling on a referendum repealing the 8th Amendment to be tabled and steps to be taken to ensure that women are provided with adequate information to make informed decisions around their care during pregnancy and birth. Additionally women should be provided with the option to decline intervention where they feel that this is in their best interest.

Recommendations:

- Review of consent policies around maternity care ensuring best practice and due regard to the wishes of pregnant women and significant others.
- Labour is Women is calling on the government to table a referendum repealing the 8th Amendment.

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<http://www.courts.ie/Judgments.nsf/09859e7a3f34669680256ef3004a27de/597235d07c04a26a80257d35004d7c25?OpenDocument>

⁸ http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/3/nas/news/National_Consent_Policy.pdf

Appendix

Text of Motion carried at 2013 Labour Party Conference and at Labour Women's Biennial National Conference in February 2014

Labour Women Conference welcomes the passing of the motion "Creating Fairness in our Health Service" at National Party Conference in November 2013.

"Conference notes that the current maternity system has not undergone a major review in 59 years. Conference further notes the deficiencies in the maternity system highlighted by the recent HIQA and inquest reports relating to the tragic deaths of Savita Halappanavar and Bimbo Onanuga. Conference calls on Labour in government to carry out a large scale review of the current maternity services in Ireland to include:

- Expert international review of the active management of Labour policy with reference to current international best practice guidelines
- Review of the large discrepancies in intervention rates between maternity units nationwide
- Review of consent policies around maternity care ensuring best practice and due regard to the wishes of pregnant women and significant others
- Investigate establishing national guidelines outlining the minimum information regarding the potential risks and benefits of any intervention, which should be provided prior to an intervention being carried out
- Review of current standards of documentation in maternity care to ensure that the clinical indications for each intervention are clearly documented in medical notes and that informed consent for the procedure is also clearly documented including an outline of what information on risks and benefits was provided
- Review of the current staffing levels of maternity services nationwide and how this relates to best practice and ensuring safety in maternity care
- Review of the structure of maternity services to allow women access to a variety of maternity care including home birth, midwife led unit and consultant led care depending on need and preference."

Conference mandates Labor Women Executive to campaign on the issues raised.

- Expert international review of the active management of Labour policy with reference to current international best practice guidelines

- Review of the large discrepancies in intervention rates between maternity units nationwide
- Review of consent policies around maternity care ensuring best practice and due regard to the wishes of pregnant women and significant others
- Review of the current staffing levels of maternity services nationwide and how this relates to best practice and ensuring safety in maternity care
- Review of the structure of maternity services to allow women access to a variety of maternity care including home birth, midwife led unit and consultant led care depending on need and preference.”