

Realising our Rights: Women Organising for change

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Women's Conference

5/6 March 2020

White's Hotel, Wexford

Report for Women's Conference

April 2018 – March 2020

Programme

Thursday 5th March

10.00 Registration and Tea/Coffee

Session 1 Opening Session

11.00 **Welcome and Introduction –**

Margaret Coughlan and
Geraldine Alexander, Joint
Women's Committee Chairs

Chair of Conference
Arrangements Committee

Civic welcome
Wexford Mayor,
Cllr George Lawlor

Sororal Greetings, Wexford
Trades Council

11.15 **General Secretary's address:**

Patricia King, ICTU
General Secretary.

Session 2 Women and Work

12.00 **Motions on Women and Work**

EC Report

Appropriate Sections/Paragraphs

Report of Women's Committees

Appropriate Sections/Paragraphs

Voting on Motions and Agree
Sections of Reports

13.00 **Lunch and Fringe Events**

Sandwiches and Tea and coffee
will be available in each of the
Fringe meetings. (see separate
documentation on Fringe
meetings):

1. Work Life Balance –
implementing the EU Directive,
Marina Monaco, ETUC
2. A Just Transition – Nevin
Economic Research Institute
3. Women Leading the
Resistance: Irish Palestine
Solidarity Campaign

Session 3 Women and Work

- 14.30 **Motions on Women and Work**
- EC Report**
Appropriate Sections/
Paragraphs
- Report of Women's Committees**
Appropriate Sections/
Paragraphs
- Voting on Motions and Agree
Sections of Reports
- 15.45 **Coffee Break**
- 16.00 **Session 3 resumes**
- 17.30 **End of Day 1**
- 19.30 **Dinner followed by Disco**

Friday 6th March

Session 4 Women and Society

- 09.30 **Motions on Women and Society**
- Intro to second day -**
Alison Millar, ICTU Vice President
- Guest Speaker:**
Noelle O'Connell, Executive
Director European Movement
Ireland
- EC Report**
Appropriate Sections/Paragraphs
- 10.45 **Coffee Break**
- Guest Speaker:**
How Choice was Won in
Northern Ireland: Alliance for
Choice
- Report of Women's Committees**
Appropriate Sections/
Paragraphs
- Voting on Motions and Agree
Sections of Reports
- 13.00 **Close of Conference**

Introduction

A warm welcome to the 2020 Irish Congress of Trade Unions Women's Conference:

Realising our Rights, Women Organising for Change.

The period covered by this report has seen momentous change across the island, from the yes vote in the Repeal the 8th Amendment referendum in May 2018, to realisation of rights for LGBT+ people and women in Northern Ireland with the introduction of same sex marriage and reform of Northern Ireland's punitive abortion laws in 2020.

Trade Unions have played a crucial role in these historic campaigns and it is proper that these victories are celebrated in the theme of this conference – *Realising our Rights*.

While doing so, we must also remember that there is still work to be done. In both the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, we face considerable challenges, not least in relation to the rise of insecure work and attacks on worker's rights.



ICTU General Secretary Patricia King addresses the ICTU BDC with An Taoiseach looking on

2020 also marks the anniversaries of important international human rights protections for women: the 40th anniversary of the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. As we mark these, it is important that we reflect on how far we have come in relation to gender equality but also that we remember and send solidarity to women trade unionists internationally who are still struggling to achieve basic human rights.

I want to finish by commending the Women's Committee of ICTU North and South for their work in promoting gender equality in work, in trade unions and in society and wish you well for this important conference.

Patricia King
General Secretary.

Motions to the Congress Women's Conference

2020

Motions For the Women's Conference 2020

Women and the Work

1. Tackling Sexual Harassment at Work ICTU Women's Committee, Northern Ireland

A survey examining the experience of trade union members in relation to sexual harassment at work was conducted by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in late 2019, revealing shocking statistics. The survey sought to gain a deeper understanding of workers' experience of sexual harassment at work - the types of incidents experienced, the perpetrators and location, the barriers to reporting, and the impact sexual harassment has on the lives of those affected.

More than 600 trade union members in Northern Ireland with experience of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace responded.

Shockingly, 3 out of 4 (75 %) of respondents did not report the unwanted sexual behaviour to their employer, while of those who did report 62% felt that it was not dealt with satisfactorily and in some instances reported that they had been treated less favourably as a result of reporting sexual harassment.

Those polled were asked to choose from several options describing the effect that the harassment had on them. Over half reported that they felt embarrassed, while 50% reported that they avoid certain work situations as a result. 38% reported that they felt less confident at work, with a further 21% saying it had a negative impact on their performance at work.

Around a third reported that the harassment had a negative impact on their mental health, and a further 13% reported that there was a negative impact on their physical health.

1. Tackling Sexual Harassment at Work continued

While the #MeToo movement has shed light on the hidden problem of sexual harassment and sexual assault at work and empowered women to speak out, the fear of a negative impact on careers or of not being believed or taken seriously are clearly still reasons for not pursuing a complaint. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has said that complaints in relation to workplace sexual harassment are still worryingly prevalent.

Given the scale of the problem and the impact that it has on workers and work, this conference calls on the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to launch a comprehensive campaign to address the root causes of workplace sexual harassment including:

- Ensuring that the Northern Ireland Executive produce a robust Gender Equality Strategy which tackles gender related workplace issues, including sexual harassment.
- Ensure the UK Government ratifies the ILO Convention 190 which mandates government to take proactive steps to address violence against women including in the world of work.
- Campaign for the introduction of proactive duties on employers, supported by a Code of Practice which outlines employer responsibility to ensure that workplaces are harassment free zones. To include, among other areas of action, mandatory and comprehensive training for all staff, particularly managers and Human Resource personnel.

Motions

2. Intimidation & Sexual Harassment **Cork Council of Trade Unions**

- a) All employees have a right to a workplace free from intimidation and sexual harassment.
- b) All workers are able to experience this right.
- c) Intimidation and sexual harassment will not be tolerated at work.

UNISON Amendment

At end add "Consequently conference calls on the Executive Council to:

- continue to make the eradication of workplace harassment a priority,
- with the assistance of the Women's Committee, develop guidelines for negotiators on the establishment of sexual harassment policies and procedures particularly aimed at anti trade union workplaces, and
- request affiliates to share examples of best practice and achievements in the operation of existing anti-harassment workplace policies and procedures."

3. Sexual Harassment **NASUWT**

Conference is deeply concerned by the compelling evidence of the increasing incidence of sexual harassment in the workplace, including sexist 'jokes' and 'banter', unwanted touching and the growing objectification of women and girls.

Congress notes that the NASUWT's research indicates that one in five members has experienced sexual harassment in the workplace by a colleague, manager, parent or pupil since becoming a teacher.

3. Sexual Harassment continued

Conference is concerned by the widespread reluctance among teachers and other staff to report harassment for fear of not being believed by employers and that even when this abuse is reported, in the majority of cases, little or no effective action is taken by employers to address the harassment.

Conference asserts that this is not only having a damaging impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of women teachers, but is also creating a climate of premature sexualisation of children, and in particular young girls.

Conference affirms that schools should be places of safety and must be supported in tackling the problem of sexual harassment or violence towards either pupils or staff.

Conference therefore calls upon the ICTU to campaign for:

- (i) a mandatory requirement on employers to record and report incidents of sexual harassment and abuse against staff in schools;
- (ii) schools to foster an environment in which individuals can be confident that when reporting incidents of sexual harassment, such complaints will be taken seriously and acted upon;
- (iii) increased awareness among employers that sexual harassment can intersect with other forms of prejudice and discrimination, including on grounds of age, class, community background, disability, gender identity, race/ethnicity, religion/belief or sexuality;
- (iv) affiliates to work with other civil society organisations to end sexual harassment in the workplace and wider society and
- (v) the introduction of legislation to give wider protection from third party harassment to all employees with protected characteristics.

Motions

4. Reconciling Caring Responsibilities with Work **ICTU Women's Committee, Republic of Ireland**

Family carers are the main source of care provision for those in need of care due to a long-term illness, disability or frailty living in the community.

Noting that:

- Approximately 4.1% of the Irish population are carers (CSO 2016).
- 54.6% of carers are in the labour force (CSO, 2016).
- 61% of carers are female, 39% male.
- An ageing population will mean increased demand for care will soon exceed supply.
- Consequently, balancing work with care obligations will become an increasingly important health, social and economic issue.
- Acknowledges the need for more public investment in our care infrastructure.

While there are existing entitlements in the Carer's Leave Act 2001, conference urges Congress and affiliates to seek improved terms and conditions for carers seeking to reconcile work with caring responsibilities, which would enable carers to remain in touch with the labour market to the greatest extent possible.

The transposition of the EU Work Life Balance Directive which provides for:

- A minimum of 5 days carers leave per year, per worker.
- Right for carers & parents to request flexible work arrangements.
- And 'Significant room for manoeuvre' regarding implementation provides a useful context for the promotion of such an approach. Conference notes that the Directive is a minimum standard and urges Congress and affiliates to strive for more ambition, including payment to avoid it remaining an option for the better off only.

5. Reproductive Leave **ASTI**

This conference calls on the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to seek statutory leave for workers who are engaged in medical and/or related treatments in relation to reproduction and family formation.

6. Valuing Women's Work **CWU UK**

The gender pay gap in Northern Ireland is a pervasive and systemic problem. The current gap between men and women's hourly earnings (of all workers, excluding overtime), stands at almost 10%.

Much of the gap can be attributed to the 'part time effect' i.e. the fact that women are more likely to work part time and these jobs tend to be lower paid than full time jobs. This part time effect is further illustrated by assessing the gender gap in terms of the gap in gross weekly and gross annual earnings between men and women. Gross weekly earnings are 27% below that of men whilst gross annual earnings are almost 30% below that of men.

This conference recognises that a whole range of measures will be required to eliminate the gender pay gap and ensure that women's work is valued and paid properly.

Motions

6. Valuing Women's Work continued

This conference calls for the ICTU to press the Northern Ireland Executive to introduce, without delay:

- Gender Pay Gap reporting regulations which take into account the particular circumstances of the NI economy and which include fines for employers who flout the law;
- A comprehensive Gender Pay Gap strategy and resourced action plan which addresses the fundamental issues associated with the GPG;
- A properly resourced childcare strategy which prioritises investment in childcare infrastructure;
- A family leave system which includes, among other measures, properly remunerated parental leave which is reserved for both parents.

7. Flexible Working in the Performing Arts **EQUITY**

Parents and carers in the performing arts often require flexible family support, due to the unpredictable nature of their careers. Short term work contracts, precarious work, atypical work hours and a necessity to travel for engagements are examples of the particular challenges our members face. Access to flexible, reliable childcare is essential if women are to have equal access to work, continuity and longevity in their careers and if workforces in the entertainment industry are to be more diverse.

Equity calls upon the ICTU to support our work campaigning for greater awareness and recognition of flexible working arrangements amongst employers and publicly funded arts and entertainment organisations.

8. Domestic Violence Leave

ESU

That legislation to provide for a statutory entitlement to domestic violence paid leave be introduced. Providing for leave is an important strand in a wider strategy to create workplace awareness of domestic violence. Co-workers may be aware of a colleague's abuse but in the absence of a workplace policy are unsure on how best to support them. Managers need guidance on how to recognise the signs of Domestic abuse and how to respond to a staff member's disclosure. Abusers can focus efforts on a partner's workplace for the purpose of ending their employment. Workplace awareness policies ensure employees feel valued whilst working in a safe and supportive environment and address unpredictable absenteeism and reduced productivity for employers.

9. The Future of Work

FSU

This conference recognises that the digital revolution is dramatically changing the business environment. And while employers may embrace revolutionising the way business works it also means a more complex role for employees. The impact and speed of diffusion and change at which data collection, automation and digital analysis have become vital parts of industry, including the financial services sector, seem unprecedented.

The workforce will be expected to learn new skills, individual targets may be increased and there will be a shift on operations staff to acquire more 'value-added' roles. We can already see how employers are pushing for more adaptability and flexibility and this can have a disproportionately negative impact on women. While digitalisation will potentially bring employers vast new profits in the form of reduced costs, global labour arbitrage and commodification of data, for workers it threatens to bring redundancies,

Motions

9. The Future of Work continued

job insecurity, job precarity, workplace monitoring and surveillance, increased work intensification and 'techno stress'.

This conference notes the findings of a research study, commissioned by FSU and undertaken by the University of Limerick, on "Technology, Work and Skills: The Impact of Technology on Employees" which reveals that women and men had some different experiences of workplace technology. Women were more likely to expect that there would be a significant level of automation of their role and that their work was being monitored through technology. The study recommends that greater attention needs to be paid to possible gender implications of workplace technology.

Conference recognises that while there may be some advantages to technology in regards to work-life balance (WLB), e.g. in facilitating homeworking, there is evidence that the emergence of organisational cultures which either demand or institutionalise the use of technology to remain engaged with work outside of working hours erode the advantages that technology creates in relation to WLB.

Conference supports ICTU and affiliate unions in their work to protect workers from the negative impacts of future technology on work, which includes legislation to provide workers for the right to disconnect and to end the informal extension of the working week and the over-use of technology for work purposes. Conference further calls for further analysis and action on the gender implications of workplace technology, particularly in those sectors and jobs which are most at risk.

10. Women in Education and Research Need Secure Jobs, not the false hope of “flexibility” IFUT

This Conference calls on Congress to engage with unions representing workers in Higher Education Institutions to urgently address the growing problem of increasingly precarious employment across the sector.

Many studies have shown that women are disproportionately affected by the negative impact of precarious and casual employment as researchers, tutors, lecturers, and other crucial roles in Higher Education.

Precarity can be seen as part of the bigger picture of the commodification of education and research. Commodification of higher education and research institutions, and even research in general, is a significant concern for IFUT and for academic trade unions across the world.

The current conditions of precarity and instability suit the model of an underfunded Higher Education system where HEIs are pitted against each other and researchers compete for the next big funding opportunity in the hope of security.

The positive spin often put on insecure work is that it offers “flexibility”, but there is a balance to be struck between flexibility and security. Flexibility is of little use if you cannot get a mortgage, cannot buy a house, cannot even get a small loan. Keeping working women on casual and precarious contracts is not only immoral but it is bad for quality education and teaching.

This Conference calls on Congress to lobby government and employers to reveal the true extent of staff numbers on casual and precarious contracts and to tell the parents of students in the colleges and universities exactly how many of their lecturers and tutors have no idea if they will be kept on to teach their subjects in the next academic year or even next term.

Motions

11. Pension Age and Female Workers

INMO

Conference recognises that the extension of the age for receipt of a state old age pension to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028 will have a significant impact on female workers.

Conference further recognises that these increases will create an impossible burden for female workers who work in occupations which require considerable physical and psychological resilience, such as in the health services where the majority of front-line care workers and professionals are women.

Women in the health services will not be capable of working to the threshold of receiving the state pension in light of the demands of the care environment, which is perpetually understaffed, physically and emotionally demanding, and where they are experiencing increasing levels of psychological and physical abuse.

Conference calls on the Government to review these measures which will have a disproportionate effect on women workers, who already on average receive lower occupational pensions, and to create exceptions to recognise the particular needs of women workers in physically and psychologically demanding occupations.

12. Stop the Pension Age Increase

SIPTU

This conference notes that the Government in the Republic intends to raise the state pension age to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028; that these pension age increases are rising faster than any other EU country (despite having the youngest population); that these increases were introduced without any consultation with the trade union movement and other civil society actors.

12. Stop the Pension Age Increase continued

Conference further notes that these increases will disproportionately impact on women who are more likely to have interrupted contribution records and caring duties which means they could be trapped in means-tested unemployment payments between retirement age and the age they can access the state pension.

Conference therefore calls on the Government to stop the increase in the pension age in 2021 and establish a forum whereby all relevant parties (employees, employers, civil society groups, government) can work to achieve a consensus on the pension age and age discrimination, living standards in retirement, sustainable finances and the restoration of full pension rights.

13. Financing Parent's Leave

INTO

Conference welcomes the introduction of two weeks' parent's leave in respect of babies born on or after 1 November 2019, to be taken within a year of the birth. However, Conference condemns the fact that the state benefit payable in respect of the parent's leave is not topped up to normal salary levels for public sector employees who avail of the leave, and across much of the private sector. Conference considers that this failure to top up the state benefit payment of €245 per week will result in many new parents being unable to avail of the leave for financial reasons. Conference urges the ICTU to engage with the government on this matter, in order to secure a top-up payment in respect of parent's leave across the public sector. Conference also calls upon all employers to top up the state benefit to enable their employees to avail of the leave.

Motions

14. Parental Rights and Maternity Pay

UTU

Conference is gravely and increasingly concerned about the lack of progress made by the relevant political bodies to address the inadequate provision of and funding for parental leave and maternity pay entitlements. Despite claims to increasing equality in society, the current arrangements are leaving women and families across Northern Ireland in often very difficult circumstances, especially compared to women and families in most other OECD countries. Conference demands that a comprehensive review be undertaken to adequately support and value women in their role in the family and society as well as in the workplace.

15. Equality - Gender Pay Gap

MANDATE

This conference notes with dismay the continued gender pay gap in Ireland and the prevalence of low pay and precarious type employment amongst women in large sections of the economy. This conference calls on the ICTU to launch an equality for women campaign to include the following:

1. Annual mandatory gender pay gap reporting by all companies and State bodies employing more than one hundred (100) employees.
2. All companies to be legally obliged to top up the difference between State Maternity Benefit to the average net take home pay for all female workers.
3. The State to provide a fully funded State childcare service up to the age of four (4).
4. Noting that the lack of robust collective bargaining legislation is a major contributory factor to low pay and poor conditions in many sectors of female employment which therefore adds to the gender pay gap, this conference calls for primary legislation which confers the right to collectively bargain to all workers.

Women and Society

16. Safe Access to Abortion

Belfast & District Trades Council

Conference calls on both the British and Irish Governments to fulfil their full obligations in ensuring access to safe abortion for women and pregnant people in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland without delay.

This includes creating safe access zones to protect the mental and physical health of patients, medical staff, and the community at large. In jurisdictions without safe access (or 'buffer') zones, patients and staff members are routinely harassed. A range of studies and research has demonstrated how such harassment has been shown to have a profoundly negative effect on both patients and providers, as well as the broader community.

Beyond the fact that the mere presence of protestors serves as a source of intimidation and stigma for many, it is important to note that many of the demonstrations that take place outside of abortion providing facilities are not contained to 'peaceful' protests. One study of abortion clinics in the United States found that only 6% of facilities had experienced 'peaceful' picketing alone. The overwhelming majority of facilities were subjected to a wide array of severely disruptive or even violent demonstrations such as abortion opponents falsely booking large numbers of 'no-show' appointments, clinics being invaded or blockaded by demonstrators, vandalism, death threats to staff members, and picketing physicians' homes. Anti-abortion protestors in Great Britain have recently adopted many of the more aggressive tactics deployed by their American counterparts, including toting signs with grisly imagery, blocking clinic entrances or driveways, and engaging in 'pavement counselling,' a tactic in which protestors attempt to physically intercept arriving patients and 'persuade' them not to have an abortion.

Motions

16. Safe Access to Abortion continued

People's right to express an opinion does not include a right to damage property, harass and threaten people, or physically obstruct the path of people attempting to access healthcare. Safe access zones are therefore required to ensure patients and staff members are able to freely and safely enter a healthcare facility.

Both Governments now have the opportunity to implement an effective end to end model of abortion provision, which prioritises the well-being and safety of patients when accessing and egressing abortion healthcare facilities in both jurisdictions.

17. New Maternity Hospital **Bray & District Council of Trade Unions**

- The lengthy delay in progressing the building of the new maternity hospital while the State awaits Vatican sign-off on the transfer of the site owned by the Religious Sisters of Charity.
- That Papal approval of this land transfer for purposes prohibited in canon law, such as the provision of abortion services, is unlikely to be granted.
- That the projected 99-year lease is entirely unprecedented and wholly inadequate to a building project of this scale
- That the 2013 estimated cost of €100m of the hospital has ballooned, just like the National Children's Hospital, and is now expected to cost a multiple of €350m.
- That, despite being publicly funded, the new hospital is to be owned and managed by a private Catholic healthcare company currently owned by the Religious Sisters of Charity.

Demands that, to exclude the possibility of canon law governance of the new hospital, the facility be built on State-owned land, and, to guarantee the provision of a secular maternity service, the new hospital company be placed in public ownership.

18. Women's Healthcare

FÓRSA

That this Conference notes that just one year after the Minister for Health, Simon Harris, gave the go ahead for the first phase of the new National Maternity Hospital to be built at St Vincent's Hospital the project has stalled as it, apparently, awaits the approval of the Vatican for the sale of the land.

Conference further notes that at the time the Minister authorised the project to proceed he refused to take on board serious concerns regarding the future ownership and status of the new National Maternity Hospital raised by members of the medical profession, campaigners, political parties and civil society groups.

Conference shares the concerns of Dr. Peter Boylan, the former Master of Holles Street Hospital who resigned from the board of the national maternity hospital, that the hospital, like other hospitals on land owned by the Catholic Church, will be obliged to follow Catholic teaching and Canon Law on medical practices and procedures.

Conferences calls on the Executive Council of ICTU to support the ongoing campaign to ensure that the ownership and control of the new maternity hospital will not impede its complete clinical independence, that women's healthcare will remain its priority and that the hospital will provide all healthcare services available under Irish law.

Motions

19. The Impact of Homelessness on Women and Children CWU

Conference recognises the work done by Congress to date to raise awareness of the plight of the homeless through the Congress Charter of Housing Rights, through their coalition with the Raise the Roof Campaign as well as their interaction with government and housing activists. Conference also notes nonetheless that the homeless crisis in Ireland has continued to escalate.

As trade unionists we are aware of the significant burden for those who are homeless. We must also recognise the burden on women and children. In Ireland our number of homeless women is significantly higher than in EU states with most homeless families headed by female lone parents. Homelessness has a serious impact on women's physical and mental health. Furthermore, domestic violence has been cited as a cause of homelessness for women with many relying on informal arrangements or temporary refuge.

The harmful effect on children in emergency accommodation has also been reported. The lack of space and facilities can have a serious impact on child development.

Irish homelessness is not just a challenge, it is an epidemic and one that may cause long term serious damage to men, women and children. We cannot allow this to become an acceptable norm in our society.

Therefore, this conference calls on ICTU to seek a review of government housing policy and for ICTU to put pressure on the government to implement appropriate strategies to:

- Reflect the increasing number of families caught in emergency accommodation.
- Reduce living periods in emergency accommodation.
- Ensure that those who are subjected to domestic violence can secure appropriate housing.
- Develop health care plans with a focus on child development.

20. Child Poverty and Homelessness

UNITE

This conference notes data showing that over 300,000 children on the island of Ireland are living in poverty, with rates of child homelessness rising, including babies being born into homelessness, and many children living in substandard accommodation or in precarious housing situations. Conference further notes that high rates of low pay in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland mean that children of parents in work may experience housing need.

Conference also notes the finding of a study carried out by London's Royal Holloway University at the request of Dublin City Council examining the impact of homelessness on children forced to live in hotels or similar accommodation for an extended period of time, which found significant impacts in terms of physical and mental health, and developmental delay.

This conference therefore instructs the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to develop a comprehensive policy to address the causes and consequences of child poverty and homelessness, and to lobby government in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland for implementation of that.

Motions

21. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) **Galway Council of Trade Unions**

Predominantly committed by a male partner against a female partner - is a major social issue requiring greater government intervention.

IPV has devastating effects on women and children (as inadvertent victims) and can end in femicide and child murder.

This conference calls on the Irish government (and the Northern Assembly) to urgently legislate for formal reviews of domestic killings.

Learning from such domestic homicide reviews will help save lives as without them statutory and other relevant agencies lack the 'whole picture' and are unlikely to see the full pattern of male violence against women and children.

The introduction of domestic homicide reviews will better aid governmental programmes and service provision designed to lower our rates of domestic violence.

22. The Impact of Welfare Cuts on Women **GMB**

From late 2008, the UK Government set out a programme of austerity that has continued for over 10 years. Cuts in public spending have been shown to have particular impact on certain groups in society. In 2011, 270,000 public sector jobs were cut as austerity measures started to bite. Research from the Runnymede Trust and Women's Budget Group in 2016 showed that women, people of colour and particularly women of colour were impacted by job cuts, as they were more likely to be employed in the public sector, be in low-paid jobs and insecure work, and have higher levels of unemployment.

22. The Impact of Welfare Cuts on Women continued

The unemployment budget was frozen, which has led to increased difficulties due to rising inflation. Benefit claimants affected by budget cuts and sanctions led to increased use of food banks, with over one million people in the UK using a food bank between 2014 and 2015. With an increase in zero hour contracts, part time work and low paid work, there is a new generation of working poor who are also dependent on benefits.

Universal Credit and the draconian welfare cuts imposed on working people, as well as those in search of employment or that due to ill health are unable to work, are having a devastating effect on women. They create more problems, pushing women and their families into poverty.

In Northern Ireland, the £500 million mitigation package established by the Northern Ireland Executive against welfare cuts is set to run out in March 2020, and its expiration could have dire consequences for women living in poverty, leading to a 'cliff edge' unless alternative arrangements are put in place urgently.

Working mothers in Northern Ireland further struggle to access affordable childcare. In Northern Ireland we have the highest weekly expenditure on childcare and therefore the highest weekly childcare element of Child Tax Credits. As Universal Credit payments are paid in arrears of up to 5 weeks, this places greater financial burdens on families accessing childcare. Children in Northern Ireland do not receive up to 30 hours of childcare as is the case in other regions, creating deep unfairness that results in negative impacts on women.

Conference calls on the ICTU Women's Committee to campaign on the following issues:

- To avoid the "cliff-edge" of the ending of welfare mitigations in Northern Ireland in March 2020;

Motions

22. The Impact of Welfare Cuts on Women continued

- To end practices where victims of the crime, domestic violence and abuse must choose whether they can survive with no money for at least 5 weeks, maybe with children, or stay with abuser;
- To scrap the disgraceful two-child benefit cap, which is neglecting our children, pushing women into deeper poverty and creating inequalities within families;
- The vile “Rape Clause” must be removed as it forces women to disclose or lose benefits, when women in violent relationships are not in a position to do so. Benefit officers are not equipped to process disclosures on rape or violent sexual crime and do not have capacity to manage these disclosures;

For affordable, accessible, high quality childcare in Northern Ireland, including the 30 hours childcare that is available in other parts of the UK.

23. Women, Poverty and Austerity

NIPSA

The cumulative impact on women’s everyday lives as a result of 10 years of the government’s austerity and welfare reform policies has been major. This is due to a range of societal factors that make women more vulnerable to these policies – women are more likely to claim social security benefits, more likely to use public services, more likely to be in low-paid, part-time and insecure work, more likely to be caring for children/family members and more likely to have to make up for cuts to services through unpaid work. Women often bear the brunt of poverty in households managing household budgets to shield their children from its worst effects. Women act as the ‘shock absorbers’ of poverty going without food, clothes or warmth in order to meet the needs of other family members when money is tight.

23. *Women, Poverty and Austerity continued*

In total, it is estimated that austerity since 2010 will have cost women a total of £79bn, against £13bn for men. It shows that, by 2020, men will have borne just 14% of the total burden of welfare cuts, compared with 86% for women. Furthermore, the group with the highest poverty throughout the last decade and worst impacted by welfare reform have been lone parents in Northern Ireland; of which 91% are women.

Conference calls on the government to:

- Create a gender impact assessment of Universal Credit to assess the disproportionate impact on women; including the relationship between Universal Credit and increased domestic violence.
- Protect those most impacted by welfare reform and austerity and provide tailored advice and support to ensure maximum uptake.
- Abide by CEDAW recommendations to abolish the two-child cap on child tax credits.
- Implement and adopt a strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation on the basis of objective need; with a particular focus being placed on disabled women, lone parents and single women pensioners.
- Strengthen gender equality of outcomes across all public expenditure and government departments by progressing towards gender responsive budgeting.
- Promote equality in procurement including that linked to the reduction in corporation tax and how this impacts on women.
- Create appropriate measures to effectively tackle wide-spread discrimination based on pregnancy or maternity.
- Protect and provide financial guidance and support as women approach retirement, particularly as the age of qualification for state pensions rises.

Motions

24. Access to Education for Asylum Seekers

TUI

The ongoing barriers faced by migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who wish to pursue education or training in Ireland include the lack of availability of affordable childcare and transport, the uncertainty or short-term nature of their visa or residential status, the lack of recognition of their existing qualifications, and the limited availability of beginner or upskilling English language classes. This conference recommends that the State implements a policy similar to the Pilot Student Support Scheme to facilitate undocumented people's access to third-level education. It also recommends that the State introduce practical supports to increase the accessibility of apprenticeships to people from minority ethnic groups, including the adoption of specific measures for women.

This conference further recommends that all measures introduced to support participation in further education and third-level institutions are evaluated in line with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty and the CERD (UN) recommendations to ensure their accessibility to minority ethnic groups and address any remaining administrative and financial barriers.

25. Brexit and the Impact on Women in Northern Ireland

UNISON

At the time of writing, whilst Boris Johnston has struck a new agreement with the EU, it is not clear whether or not that agreement will be passed by the UK parliament. Major uncertainties remain around the impact that Brexit will have on the island of Ireland, North and South, however, it is clear that particular issues will be faced by women as a result.

25. Brexit and the Impact on Women in Northern Ireland continued

Women in Northern Ireland are greatly under-represented in public and political life. This was clearly evident in the lead up to the Brexit referendum and remains a worrying issue in the current Brexit negotiations. Under-representation in political negotiations and decision-making, alongside several other areas lacking in gender parity such as access to education, training, work, affordable childcare and more, highlight the profoundly negative impact Brexit is set to have on women in Northern Ireland.

This is compounded with the political instability creating several barriers to women having their voices heard. Many areas of women's human rights have yet to be achieved, and Brexit has added a new threat to existing, hard-fought rights women currently have. Northern Ireland faces unique constitutional complexities meaning Brexit presents a unique threat to this region.

Many of the rights we enjoy today have come through membership of the EU over the past four decades; particularly in areas of economic activity and employment law. For women, there are great concerns that Brexit will erode many of these protections. Some of these protections include:

- Equality between men and women
- The right to equal pay for equal work
- Protection against discrimination on the ground of pregnancy and maternity
- Introducing measures to provide specific advantages to the under- represented gender
- Prohibition of discriminations on the grounds of sex
- Introduction of paid holidays.

Furthermore, the EU recognises the need for wide-spread structural change to deal with systematic gender discrimination through their commitment to Gender Mainstreaming and the Gender Recast Directive 2006.

Motions

25. Brexit and the Impact on Women in Northern Ireland continued

Other areas of EU legislation, representation and funding that are relevant to the protection and enhancement of women's rights and participation include the European Protection order, which is significant in recognising women's rights as they cross the border; the Rural Development Programme, which NIRWN highlight as significant given historic government underinvestment in rural women; the European Social Fund, which is important to increasing women's access to the workforce; the European Parliamentary Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, alongside various EU funding streams that support the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.

It is deeply concerning that limited guarantees have been made to protect, or enhance, the rights mentioned above post-Brexit. However, the UK Government has already taken steps to remove the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which contains numerous specific rights relevant to women; future case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) will no longer be binding in UK courts post-Brexit; and the Human Rights Act 1998 remains under threat of repeal from the Tories.

There have been worrying misinterpretations of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement by the current Prime Minister. With Northern Ireland still the crux of disagreements on how the UK should leave the EU, and ongoing political instability growing as a concern, it is essential to point out the importance of avoiding a divergence of rights on either side of the border. For example, areas of protections such as violence against women, or child maintenance payments, rely on EU wide measures to ensure the legal systems on the island of Ireland are co-ordinated to protect vulnerable people through the criminal justice and family law systems. This is essential to ensure that people cannot avoid the repercussions of violence against women, or refusing to pay child maintenance, by simply crossing the border.

25. Brexit and the Impact on Women in Northern Ireland continued

All aspects of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement need to be protected and implemented; including a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland where specific focus can be given to the rights of women.

It is evident that women in Northern Ireland are in line to face the brunt of the impact of Brexit. The UK Women's Budget Group maintains that women will be adversely impacted by the economic impacts of Brexit. This can only get worse for the women of Northern Ireland, who have greatly suffered from the past decade of austerity and are deeply concerned about the impact of welfare reform and future austerity on gender equality. The economic consequences of Brexit are set to have disproportionately negative impacts on rural women, disabled women, LGBTQ+ women, women of colour, women living on the border, migrant women and more as they lose many human rights protections and funding streams supporting their participation and empowerment.

Women in Northern Ireland are already facing great barriers due to political instability, an arguably failed peace process, a collapsed Assembly, the lack of implementation of the UNSCR 1325, an outdated Northern Ireland Gender Strategy, unprecedented levels of poverty and having limited representation in Brexit negotiations. With all the hard fought women's rights protections won at an EU level now at risk, and many human rights still failing to have been implemented at all, there are many reasons to be deeply concerned about the impact of Brexit on the women on Northern Ireland.

Conference calls on the ICTU Women's Committee to continue to campaign for the protection of the particular circumstances that women in Northern Ireland are facing as a result of Brexit. This should include calling for greater recognition and participation of women within the Brexit process; and ensuring that women's rights are protected and enhanced, rather than being eroded, by Brexit.



FÓRSA members Committee

Conference Report

April 2018 - March 2020

Conference Report 2020

Women's Committee

The Officers of the Women's Committee during the period covered by the report were:

Northern Ireland:

Chairperson

Geraldine Alexander (NIPSA)

Vice Chairperson

Margaret McKee (UNISON)

Secretary

Eileen Gorman (FSU)

Republic of Ireland:

Chair

Margaret Coghlan (FÓRSA)

Vice Chair to September 2019

Betty Tyrell Collard (Dublin Trades Council)

Vice Chair from September 2019

Alison Regan (SIPTU); and

Secretary

Melissa Brennan (FÓRSA)



ICTU Women's Committee

The Women's Committee is one of the longest standing formal committees of Congress and has an important to play in identifying issues that are a priority for working women across all sectors and in so doing makes a positive contribution to Congress policy.



Women's Committee Chairs with ICTU General Secretary Patricia King, ITUC Chidi King and Chair of Fermanagh Council



Women's Committee members Danielle McCusker and Cllr Alison Gilliland together with Claire Hanna MLA

The constitution of the Committee sets out the functions to be:

the co-ordination of policy or action by affiliated organisations catering for women workers on matters relating to the interests of women; the investigation of problems arising from the employment of women in industry, services and the professions; the preparation of reports on aspects of women's employment, conditions of work, remuneration etc.

A Work programme based on the motions that were passed at the 2018 Women's Conference, the 2018 NIC ICTU Biennial Conference and the 2019 ICTU Biennial conference was adopted by the committee.

Priority issues North and South included:

1. Highlighting the issues affecting women in the workplace including insecure work, gender pay gap, workplace harassment.
2. Tackling violence against women, including domestic violence and abuse, human trafficking and combatting sexual harassment at work.
3. Campaigning for reform of legislation on reproductive rights, including abortion.
4. Highlighting the disproportionate impact of austerity on women and supporting gender budgeting.
5. Campaigning for comprehensive, quality affordable childcare systems.

The major initiatives of the Women's Committee during the period were the organisation of a **National Women's Conference in 2018** and National Women's Seminar in 2019 as well as participation in the Women's Council of the Isles, an initiative that brings together the TUC, STUC, WTUC and ICTU Women's Committees on an annual basis.



Chairs of the womens committee with Owen Reidy, ICTU AGS



Standing ovation for Repeal the 8th campaign co-ordinator Ailbhe Smyth

The Women's Conference 2018

The Women's Conference took place in Enniskillen in June 2018 and had the theme of Better Work Better Lives for Women Workers.

Some 170 delegates gathered to debate 21 motions relating to Women and Work, Women in Unions and Women in Society.

Speakers included Congress General Secretary, Patricia King who told delegates that gender equality is no longer simply the right thing to do, but is an economic imperative – with the IMF claiming that up to 10% of GDP is lost as a result of gender inequality in our labour market.

Dr Caitriona Crowe spoke about the Centenary of the Representation of the People Act which extended the vote to include some women. Fringe meetings were held on topics including Women and Precarious Work, Abortion as a Workplace Issue, Sling the Mesh and the Women's Pledge.



ICTU Women's Committee Chair J White and Ailbhe Smyth



Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th

The conference also included an address by Ailbhe Smyth of the Together for Yes campaign, fresh from the historic referendum result that repealed the 8th amendment to the constitution and paved the way for women's reproductive rights to be respected in the Republic of Ireland.

The Women's Seminar 2019

The Seminar took place in Newcastle, Co Down in March 2019. The theme of the seminar was Women's Leadership in work and in society – challenges and opportunities.

Some 150 delegates gathered to listen to keynote speakers including Chidi King, Director of Equality at the ITUC and Esther Lynch, Confederal Secretary with the ETUC.

As a result of those discussions Congress is now running a Women in Leadership course for delegates from affiliates North and South. The course explores what leadership means in the context of the trade union movement and particularly focusses on how women can be supported to take on leadership roles within their trade unions – more below.

Delegates to the Women's Seminar March 2019



Dr Lisa Wilson, NERI at the Women's Seminar in 2019

Women's Council of the Isles

Members of the Committee participated in the Women's Council of the Isles meetings in 2018 and 2019.

The Council of the Isles in 2018 took place in Dublin and presentations included the ICTU Assistant General Secretary on Brexit, the TUC on stereotyping and violence in work, the Wales TUC on hidden disabilities and gender and the ICTU on the gender pay gap and abortion as a workplace issue.

In 2019, the Council of the Isles took place in London and discussions centred around the rise of the far right, a delegation of trade union women who visited Palestine as well as focusing on the significant equality and human rights victories gained in Northern Ireland. Delegates also discussed the landmark ILO convention on protection against Violence and Harassment at work, particularly focusing on ratification by the UK and Irish Governments.

Women and Leadership in the movement

Supporting women to take on leadership roles within their unions and elsewhere has been a long standing priority for the women's committee.

At the 2018 Women's Conference, a motion from TUI on Women in Unions was overwhelmingly supported. The motion said:

Women of all ages are currently under-represented in Leadership positions in trade unions.

In order to encourage more women to take up leadership roles at all levels within their unions...this conference calls on ICTU to organise a mentoring/training programme for trade union members in the regions in order to empower, encourage and enable more women to take up leadership roles in their unions.

This was subsequently considered by the ICTU Executive Committee and debated further at the Women's Seminar in 2019 when it was agreed that the initial courses should be restricted to women.

The pilot Women and Leadership course will be run over three days in Feb/March 2020. There was a huge response to the course, so much so that it was well oversubscribed with consideration being given to running a further three days.

Women leading Congresses

The Scottish Trades Unions Congress has announced that Rozanne Foyer is to replace Grahame Smith as its General Secretary. Foyer will be the first woman to hold the position, the most senior representative of Scotland's 540,000 trade union members, in the organisation's 123-year history. She will take up the post when Grahame Smith retires later this year.

Rozanne's appointment will mean that all of the trade union Centres in Ireland and Britain will be led by women, with Frances O'Grady as the General Secretary of the TUC; Shavanah Taj recently announced as the acting Secretary of the Wales TUC and of course Patricia King as General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions.



ICTU Vice President Alison Millar



NIC Women's Committee

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women – November 2018

As part of ongoing work to establish domestic and sexual violence as a workplace issue, the Equality Officer (NI) participates in a Strategic Advisory Group to the Departments of Health and Justice. Lobbying by Congress has ensured that this issue has been included in annual action plans overseen by the Departments.

A task and finish group to redraft guidelines for employers on workplace policies was established and Chaired by the NI Equality Officer. The resultant Guidelines were published in Autumn 2018 and launched at an event in Belfast City Hall to mark the international Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the 16 days of action campaign.

Speakers from a range of trade unions and statutory agencies spoke at the event to highlight the importance of addressing issues raised for the workplace by domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

Congress is now working with a range of affiliates and with the Equality Commission for NI to promote the Guidelines to employers, particularly in the private sector.

Tackling Sexual Harassment at work

The rise of the #MeToo movement has put a global spotlight on the issue of violence against women and sexual harassment. However, despite considerable media attention and continued activism by women and others, the issue of sexual harassment continues to be persistent in the workplace.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland reported in 2017 that discrimination on the grounds of Gender is the second most reported form of discrimination overall to their legal advice team, and within that, harassment at work is the second most common complaint. Numbers of complaints have risen by 31% over the last five years.

2018 research carried out by Red C research reported that Ireland has the highest level of claimed sexual harassment in Europe with 32% of Irish women between the ages of 18 and 34 saying they had experienced some

form of sexual harassment in the last 12 months.¹

As part of the Committees action for International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Congress issued a survey to find out more about trade union members experiences of sexual harassment.

The opinion poll, which was issued North and South, surveyed union members with experience of sexual harassment at work and was conducted online between 01 and 14 November. The survey focused exclusively on people's experience of sexual harassment in the workplace, rather than measuring the scale of the problem.

Congress wanted to gain a deeper understanding of workers' experience of sexual harassment at work - the types of incidents experienced, the perpetrators and location, the barriers to reporting, and the impact sexual harassment has on the lives of those affected.

¹ <https://www.equalityni.org/Blog/Articles/November-2017/Sexual-harassment-at-work-reported-cases-up-31-ove>

Of all the alarming statistics thrown up by the polling, perhaps the most worrying was the unacceptably high levels of under-reporting and dissatisfaction with their employer's action among those who had reported sexual harassment.

Key results from the survey included:

- Over three quarters of workers experiencing sexual harassment at work do not report the incident to their employer
- A large majority of respondents did not report the unwanted sexual behaviour to their employer, while of those who did report, most felt that it was not dealt with satisfactorily and in some instances reported that they had been treated less favourably as a result of reporting sexual harassment.
- Nearly a third reported their most recent experience of sexual harassment had taken place at a work-related social event; while a sizeable minority reported being harassed by phone or text or by email, online or via social media.

The results were widely covered in national and local media, North and South and will be used to influence policy and legislation to better protect workers from sexual harassment.

Menopause and the Workplace

The Women's Committee also devised a survey on the effects of the menopause on the workplace. The survey was circulated to all affiliated unions in Northern Ireland and nearly 2,500 responses were made.



Key findings from the survey included:

- 49% of respondents said that the menopause had been treated as a joke in their workplace;
- 28% said that the menopause had been treated negatively.

Congress is now working with the Labour Relations Agency and the Equality Commission to draft guidance which can be used by unions and employers. As part of this work, consideration will also be given to pilot training. The Committee in the Republic is planning a similar survey.

Representation on external groups

The Women's Committee continues to be represented on a range of committees and groups including:

- Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP);
- Women's Policy Group;

- Belfast Area Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership;
- Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group;
- Equality Coalition;
- Human Rights Consortium;
- Strategic Advisory Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy.

UNISON Regional Secretary Patricia McKeown



The Women's Policy Group

The Women's Policy Group brings together a range of organisations including from the Women's Sector, Trade Unions, Human Rights and other NGOs.

The Equality Officer attends the Women's Policy Group along with members of the Women's Committee.

The major initiative during this period was producing a manifesto for the General Elections in 2019. The Women's Policy Group has also worked together for a strong and united voice on matters such as gender pay gap regulations.

The Women's Budget Group

Congress is represented on the NI Women's Budget Group which campaigns for budgets and resources to be considered and allocated through a gendered lens. The NI Women's Budget Group will be advising Ulster University on a major Gender Budgeting project from 2019.

Campaigning for universal, affordable childcare.

Childcare policy document

As part of the Better Work Better Lives campaign, the Northern Ireland Committee prioritised a number of policy areas. This included the issue of gender equality in the workplace and the provision of properly funded and accessible childcare in Northern Ireland.

Childcare became the subject of the first BWBL policy paper and Childcare in Northern Ireland: Cost, Care and Gender Equality was launched in June 2019 to a full room in the MAC theatre, Belfast.



The paper examined a number of issues connected with the issue of childcare including how childcare is organised in Northern Ireland, both household and public spend on childcare, issues for the childcare workforce, how the issue of having children impacts on men and women differently and recommendations for policy interventions. Since the launch of the paper, Congress staff have held bilateral meetings with all political parties in Northern Ireland as well as meeting with statutory bodies including the Equality Commission, NGOs and others.

Policy interventions included:

- Rolling out access to 30 hours free childcare, as in the rest of the UK; making clear that this must be properly funded.
- Public spend on childcare should be redirected away from individual subsidisation of childcare supply to investment in childcare services and infrastructure.

- Drastic improvement in the pay and conditions of the childcare workforce. Our analysis showed that almost half of the childcare workforce earn below the real living wage – this is not acceptable nor sustainable.
- Unionisation and collective bargaining or a system of sectoral agreements is urgently needed to address levels of pay and terms and conditions.
- The urgent need to review and update parental leave systems. Our policy document urged provision of properly remunerated parental leave **reserved** for both parents – a 'use it or lose it' system.

These measures, together with proper flexible leave entitlements, could go some way to addressing the problem whereby women with dependent children are over represented in part-time employment, more likely to be in temporary employment and much less likely to be self-employed than men with dependent children.



Denise Walker, GMB at the launch of the Childcare policy paper in Belfast

See www.ictuni.org for full report. Congress is supporting a major civil society campaign, Childcare for All which brings together NGOs, childcare organisations together with women's organisations and trade unions to campaign for accessible, flexible and high quality childcare.

In **Northern Ireland**, parents and care providers face crippling childcare costs. A recent report by Employers for Childcare in Northern Ireland indicates



ICTU President Gerry Murphy and ICTU AGS Owen Reidy launching childcare report

for a family with two children in full-time childcare the costs can be as much as £16,432 per year; whilst the average full-time childcare place now costs £158 per week, a £2 increase on last year's figure. Despite this, Congress is dismayed that there is still no strategic Childcare plan for Northern Ireland.

Restoration of Devolved Government in Northern Ireland

For much of the period of this report, there was no government in Northern Ireland. This has had an impact on many policy and legislative developments, including in relation to gender equality matters.

At the time of preparing this report, the Northern Ireland Assembly had just reformed with the British and Irish Governments publishing the New Decade New Approach document which outlined the basis of the deal reached between the parties as well as the priorities of a restored NI Executive including commitment to banning zero hour contracts, deeper civil engagement and crucially, a commitment to publishing and resourcing a childcare strategy.

Although the commitment falls short of a delivery of the 30 hours free childcare which is available elsewhere in the UK 'the Executive will publish a Childcare Strategy and identify resources to

deliver extended, affordable and high quality provision of early education and care initiatives for families with children aged 3-4'.

The document also name-checks a number of important equality strategies stating that the Programme for Government could be underpinned by, among others, an anti-poverty strategy, racial equality, disability, sexual orientation, active aging, child poverty and gender strategies.

The NIC ICTU and the Women's Committee will be pursuing active engagement on all of these matters with both the relevant departments and their Assembly Committees.

Gender Pay Gap regulations

Among the matters which should be given priority are the enactment of the Gender Pay Gap regulations as well as the development of a Gender Pay Gap strategy. Congress has consistently argued that robust regulations, with appropriate threshold for reporting

should be accompanied by measures which tackle gender pay disparities.

NI Assembly Women's Caucus

During this period, the Officers of the Women's Committee gave evidence to the NI Assembly Women's Caucus outlining the work of the Committee and Congress on childcare, violence against women and menopause and the workplace.

Victories for Human Rights campaigns

Among the most significant developments in this period was the success in delivering Marriage Equality and abortion rights to Northern Ireland. Congress and the Women's Committee has been closely allied to both of these campaigns playing an active role in lobbying, engagement and organising events.

Marriage Equality

'All love is equal' – one of the straplines of Love Equality, the campaign for marriage equality in Northern Ireland. When Love Equality was established by six organisations (including the Rainbow Project, HereNI, Cara Friend, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Amnesty International and NUS USI) to lead the fight to deliver marriage equality to Northern Ireland, one thing was patently clear. In Northern Ireland, all love was not equal.

For unique in the UK and Ireland, LGBT+ people in Northern Ireland could not marry the person they loved. And should they choose to marry elsewhere, their marriage would only be recognised as a civil partnership on their return.

The first Love Equality rally on June 2015 saw 20,000 pour onto the streets in Belfast and such was the popular support that it seemed inconceivable that LGBT+ people would continue to be discriminated against. Despite this growing popular and political support,

moves to have Marriage Equality delivered by the Northern Ireland Assembly were frustrated by the DUP's continued use of the Petition of Concern. Attempts to introduce Marriage Equality by a cross party Private Members Bill were derailed when the Assembly collapsed in 2017.

And so the Love Equality campaign began to focus on Westminster as the only way to deliver equality.

Four years after that first rally, an amendment to a Westminster bill largely intended to extend the period for NI Ministers to be appointed became the somewhat unlikely mechanism to deliver same sex marriage to Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill (the Bill) was introduced in the House of Commons on 4 July 2019. Its purpose was to extend the period for Northern Ireland Ministers to be appointed, following the Assembly election held on 2 March 2017, to 21 October 2019; and to impose a duty on the Secretary of State to report on progress towards the formation of an Executive in Northern Ireland.

The Bill was amended by both Houses of Parliament and became the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act 2019 (the Act) by Royal Assent on 24 July 2019.

Clause 8 was introduced to the Bill via an amendment tabled in the Commons by Conor McGinn MP and co-sponsored by members from a range of parties. It was passed into the Bill on Tuesday 8 July by a landslide vote in the Commons.

Section 8, Same sex marriage and opposite sex civil partnership, came into force on 22 October, requiring the Secretary of State to make regulations,





to come into force on or before 13 January 2020, to provide that, in Northern Ireland, same sex couples are eligible to marry, and opposite sex couples are eligible to register a civil partnership.

The tabling of the amendment by Conor McGinn came after many months of behind the scenes work by Love Equality to find a suitable vehicle for the introduction of marriage equality with both MPs and Peers including Conor and Lord Robert Hayward deserving special credit.

As of 13 January 2020, couples wishing to enter into a new marriage could register their intent with a civil registrar with the first marriages due to take place from February. However, as of writing this report, there are still some anomalies to the law. The regulations brought in by the Secretary of State did not allow for either faith based marriages or conversions of existing civil partnerships to marriages. Love Equality has registered dismay at these gaps and has pressed the Northern Ireland Office to rectify this situation as soon as possible. A consultation on both matters was launched in January 2020, with regulations expected to be brought in April 2020 for faith based marriages and shortly thereafter for conversions.

Marriage Equality in Northern Ireland is often characterised as a controversial issue. Love Equality begs to differ. In our opinion, the only controversial thing about it will be how long it has taken to get here.

Abortion Legislation

It has been a momentous year for reproductive rights and justice in Northern Ireland. After decades of campaigning, the speed with which the necessary legislation to bring about both equal marriage and the decriminalisation of abortion NI came about, was almost difficult to comprehend.

For the past 50 years, women in Northern Ireland have had to travel (mainly to England) to have safe, legal abortions. This has been a huge burden financially,

Alliance for choice



emotionally and logistically for those women. We know that some people have been forced to continue unwanted, or even medically unviable pregnancies, because they haven't been able to travel.

Since 2009 the Abortion Support Network has helped women with travel costs, abortion costs and logistics; even putting women up in volunteers' homes when necessary. Following years of campaigning, a high profile court case, and a brilliant political manoeuvre by Stella Creasy MP, abortions in England for women from Northern Ireland are now paid for by the NHS, along with some travel costs. However, for some people travelling is not an option, for asylum seekers and others without the right papers, for those trapped in domestic violence situations, for the disabled and for those (often the young) without family or partner support, travel has sometimes been impossible.

Many of those without medical complications and still early in pregnancy have opted to buy abortion medication online but taking it or providing it in

Northern Ireland was illegal and resulted in prosecutions until 22nd October.

Credit must go to the grassroots campaigners in Northern Ireland, who have been advocating for abortion rights consistently, loudly and courageously for decades. Alliance for Choice has led powerful campaigns in Northern Ireland and Westminster, drawing on medical evidence, research, women's stories, and health and human rights arguments to make their case. Credit must also go to the trade union movement. For years, trade union members have raised the issue of reform of abortion legislation within their unions – not always a popular subject. Motions have been brought to affiliate conferences and to ICTU Biennial Delegate Conferences and trade union activists and the ICTU Women's Committee have been stalwarts in their support of the campaign.

It once seemed impossible that abortion would be realised in NI with the draconian and archaic 1861 the Offences Against the Person Act firmly in place in NI. The 1967 Abortion Act



Alliance for Choice's Naomi Connor

never applied to Northern Ireland, so abortion in Northern Ireland has been illegal except in exceptional circumstances right up until the 22nd October 2019.

Getting safe, legal, local abortion up and running in Northern Ireland will not happen overnight. We'll keep supporting our friends in Alliance for Choice to keep up the pressure. But for the year that's in it let's mark this historic moment and celebrate toast the tenacity of the campaign and those who fought so hard to achieve it.

Abortion placards



In the Republic of Ireland, Congress work on gender issues carried out in consultation with the Women's Committee and affiliate trade unions included:

Gender Pay Gap: Congress continued to work with affiliates regarding the proposed gender pay gap reporting bill. Our work is based on the trade union submissions which as well as the legislation, also included calls for more collective bargaining, improvements in family leave, more women in STEM subjects. We held meetings with IBEC and the Minister for Justice and Equality to explore common ground. We also worked jointly with the National Women's Council and participated in national consultation meetings. Congress also participated in a number of media interviews on the topic and our submission was profiled in IRN. We also presented to an Oireachtas Committee regarding the Governments Gender Pay Gap reporting scheme for a Bill in November 2018 and the Committee report took on board some of our suggestions, including that the Bill:

- Reduces the threshold for public and private organisations to 10-15 employees;
- Provides for voluntary reporting by smaller companies;
- Specifies the reporting timescale for all affected organisations;
- A range of Employee categorisation, including by job classification as well as quartile reporting;
- Includes Part-time workers;
- provides for specific fines in order to increase certainty and transparency and to ensure greater compliance;
- Requires employers to provide a narrative or contextual statement alongside their gender pay statistics;
- Requires the establishment of a publicly accessible website to record gender pay gap data and information.

The Government announced on International Women's Day 2019 that the reporting requirement will apply on a phased basis, beginning with employers of more than 250 employees, then reducing to employers of more than 150 employees and then to employers of more than 50 employees. It will include both full-time and part-time employees and will extend to bonus payments and benefits-in-kind. The resultant legislation completed 3rd stage in the Oireachtas in May 2019 but progress was slow after that. The National Women's Council and Congress jointly called on the Government to commit to passing the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill before Christmas but unfortunately did not get passed before the election was called for February 8th. We will work to ensure that it remains on the agenda for the next session of the Oireachtas.

Tackling Precarious Work

The Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018 is one of the most significant pieces of employment law in twenty years and is the result of a five-year campaign by the trade union movement to get legal protection around working hours for vulnerable workers. Women workers will benefit disproportionately as

There are four new rights:

1. Workers are entitled to a written statement of their terms of employment within first 5 days. The Act legally requires employers to provide workers with a written statement of their main conditions of employment within the first 5 days of starting work. The statement must include details of daily and weekly working hours, rate of pay and how pay is calculated.

2. Zero-Hour contracts are banned in almost all circumstances. It had become practice for some employers to employ workers without guaranteeing them a set number of working hours. Under the Act, employers will no longer be able to use these zero-hour contracts except in very limited circumstances, such as to provide cover in emergency situations or to cover short-term absences.

3. Workers are entitled to a minimum payment if their employer fails to provide them with work. Workers have the right to compensation from their employer if they turn up for work but are sent home without work. The minimum payment they are entitled to is 3 hours pay at the minimum wage rate, or 3 hours at the JLC rate if they work in a sector where an Employment Regulation Order is in force, such as security or contract cleaning.

4. Workers are entitled to be guaranteed hours of work that reflect their normal working week. Under the Act, if a worker habitually works more hours each week than is provided in their contract, they have the right to request to be placed in a band of weekly hours that better reflects their normal working hours over a 12-month period.

Reconciling Work and Family Life

Congress continued to work with the Women's Committee, the ETUC and other civil society organisations in order to improve work life balance. This included advocating for more affordable quality childcare and enhanced paid family leave.

Significantly, the Government launched a Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families in late 2018. This strategy has potential to deliver real changes for working families and sets out an important roadmap on how to improve

the lives of babies, young children and their families. It contains some of the agenda pursued by Congress including the confirmation of the planned introduction of paid parental leave, which will see the gradual introduction of a non-transferable (between parents) paid parental leave in the first year of a child's life, rising to seven weeks' parental leave over a three-year period from late 2019. This will be further improved by the provisional agreement between the European Council and Parliament on a new Work Life Balance Directive which is discussed further below.

Congress also welcomed the passing of the Social Democrats' Parental Leave (Amendment) Bill 2017 which allows parents to take a total of 26 weeks' unpaid leave from their jobs without their employment rights being affected. This is eight weeks more than the current period of 18 weeks of unpaid leave. It also allows leave over the lifetime of children up to the age of 12, rising from the current threshold of eight years old. However unpaid leave is not a

substitute for paid parental leave; it is a complementary form of parental leave that offers parents additional flexibility in reconciling work and family life.

With up to 50% of workers in Ireland earning less than €34,000 in 2017 and almost one in five classified as low paid, it is clear that many households will be unable to avail of unpaid Parental Leave.

Congress welcomed the passing of new legislation governing parent's leave - the Parent's Leave and Benefit Act 2019 which entitles each parent to 2 weeks paid leave. The following criteria must be met to be eligible to take parent's leave. You must:

- Be a *relevant parent*
- Take the leave within 52 weeks of the birth of the child or in the case of adoption, from the date the child is placed with you (the placement date) of placement of the child
- Give at least 6 weeks' notice to your employer

The legislation only provides for the minimum entitlement to parent's leave and affiliates will be working to improve the leave for parents, including by top up payments by employers. Upon hearing that the Department of Education and Skills (DES), on the instruction of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DEPR), will not top up the €245 of benefit payable weekly to teachers to their full pay for these two weeks of parent's leave, (for other statutory paid leave, such as maternity, paternity and sick leave the DES does pay full salary and has always done so) teachers unions stated that this calls into question whether the Government is really serious about supporting working families. Employers in the public service have always led the way in providing fully paid leave. By refusing to pay the full personal daily rate to teachers, government sends a strong signal to unscrupulous employers that they do not need to support their own employees beyond what the State provides. Congress and all affiliates are calling on DPER to support parents working in the public

service, including teachers, and pay them fully while they are on parent's leave.

We also continued our campaign for breastfeeding breaks at workplaces including the Women's Committee getting a presentation by Baby Feeding Law Action Group In May 2019 and subsequently marked National Breastfeeding Week 2019 by issuing a statement to remind all workers of their rights relevant to infant feeding and to seek better legal provision for such rights: Currently, under Irish law, women who are breastfeeding are entitled to time off or a reduction in working hours to breastfeed their baby, up until the child is 26 weeks of age - which coincides with return from maternity leave. In November 2019 we were informed that "Heads of provisions to extend the period during which breastfeeding breaks will be available from 26 weeks to 2 years have been approved by Government. The provisions are being drafted for inclusion within an early appropriate Bill." However, the election has halted such progress for now.

These developments are good news for families that would in effect mean that parents would have up to 42 weeks of some form of paid leave during the first year of a child's life. It will enhance families' ability to reconcile work and family life and enable fathers to play a more active role in family responsibilities. Congress has long held the position that such arrangements should cover the full first year of a child's life and notes that the proposals as planned falls short of this by some 10 weeks.

Early Years Care and Education

The Reform of the Early Learning and Care (ELC) system, including a new funding model is also a significant area of action signalling increased investment and more favourable working conditions that will help to attract and retain staff in the sector. Current investment levels lag behind those of our EU partners and result in exorbitant costs faced by families and an undervalued workforce where

qualified educators earn on average less than €11 an hour with many on precarious 15-hour a week and 38-weeks a year contracts. Congress has consistently questioned the feasibility of achieving better early years services based on low pay and poor conditions and looks forward to an early resolution of this significant barrier to achieving many of the objectives laid out in today's strategy.

Congress continued to pursue improvements in these areas through our participation in the LEEF subgroup on early years care and education, chaired by Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone

Congress hosted a Friday briefing in March 2019 on the introduction of the new National Childcare Scheme introduced in autumn 2019.

Despite developments, the sector is facing many difficulties with:

Parents are paying too much for childcare. Workers are paid too little to make ends meet. Providers are struggling



Big Start rally

to break even. Congress is a supporter of SIPTU's 'Big Start' campaign.

Professional workers deserve professional pay.

For children and parents we want quality and affordable services.

By bringing together workers, parents and childcare providers we can ensure that government makes the necessary investment to make this a reality.



Big Start rally



Big Start rally



Big Start rally

A responsible government that values every child would recognise every Early Years professional.

We need Government to increase investment and support decent pay with a Sectoral Employment Order.

Trade unions supported a protest march in February to highlight the ongoing low pay and affordability crisis in childcare. The march was organized by the 'Early Years Alliance' which includes SIPTU. Thousands of educators, parents and supporters gathered to demand

greater government investment to increase pay, reduce fees and support sustainability. These demands were also part of Congress election campaign demands.

National Policy context for gender equality

Congress continues to pursue our gender equality agenda through participation in the regular meetings of the National Strategy for Women and Girls Implementation Group, chaired by Minister David Stanton. We also liaise with other civil society organisations represented on that group. A major development in late 2019 was the announcement of the Citizen's Assembly on gender equality to be chaired by former head of the European Commission, Catherine Day. The membership of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality will consist of the Chairperson and 99 citizens entitled to vote at referendum, recruited at national level and randomly selected to be broadly representative of Irish society.

The inaugural meeting of the Assembly took place on Saturday 25th January.

The first full weekend meeting was due to be held the weekend of the 14th to 16th of February and the dates for four further weekend meetings have also been confirmed.

The work programme will be based on the topics set out in the Oireachtas resolution establishing the Assembly as follows:

- challenge the remaining barriers and social norms and attitudes that facilitate gender discrimination towards girls and boys, women and men;
- identify and dismantle economic and salary norms that result in gender inequalities, and reassess the economic value placed on work traditionally held by women;
- in particular, seek to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in the workplace, politics and public life;
- recognise the importance of early years' parental care and seek to facilitate greater work-life balance;
- examine the social responsibility of care and women and men's co-responsibility for care, especially within the family; and
- scrutinise the structural pay inequalities that result in women being disproportionately represented in low pay sectors;

Balance for Better Business

In July 2018, the Taoiseach, Minister for Justice, and the Minister for Equality announced a new Review Group composed of senior business figures and government officials to make recommendations on how to increase the percentage of women on corporate boards and in senior management in leading Irish companies.

General Secretary, Patricia King is on the advisory group to the initiative. Commenting on the establishment of the review group, Patricia said:

"Congress recognises the urgent need for action in this area. Earlier this year we showed in our annual report on CEO pay, 'Because We're Worth it – the Truth about CEO Pay' (January 2018), that there were only two female CEOs in twenty-seven leading Irish companies we reviewed. The Review Group needs to take a holistic view of the barriers women face daily in the workforce and if the recommendations are to fully capture this, it is essential that the voices and experiences of female workers are included. Achieving gender diversity on corporate boards is unlikely to be realised if this new initiative is confined to senior figures in business and government officials. As the representative of some 800,000 working people, some 50 per cent of whom are female, Congress has long campaigned for measures to improve access to childcare, a positive change in the work culture and promoting confidence in young female workers to put themselves forward for promotion".

In May 2019 they set targets of 33% female representation on boards of ISEQ 20 companies by 2023 and 25% for other listed companies. They also set a target of no all-male boards by the end of 2019. The launch of the second Balance for Better Business report in December 2019 report revealed that while progress had been made, serious gender imbalance persists:

- ISEQ 20 companies achieve 2020 interim target of at least 25% female directors
- Virtually no progress made among the other listed companies
- No change made to all-male boards listed on Euronext Dublin
- Gap between Ireland and other EU member states closing, but Ireland remains 17th

The Gender targets were extended to leadership teams and private companies.

Sustainable Development Goals

Congress was chosen as a national Sustainable Development Goal Champion Organisation and announced by Minister Richard Bruton at the ploughing championship in September 2019. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development² adopted by the United Nations in September 2015 contains a set of shared objectives, the 17 SDGs, which cover issues highly relevant to the work of trade unions, including the promotion of decent work, the fight against poverty, inequalities and climate action; and recognise the need for greater gender equality, free quality education, public services and stronger institutions. Goal 8 promises decent work and sustainable economic growth and goal 5 is centred on tackling gender inequalities.



² <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

ILO Matters

The Equality Officer ROI attended the centenary conference of the ILO in Geneva from 10 – 21 June 2019 and played an active role as a member of both the Irish delegation and the Workers group. He was a member of the Standard Setting Committee on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work and a member of the bureau of the workers group on this committee. This involved liaising with Irish officials within the EU group on issues arising during the negotiations. DJ also delivered a response to the report of the committee to the final plenary of the conference and Congress issued a press release welcoming the new Convention and Recommendation.

The new Convention resulted from two years of often very difficult discussions, however, thanks to the efforts of Employers, Governments and Worker colleagues at the conference, we now have the first global standard on the topic. The standard has agreed definitions and scope and includes:

- Recognition of the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender based violence and harassment;
- recognition that violence and harassment can constitute a human rights violation or abuse;
- the concept of leaving no groups of people behind;
- recognition of the effects of domestic violence and the need to mitigate its impacts in the world of work; and
- commitments to an inclusive, integrated and gender responsive approach for the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work.

It is a remarkable achievement and the result of years of campaigning by the trade union movement - particularly the women of the movement – who have been working long and hard to bring us such an instrument.

Congress is liaising with the Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation

regarding early ratification of the Convention by the Irish Government which will hopefully take place in quarter three of 2020.

ETUC

Congress is represented on the ETUC Women's committee by Clare Moore, Equality Officer with Committee Chair, Margaret Coughlan as the alternate.

In this period, the major development was the agreement, after many years of negotiation, of the EU Work Life Balance Directive.

The Work-life Balance Directive ³ introduces a set of legislative actions designed to modernise the existing EU legal and policy frameworks, with the aims of

- better supporting a work-life balance for parents and carers,

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1311&langId=en>

- encouraging a more equal sharing of parental leave between men and women, and
- addressing women's underrepresentation in the labour market.

The Directive, which was passed by the European Parliament in April 2019, entered into force on 1 August 2019. Member States now have three years to adopt the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with the Directive.

Measures under the directive include:

- The introduction of **paternity leave**: under the directive, fathers must be able to take at least 10 working days of paternity leave around the time of birth of their child, compensated at least at the level of sick pay.
- Ensuring that two out of the four months of **parental leave** are non-transferable between parents and compensated at a level that is determined by the Member State.

- The introduction of **carers' leave**: workers providing personal care or support to a relative will be entitled to five days of leave per year.
- Extending the **right to request flexible working arrangements** to carers and working parents of children up to eight years old.

The directive is also accompanied by a set of policy measures that are designed to support Member States in achieving the aims of better work-life balance and more equally distributed caring responsibilities. These include

- encouraging the use of European funds to improve the provision of formal care services,
- ensuring protection for parents and carers against discrimination or dismissal, and
- removing economic disincentives for second earners within families.

As a result of these measures, the directive aims to improve not only work-life balance but also contribute to an increase in women's employment and families' economic stability.

The ETUC has called on Member States to take urgent action to transpose into law and implement these new rights for working families.

"This is the first legislative advance to come out of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and it is crucial to demonstrate to EU citizens that it will mean real improvements in their lives," ETUC Deputy General Secretary Esther Lynch.

"We will be supporting national affiliates in pushing forward and monitoring the transposition process. Social partners – and especially trade unions – must be consulted and involved throughout. We call on the EU actively to encourage social dialogue and collective agreements that will build on the measures contained in the Directive, and to promote an exchange

of good practice in work-life balance arrangements."

"In transposing the Directive, national governments must recognise the diversity of family life in the 21st century and respond to changing labour market realities," Member States must also take urgent action to provide affordable childcare, because otherwise parents cannot afford to return to work – especially those with children under four years."

Congress has met with the Department of Justice and Equality in ROI to ensure that we are consulted throughout the transposition process.



Esther Lynch at the ETUC Women's Committee

The ICTU Women's Committee would like to congratulate Esther Lynch, former Social Policy Officer with Congress, on her election as Deputy General Secretary of the ETUC. We look forward to working with Esther and her colleagues to progress the rights of women in work and in society.

<https://redcresearch.ie/win-world-survey-www-ranks-40-countries-on-gender-equality-sexual-harassment-and-violence/>

INMO

Ireland's nurses and midwives members of the INMO, (over 92% of them female), took strike action in January and February 2019 over crises in recruitment and retention. The INMO, citing long-standing gendered differences in pay and conditions, argued that the time had come for their members' pay to be aligned with that of other similar-qualified health professionals.

Nurses and midwives who are members of the INMO, went on strike on the 30th of January, and 5th and 7th of February, attracting massive public

support and media attention. Following a national rally held in Dublin City Centre on February 9th and attended by over 50,000 people, government bodies agreed to open negotiations on a significant pay and staffing proposal. THE Ex council of the INMO express its thanks to unions that supported them during the dispute and in particular to the General Secretary of ICTU for her assistance and support.





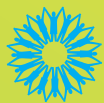
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STRONGER TOGETHER

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5 GENDER
EQUALITY



8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH



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