

'Stand Up, Speak Out, Fight Back'

LABOUR WOMEN STRATEGIC PLAN

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Introduction

The Labour Party, founded by James Connolly in 1912, is committed to the achievement of genuine equality between women and men in Irish society. It is an obvious place for those who recognize the historical and actual subordination and oppression of women and who are committed to tackling it to work with others of similar mind. Women party members who recognized that women are underrepresented in positions of leadership and influence within the Labour Party as elsewhere in Irish political, economic and cultural life founded Labour Women in order to work for women's human rights and for women's political representation and leadership.

Labour Women works in solidarity with others across the Labour Party - with the Party Leader, the PLP, local councillors, constituency organisations, the Central Council, Labour Party staff, special advisors and other sections of the Party - on the basis of collective recognition that

- Significant barriers remain to be addressed in the struggle to achieve gender equality,
- The achievement of gender equality is critical to the achievement of the Fair Society,
- Labour Women is supported by the Party organisation in its work to achieve the goals set out in this strategic plan.

This Strategic Plan is both a strategic communication and a strategic planning tool. It communicates the mission and work of Labour Women to women members, to members, sections and constituencies across the Labour Party and to constituencies of women outside the Labour Party.

It provides a framework for Labour Women to name its achievements, strategically assess the challenges it encounters, build alliances, and undertake actions across the Labour Party and beyond in order to ensure that development of a Fair Society and the electoral successes of the Labour Party.

Labour Women

2.1 Mission

The mission of Labour Women is the achievement of its aims as outlined in the party's Constitution; the election of Labour Party candidates in local and general elections and the provision of a space with the party for women members to work together to influence party policy and strategy affecting women. Labour Women see the implementation of the recommendations of the Report of the Commission on Women's Participation in the Labour Party as key to achieving its mission and believes that the Report provides a road map for its work.

Labour Women is committed to three spheres of organization:

- The organization of women within the Labour Party
- Active participation in internal party activity at local, regional and national levels
- Cooperation and partnerships with women's organizations in civil society with a vision compatible with that of Labour Women and the Labour Party.

Labour Women engages at these three levels in order to

- Enhance the participation of women in the Labour Party
- Inform and develop Labour party policy from women's perspectives
- Work for the equitable representation of women as Party candidates and as elected representatives, locally and nationally
- Work for the election of the Labour Party to national government
- Achieve the Labour vision of equality, solidarity, community and freedom for Irish society as a whole.

2.2 Values

Labour Women believes that the socialist vision and the values of the Labour Party are key to the transformation of society necessary for the achievement of genuine equality between women and men.

Labour Women works within the Labour Party to strengthen the party's commitment to tackle the systemic subordination of women across the economic, political, cultural and affective spheres of Irish society and to build commitment to analysis of policy and practice within the Party as it impacts on women.

Labour Women aims to do this work in active partnership with the parliamentary Labour Party, with local councillors, with other Labour sections including Equality and Youth, with the NEC and with the staff of the Labour Party.

2.3 Membership

All women Party members are Labour Women members. Those who are interested in women's issues are included in a mailing list which informs the members about Labour Women events, developments and other activities of interest.

2.4 Executive

The Labour Women Executive is elected by women members of the Labour Party at the Labour Women Conference, which is held every two years.

The Executive meets monthly and is responsible for guiding the work of Labour Women towards the achievement of its strategic goals and for convening four Labour Women general meetings each year.

The work of Labour Women is facilitated and coordinated on a day-to-day basis by the Party Women's Officer, a member of the Labour Party staff team.

The Party Women's Officer is an ex-officio member of the Executive of Labour Women.

2.5 Women's Officers

Every Constituency Council has a Women's Officer. As far as possible, every Branch should also have a Women's Officer. The Women's Officer is the Constituency/Branch link for Labour Women. She communicates information, liaises with the Party Women's Officer, engages women, promotes women and reports to her Constituency/Branch. She is actively involved in connecting with women in her constituency and in organizing activities relating to the Labour Women Strategic Plan.

Labour Women and the Labour Party

3. Labour Women and the Labour Party

3.1 The Central Council

Labour Women is represented on Central Council.

3.2 Labour Women and Labour Equality

Labour Women is represented on the executive of Labour Equality.

3.3 21st Century Commission

Labour Women is represented on the 21st Century Commission and will work to ensure that the Commission reflects our view of the future of the Labour Party.

3.4 International Links

Labour Women is represented on the executive of PES Women which meets four times each year and is a member of Socialist Women International. PES Women and SWI continue to work at European and international levels to achieve equality between women and men, equal opportunities for women in political, economic and social life and the respect for women's human rights.

As a member of PES Women, Labour Women seeks to ensure that the Labour Party gives leadership in Ireland in reaffirming the values and commitments made in Beijing in 2000, in insisting that the commitments in the Beijing Platform For Action remain irreversible and non-negotiable, in refocusing on the empowerment of women, and in building a better world of social justice, equality in status and equal opportunities for women and men.

The PES and International representative from the executive of Labour Women represents Labour Women in the International section of the Labour Party.

Labour Women Aims

4. Labour Women: Aims

Labour Women is constituted under Article 7 (1) (d) of the Labour Party Constitution. The aims of Labour Women are:

- a) To secure support of women for the principles, objects and policies of the Labour Party and to encourage and facilitate women to join the party.
- b) To encourage the full participation of women in all Labour Party activities, including policy formation and the holding of positions within the party.
- c) To advise the Labour Party and all Sections and members thereof on matters affecting, or of interest to, Labour Women.
- d) To prepare and pursue a programme of work to deal with the problems, aspirations, interests and needs of women.

- e) To provide educational, training and social opportunities for women members of the Labour Party.
- f) To develop and maintain links with sister parties and their women's sections and with organisations whose objectives are congruent with those of Labour Women.

This strategic plan sets out the priority policy issues that Labour Women will focus on to contribute to the achievement of these aims.

Labour Women Priority Issues

5. Labour Women: Priority Issues

Labour Women has identified 5 priority issues that will guide the work of Labour Women. These are:

1. Women's Political Participation
2. Economic Issues for Women
3. Violence Against Women
4. Sharing and Valuing Care Work
5. Accessible Health Care

1. Women's political Participation

Labour Women has campaigned for increased women's political participation for 40 years. Since 2003 Labour Women has specifically campaigned for legislative measures as a way to achieve an increase in women's involvement in political decision-making. While 'soft' supports addressing the so called 5 c's (cash, confidence, childcare, culture, connections) are necessary, these alone have not achieved an increase in women's political participation. In 2009 Ciaran Lynch TD published Labour Party Private Members' Bill which outlined a measure whereby political parties would be obliged to put forward 20% women candidates (increasing to 30% and to 40%) or else lose half their state funding. Increasing women's political participation was a commitment in the Labour-FG Programme for Government, and has now been acted upon as the Electoral (funding) Bill 2011 has been passed. The new law will oblige political parties to put forward 30% women candidates in the next dail election.

2. Economic issues for women

Women's economic independence is at the heart of women's empowerment. Through economic independence, a woman can exercise choice and acquire the freedom to pursue her choices. Life-long economic independence provides women with security, options and a better quality of life. Migrant women have particular needs which have to be recognised and addressed: Labour Women recognises the talents, strengths, skills and positive life-experiences of migrant women, and want to celebrate and encourage migrant women in fulfilling their potential in their lives in Ireland.

With a more uncertain economic environment, we have to be aware of possible rising unemployment, more precarious employment and greater job insecurity, all of which may mean women being squeezed out of the labour market and being affected by inadequate social welfare payments.

Gender pay gap (= difference in average hourly earnings of men and women): In Ireland women are paid 14% less than men. The Equal Pay Employment Act 1977 prohibits pay discrimination on gender or marital status grounds, but the Gender Pay Gap persists for various reasons. Women occupy the lower levels of the pay bracket (income distribution), women have more fragmented career patterns mainly due to family and caring responsibilities, women work part-time more often than men do (gender time gap), and occupational segregation still keeps men and women in their traditional professional sectors. Even in the sectors with a large female workforce like health or education more men than women occupy the higher pay bracket.

Pensions: Women's pension coverage at 50.6% (men's 58.3%) leaves half the women of Ireland without pension coverage. Lack of an adequate pension leaves older women vulnerable to poverty, limited choices and poorer quality of life. 50% of older women live on incomes below 60% of median income and 40% of older women live in constant poverty. Women aged 65 and over have a 45% risk of poverty (men 34%). Just over one in three PRSAs are being taken out by women, and fewer self-employed women have a personal pension than men.

Social welfare: Labour Women will campaign to ensure that all women will be able to receive full social welfare in their own right and not just as "adult dependants". We note that as a result of many years work in the home, many women do not have access to contributory benefits and we will work to ensure that women are no longer disadvantaged by this. Labour Women will also challenge the poverty traps which are built into a number of long-term social welfare payments. Furthermore Labour Women insists that social welfare payments should keep up with inflation.

Women as Entrepreneurs and Self-Employed (including child-minders): Women's participation as entrepreneurs is lower than men's and the disparity between women's and men's participation is higher for older established enterprises. Men who perceive opportunities in their local area are more than three times more likely to start a business, and women are more likely to be involved in the services sectors. A higher percentage of women entrepreneurs come from part time employment or from a 'homemaker' role. Many women start a business to combine family life with their careers, which may explain that women are less likely to develop their business while they have dependent children.

Labour Women will promote and highlight in the appropriate fora the severe challenges facing women in this area. We will further develop and support our links with women's organisations in furthering women's economic well-being.

3. Violence against Women (VAW)

In December 2006 the Labour Party launched its Policy on Violence Against Women. Labour's policy is an integrated policy based on best practice. Our policy incorporates all areas of VAW : Domestic Violence, Rape & Sexual Assault, Trafficking & Prostitution and Pornography. It deals with Victim & Safety, Perpetrator & Accountability and State & Responsibility.

Labour Women recognises that 134 women have been murdered in Ireland since the end of 1996 of whom 49% were murdered by their current or ex-partners, and we recognise that domestic violence is still prevalent in our society.

In 2007 a new Domestic Violence Prevention Unit COSC was established in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Labour Women will continue to work with the VAW sector to keep the issue on the political agenda.

Labour Women will continue to demand that trafficking, prostitution and pornography are treated as violence against women and women trafficked, prostituted and involved in pornography are treated as victims. Labour Women will also tackle VAW issues specific to migrant women, and recognises that migrant women have particular needs to be addressed in this regard.

Labour Women will continue to tackle VAW in the political and wider domain in co-operation with the VAW sector and women in the community and to ensure that our policies are implemented wherever possible.

4. Sharing and Valuing the Care Work

Caring work has traditionally been women's work. The stereotyping of women in the Constitution, particularly Article 41.2.1, reflects the outdated concept of women's work. While caring work is fulfilling, it is also very demanding. Sharing the burdens and joys of caring work is beneficial for everyone. Labour Women recognises the rights and responsibilities of those, both women and men, carrying out caring work. Labour Women want to encourage people of all backgrounds to share and value the caring work and family duties. Labour Women also recognises that migrant women carry out caring work which is to be valued and shared and we will also work towards the introduction of Family Reunification Policies to assist migrant women in this work.

Childcare

Women's opportunities for education, training and employment are greatly hampered by the lack of affordable, accessible quality childcare. Women opt out of employment to care for children when childcare fees become exorbitant, childcare is not available or inflexible working conditions place an unbearable burden on the family. The lack of affordable, accessible and high quality childcare is one of the major barriers for women who want to enter the workforce. This leads many women to sourcing their childcare need in the informal economy. It can create other problems for grandparents who are often called upon to help out with childcare. Many women in their struggle to combine work and home life opt to work part-time. 80% of part-time workers are women. While part-time work gives women more flexibility with their childcare, it does so at a price as many part-time positions are low paid. Women let promotional or career advancing opportunities pass by because of family commitments. Women find it difficult to enter politics because of the 'triple burden' of family, career and political life.

99 % of parents in the home are women, some of whom may experience isolation. While caring for children is rewarding, it is also very hard work that needs to be shared.

Eldercare and Carers

Women are often also responsible for eldercare and caring for a sick or disabled relative. In the 2006 census of population 160,917 people were recorded as Family Carers in Ireland and of these 64% were women. The role of the carer is very demanding as they need to be constantly available due to the high levels of social and health care needed at home and in

case of emergency. For many, it is 24hrs a day, 7 days a week. By taking on this role many women are affected economically as less than 1 in 6 carers qualify for the Carers Allowance. By their work as carers they are saving the state billions of euros each year. Labour Women is committed to highlighting and campaigning for improvements in the conditions of carers.

Labour Women will highlight and campaign for state policies and programmes that will promote and encourage the sharing of the care work between men and women in a more balanced society. Labour Women will also work to have the outdated Article 41.2.1. repealed.

5. Accessible Health Care

Access to good high quality health care, including mental health care, is something we aspire to for all citizens. Women have specific and diverse needs which warrant why women's health requires specific attention. Women who are less well off, have been consistently shown to be at a greater disadvantage in relation to health care. Women have lower incomes than men and are at greater risk of poverty. Women continue to be the major carers in society, the stress of juggling responsibilities can have an adverse effect on women's health. Women because of their reproductive roles, have unique and additional health burdens.

The issue of abortion as a reproductive health right remains unresolved. Labour Women supports the findings of the CEDAW Shadow Report Ireland 2004 which recommends that the government

- As a minimum legal reform introduce legislation to make provision for abortion in Ireland like those in the 'X' case, which was upheld by the Supreme Court of Ireland
- Provide for abortions in cases meeting the constitutional test
- Address the subject of abortion in the longer term, leading to repeal of Articles 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act, 1861 and of Article 40.3.3 of the Irish Constitution

Labour Women will continue to advocate for a flexible and accessible service for women which will respond equitably to their

Strategic Actions

6. Strategic Actions: Labour Women will

- Contribute to Labour Party policy in relation to the priority policy areas named in this Plan and on issues pertaining to women's rights
- Promote Labour Women's policy positions to relevant Party Spokespersons and other Party sections
- Participate in actions and campaigns within civil society that focus public attention on our priority policy issues

Conclusion

7. Conclusion

This Strategic Plan was developed by Labour Women to communicate the commitment of Labour Women to working as an integral dimension of the Labour Party to achieving the vision of the Fair Society and to achieving equality for women across the political, economic, cultural and affective spheres of life and society.

APPENDIX

Commission on Women's Participation in the Labour Party

Final Report - 15th September 2005

PART 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Legislative Change

Labour should be at the forefront of increasing women's political participation. Thus it is vital that as a party we introduce a voluntary selection/opportunity quota, to lead by example. However, this alone will not be enough to bring about change. Given that Labour is not a dominant political party as it is in Britain, and given that the political and social culture in Ireland is not egalitarian as it is in Scandinavia, the only way to increase women's participation in Ireland in any realistic timeframe will be through obliging political parties to adopt quotas.

Thus, in order to bring about real improvements in women's participation, legislation will have to be adopted, based on the French model, obliging political parties to adopt gender selection quotas and imposing sanctions by way of withholding public funds from parties that did not comply. The NWCI (2002) have already recommended such legislation should be introduced, to make 50% of the funding for political parties dependent on achieving a 40:60 gender balance among candidates selected for general and local elections. The framework for this is already present. The Standards in Public Office Commission currently monitors the spending of each political party on the promotion of women in political activity. On 2003 figures, Labour spent 6% of its total funding on this activity, compared to 3.3% for Sinn Fein and .8% for the Greens. None of the other political parties allocated any funding under this category. Yet no sanction was imposed on any party for failure to spend under this heading.

As a very minimum, therefore, financial sanctions should be imposed on parties through legislation, unless the parties can show that targets for increased levels of women's participation as members and as candidates have been met.

Recommendation:

- Labour should lead the way, not alone by adopting a voluntary selection quota, but also by introducing private members legislation while in Opposition. Such legislation should be based on the French model, obliging political parties to adopt gender selection quotas and imposing sanctions by way of withholding public funds from parties that did not comply. This legislation should also form part of the Programme for Government in any government negotiations entered by Labour.

4.2 Recruitment of Members

Proactive recruitment of women members into the party may best be achieved through working with groups active in local communities; through the National Women's Council and through other civic society groups. Women's officers at branch and constituency level

are the obvious contact persons to bring about such networks. They should be supported and facilitated in this work, through the provision of lists of voluntary groups in each area (see further below).

The appointment of a Women and Equality Officer (on the basis that two fifths of her/his time will be devoted to working on women's representation issues) is very welcome, this does not go far enough given the level of work required and recommended on a national basis to improve women's participation and representation rates within the Party. The appointment of a full-time Women's Development Officer is essential to provide the necessary backup support and facilitation, to co-ordinate the provision of lists of voluntary and community groups in each area, and to give practical and administrative support to women's officers at branch and constituency level.

Recommendations:

- The current position of a Women and Equality Officer should be upgraded to provide for a dedicated full-time post of Women's Development Officer to work on improving the participation and representation rates of women within Labour, to work on the development of women's membership of the Party on a national networking basis, and to provide the necessary supports to women's officers and to Labour Women.
- The Women's Development Officer should provide women's officers at branch and constituency level (elected in accordance with Motion passed at Labour Conference in May 2005) with lists of women members in their area, and facilitate them in communicating with those members on a regular basis.
- Active participation in Labour Women should be valued by the party as much as active participation at constituency or branch level. Each branch and constituency meeting should leave space on the agenda for a report on the work of the women's officer.
- Each constituency must take collective and strategic ownership of the issues around increasing women's representation. In particular, each constituency development plan must include a programme of work to further develop women's profile, participation and representation within the Party.
- Given the identified need to recruit more young women, the efforts being made by Labour Youth in this regard are to be welcomed, and further support must be provided to Labour Youth to facilitate them in the recruitment of women members.
- Resourcing should be provided by the Party for information packs, training events and conferences to be organised by Labour Women for new and renewing women members.

4.3 Party Structures

Recommendations:

- Article 15 of the Constitution provides that in any election of members/delegates to committees or councils, as far as practicable elections should be conducted so as to ensure that at least 30% of those elected are of

each gender. This measure has been in place for four years and working well. Consideration should be given to amending the Article to raise the target for each gender to 40% in the future.

- Women's officers should be elected at branch and constituency level (in accordance with Motion passed at Labour Conference in May 2005) and their role should be to facilitate networking both with existing women members and with women in local community and voluntary groups
- Labour Women, and women's officers at branch and constituency level, must be adequately resourced by the Party to provide a co-ordinating role for women members both nationally and locally.
- Term limits should be imposed on all the officerships and committee membership of all sections within the Party, including Labour Women (as recommended by the Membership Working Group). This will ensure better turnover of officers within each section, and will facilitate the recruitment and sustain the participation rates of new members - including women and younger members.

4.4 Selection of Candidates

Labour party candidates for local, Dáil and European elections are selected by a one-member-one-vote ballot of all members registered to vote in branches in the appropriate area (Labour Party Constitution, Article 13.2), at a selection convention. The number of candidates to be selected in each electoral area is decided by the Organisation Sub-Committee (Article 13.3, as amended at Conference 2005).

4.4(a) Multiple Candidate Selection Conventions

Where a convention is to take place to select more than one candidate in any particular electoral area in a local, general or European election, Party Conference 2005 has amended the Constitution to allow the Organisation Sub-Committee to 'prescribe outcomes with regard to the gender balance of the panel of candidates selected'.

This amendment is very welcome and needs to be implemented as widely as possible, wherever the Organisation Sub-Committee has decided on a two or three candidate election strategy. The amendment should also be given teeth. Where the Organisation Sub-Committee does not apply this provision due to particular circumstances in an electoral area, it should have to seek a mandate in order to opt out from the NEC.

In addition, where a second candidate is being added to the ticket by the Organisation Sub-Committee in any electoral area, the principle must be adopted that if the candidate selected at the convention is a man, the candidate added must be a woman.

4.4(b) Single Candidate Selection Conventions-

The constitutional amendment does not affect the many electoral areas in which Labour will be running only a single candidate. The best way to achieve parity democracy is to view each electoral area in which only one candidate is being selected (eg Dáil constituency or

local ward) as a single-member constituency; and adopt the British Labour model of 'pairing' constituencies.

This would mean in practice that two electoral areas in which a single candidate is to run would be matched together. Each area would have similar chances of winning a seat for the selected candidate. They would then be 'paired' with the aim that at least one of the two candidates selected would have to be a woman. In effect, in one of the electoral areas, the only candidates capable of being nominated would have to be women.

4.4(c) Practical Implementation of Pairing

(i) No constitutional change would be necessary
No constitutional change would be necessary to adopt a 'pairing' policy and/or an all-woman nomination rule for particular electoral areas. Article 13.2 provides that 'The NEC shall prescribe the procedure for selecting Party candidates.' The Standing Orders for Dáil, Local and European selection conventions are adopted by the NEC which could therefore amend the Standing Orders to provide that nominations for a particular electoral area would only be accepted in respect of women. The members in that electoral area would then be able to vote for one of the women on the list of nominees, on a one-member-one-vote basis in accordance with Article 13.2 of the Constitution.

(ii) No existing representatives would be de-selected
No existing representatives would be de-selected. Rather, in the interests of maintaining existing seats and consolidating support for current representatives, a positive action policy could only be adopted where a vacancy had arisen in a particular electoral area - that is, where there is no existing incumbent public representative.

(iii) Issues raised and responses of Commission
Issues about the introduction of a pairing model in the Irish electoral system have been raised with the Commission, in particular:

- the high premium on the need to select 'local' candidates who have links with the electoral area;
- the lower level of 'party voting' and correspondingly higher level of 'personal vote' in the Irish system as opposed to Britain;

In the Irish system, it is acknowledged that in many cases the best candidates are those with local connections and some form of track record. It is often impossible to supplement these from outside, and then often only with 'stars'. In addition, there may be strong resistance from local Party organisations to having candidates who are seen as being 'imposed'.

In response to these issues, the Commission notes that the Constitution of the Labour Party currently allows candidates to be added to the ticket in any electoral area notwithstanding local selection convention results; and that in practice candidates are regularly added against the wishes of local members, or significant groups of local members.

The Commission also notes that disaffection at the outcome of a selection convention is already a real issue for many Labour members - and an inevitable by-product of party politics.

The only difference being proposed here is that clear and transparent gender-based criteria would be used for the selection of candidates - and again only where there is a vacancy, so that no sitting representatives would be de-selected. Further, it is not proposed that candidates be 'imposed' from outside, rather that women from the local electoral area would run for selection.

(iv) Criteria for Pairing Electoral Areas
Strictly defined criteria would be necessary to decide which electoral areas would be matched together. The areas would not necessarily neighbour each other geographically, but would have similar chances of winning a seat for the selected candidate. Both areas would have to be:
(a) areas in which there is no outgoing public representative seeking re-selection;
(b) areas in which a single candidate is to be selected;
(c) areas in which Labour has a similar chance of winning a seat, as identified in the report of the Spring Committee (in relation to Dail constituencies).

Recommendations:

- Formal mentoring should be introduced and run by Labour Women to identify potential women candidates for local, national and European elections; and to provide support to those potential women candidates in encouraging them to run and backing them when they decide to run for election.
- A specialist 'intervention team' could be developed by the Party to run the mentoring process and to 'groom' potential women candidates for selection.
- Multiple candidate selections: where more than one candidate is to be selected in any electoral area, the Organisation Sub-Committee must ensure a gender balance among candidates as per the terms of the amendment to the Constitution. Where the Organisation Sub-Committee does not apply this provision due to particular circumstances in an electoral area, it should have to seek a mandate in order to opt out from the NEC.
- Where a second candidate is being added to the ticket by the Organisation Sub-Committee in any electoral area, the principle must be adopted that if the candidate selected at the convention is a man, the candidate added must be a woman.
- Single candidate selections: where a vacancy arises in any electoral area (local ward, Dáil or European constituency), with no sitting public representative seeking re-selection, the area should be paired with another of similar seat-winning profile, and nominations for one of those areas only accepted from women candidates, to ensure that at least one candidate selected from the two areas is a woman-.
- Targets should be set for numbers/percentages of women candidates for local and general elections in each region. It should be the responsibility of the Regional Development Officer, working in conjunction with Labour Women, to monitor the attainment of these targets. The RDOs together with the executive of Labour Women should present a report each year to the NEC on the extent to which targets are being met.

- Responsibility for fulfilling Resolution 35, and reaching parity democracy by 2014, should rest with the NEC.
- This positive action policy should be adopted by the Party and promoted widely, with a public awareness campaign mounted among the public in general and women's groups nationally in particular. Such a campaign could include the organisation of events such as the Portuguese 'mock parliament'.