

REPORT
of the Stakeholder Consultation Forum
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)
Department of Justice and Equality
10th June 2019

In 2020, the global community will mark the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), which sets out an agenda for women's empowerment. It also marks five years of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims as one of its Sustainable Development Goals to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

The Department of Justice and Equality is leading work across Government on Ireland's comprehensive national review to assess progress made since 2014 in implementing the Declaration and Platform for Action through the [National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017- 2020](#).

A stakeholder consultation forum was held on Monday 10 June to inform Ireland's Beijing+25 report.

The consultation was led by the Department of Justice and Equality and brought together invited stakeholders and experts in the field of gender equality to identify the following:

- the most important achievements and challenges since 2014 in progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Ireland,;
- the factors that have enabled progress or contributed to set-backs in this period; and
- new and emerging priorities for the future.

The forum was a half-day event and used the café dialogue methodology to identify the key issues. Over 100 experts and civil society organisations in the field of gender equality were invited to participate and 29 attended the consultation. A list of invited stakeholders and participating organisations are detailed at the back of the report. However, the consultation was held late in the process and some were unable to attend at short notice.

The questions on which views were sought, and the range of responses received are outlined over the following pages. In addition to views expressed by participants on the day, the written views of invited stakeholders have been taken into account.

Question 1

*Over the past 5 years what have been **the most important achievements** in progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women? Why? What helped?*

Achievements were raised under the following themes:

(a) Constitutional and legislative reforms

A number of legislative and constitution reforms that enabled positive changes over the past five years were cited as important achievements, namely:

- Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Act 2015, which provided for marriage by two persons of the same sex and include both parents on birth cert in same sex couple;
- The Gender Recognition Act 2015 provided for all individuals over 18 years to declare their gender (and with additional provisions for 16 and 17 year olds);
- The recognition of Travellers as a distinct ethnic group in Irish society by the Taoiseach in 2017;
- The Repeal of the Eight Amendment provided for the regulation of termination of pregnancy;
- Ireland's ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention);
- The passing of the Referendum in 2019 that reduced the waiting time for a divorce;
- The recognition of gender pay gap and subsequent legislation; and
- Changes in legislation in parental and paternity leave.

Also noted were the development of a number of strategies targeting disadvantaged groups including: the LGBTI community (and LGBTI young people); women; Travellers; migrants; and people with disabilities.

(b) Women in Leadership and greater visibility of women

Participants cited a greater visibility of women in leadership roles in politics and in society in general. Quotas were seen as useful in increasing the profile of women in politics. In the 2016 election, the gender quota law contributed to a 90% increase in women's candidacy and a 40% increase in the general election, which contributed to 7% increase in women in the Dáil.

Increases in the number of women on state boards and work to increase the number of women on corporate boards were deemed important achievements. The increased profiling of women in sport, both in presenting and reporting roles, and in the participation of sports increased women's visibility.

(c) Childcare and the role of women as carers

Some progress was noted in the area of childcare support was identified including two free years of childcare.

Increased paternity and parental leave helped to shared caring responsibilities and rebalance the caring role to both genders.

(d) Work

It was noted that there was increased economic opportunity and an increased policy focus on women returning to the labour market. The discourse on the proposed gender pay gap legislation brought about enhanced focus on differences in pay and treatment in the workplace.

Targeted approaches to bring women into the labour market, such as the European Social Fund PEIL Programme and initiatives co-ordinated by the NCCWN, the National Collective of Community Based Women's Network, have been successful and targeted women in disadvantaged communities who were distant from the labour market.

(e) Education

A number of achievements were noted in the higher education sector. This included the Higher Education Authority national review of gender equality in higher education institutions (2016) and the Gender Equality Taskforce Action Plan (2018-2020), which introduced: compulsory organisational gender action plans with identified targets and goals; incentivised progress through funding mechanisms; a centre of excellence for gender equality; the implementation senior academic leadership initiative; and an increase in the number of professorships in universities.

A key development also was the introduction of the Athena SWAN Charter into Ireland and the research funders making Athena SWAN certification an eligibility requirement for participation in their programmes.

A new curriculum in senior cycle schools entitled 'politics and society' was also noted as progressive.

(f) Health care

An enhanced focus on women's health care and maternal care was cited.

(g) Legacy issues

The symbolic apology for women in Magdalene Laundries was highlighted alongside the acknowledgement of the abuse and treatment of women in Mother and Baby Homes.

The enabling factors cited included:

- Feminist activism;
- Civil society organisations raising important issues for women;
- The ongoing cultural shift in perspectives on gender equality including the global #MeToo movement and an increased focus on sexism;
- The Anti Hate Crime campaign;
- The 'Home to vote' campaign assisted with passing the eight amendment as did personal stories, grassroots advocacy and individual champions;

- Global pressure from international treaties
- The use of social media to raise positive awareness. The Repeal of the Eight Amendment and the participation of Traveller candidates in election campaigns were cited as positive examples.
- A reform debate that emerged in the wake of the financial crash and ensuing economic recession.

Question 2

*Over the past 5 years what **challenges** were encountered in making progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women? Were there any **significant set-backs**, and what caused these?*

Challenges were raised under the following themes:

(a) Traveller Women

The exclusion of Traveller women was identified in the consultation as a serious issue. Persistent challenges remain for Traveller women. Traveller women were distant from the labour market (80% unemployment rate), education (reduced school timetables for school going children and low participation rates at third level) and public services including health and childcare. Traveller women are disproportionately represented in the prison system. There was little progress identified over the past five years despite the symbolic recognition of ethnicity and a national strategy.

(b) Patriarchy and Misogyny and the lack of Women in Leadership roles

Patriarchy and misogyny were cited as persistent challenges for women as was the rise of right wing politics internationally and the subsequent backlash against women. Homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia were barriers to the progression of rights for the rights and equality of trans women and girls.

The lack of women in leadership roles in politics is an ongoing challenge. It was noted that there had never been a female Taoiseach in Ireland and Ireland's participation of women in politics at local and national level is low.

(c) Work and pay

Systemic issues in the gender pay gap exist. Unconscious bias in favour of men remains an issue. The leaders of feminised work sectors tended to be males e.g. principals in schools, head of nurses. There was a lack of female role models in male dominated areas such as science and technology. The female labour participation rate is still low. There is a concentration of women in lower paid sectors, in precarious work and short-term employment contracts.

The burden of care and no universal access to childcare prohibited women from engaging in the workplace and in gaining promotions. Balancing long commutes with

care roles was a struggle. Family friendly and flexible working arrangements needed to be extended along with parental and paternity leave.

Some groups were still excluded from the workplace. Ireland was cited as having the lowest employment for people with disabilities in Europe with Traveller women and trans women also among the most excluded groups.. There are less women working in technology coupled with a lack of investment in research and technology.

It was noted that there was an increase in middle class women in the work force but it was also felt that poorer, migrant and marginalised women were not being included in these gains.

(d) Childcare and the care role

It was felt that the role that women often have as carers was undervalued. Costs of childcare were prohibitive with Traveller women unable to access any childcare services. Services were also patchy in rural areas.

(e) Public Services: austerity, homelessness and health

It was felt that the impact of austerity and cutbacks in public services had disproportionality affected women. The high cost of living was also identified as a serious challenge. There were regional disparities in the quality of public services and how they were organised and delivered, and in rural areas services were sporadic or non-existent. There was inequality of access to health and education services, especially for women in minority or ethnic groups. Higher taxation is required to invest and deliver public services but it is difficult to have a public debate on this where the political climate is to reduce taxes.

The housing crisis affected women and children with the increased levels of family homelessness. The State needed to clearly articulate its role and responsibility in providing accommodation and housing. There were particular issues identified for women in direct provision and in emergency accommodation. It was noted that there was a lack of delivery of Traveller accommodation.

There were still serious issues in health care for women. The recent cervical check scandal was cited. As some ethnic minority and poor women experienced literacy issues, access to abortion could be an issue. The lack of funding for mental health services was identified.

(f) Media and social media

The harsh treatment of women in the media and in social media was cited as an issue. The Belfast Rape trial and the reporting of the same was cited as a particular challenge.

The harassment of women and violent threats against women for articulating viewpoints on social media was identified. Public online commentary can be violent, cruel and misogynistic. Coupled with this, are the issues of pornography and the sexual exploitation of women and lesbian women.

(g) Access to Justice

It was noted that the treatment of women in court and criminal proceedings such as rape trials, using underwear as evidence was particularly difficult. In addition, the lack of practical accessible protection or women in regard to domestic violence was noted.

(h) Violence against women

How women who take a case are treated in court is a huge challenge. Separately, there were not enough supports for women living with domestic violence who had to leave the family home – this was exacerbated by the current housing crisis. The issue of women being forced to leave their homes to escape perpetrators while perpetrators remain in the family home was flagged.

(i) Implementation of Strategies

While the increase in strategies was welcomed, their implementation was viewed as slow. In addition, there were viewed as too limited in their reach and should be developed with a long term in approach. Strategies also need to consider the intersectionality of difference issues such as ethnicity, class, disability etc.

Budgets did not appear to be gender proofed adequately and there was a lack of data and information on outcomes for women.

(j) Role of civil society and the voluntary and community sector

It was felt that there was generally less empathy for issues faced by disadvantaged communities and groups. Civil society groups noted they had faced cutbacks and should be adequately resourced.

The main setbacks cited were:

- Housing/homelessness big challenge for families;
- Geographical disparity in population and access to work;
- Poverty had become feminised;
- Climate change and its disproportionate impact on women / lower paid;
- Energy poverty;
- Food poverty;
- Rise of the alt-right; and
- Resurgence of violence in Northern Ireland

Question 3

*What, in your opinion, should be the **top priorities for the next 5 years** to quicken progress for women and girls in Ireland?*

The following priorities were identified:

(a) Implementation of Strategies and Polices

The implementation of strategies that focus on the intersection between women's oppression and other forms of discriminations (such as racism, disability or social class) needs to be addressed. The implementation of these strategies and resulting impact for all women requires continued collaboration between departments and agencies alongside communication, consultation and implementation. The application of gender proofing and a women's perspective to all proposed policies and legislation was deemed important alongside the effective use of the Public Sector Duty.

The need for data to underpin the measurement of the rollout of the strategies was important, while communicating these strategies to the general public and implementation of the same.

Enact recommendations of other human rights instruments and treaties including CEDAW and CERD. Implement the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014.

(b) Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector

The engagement of the community and voluntary sector and of civil society groups is important in implementation of strategies. The need for greater resourcing for community development strategies to support and enhance engagement and empowerment of marginalised and minority women in growing their collective voice and involvement as developed by them on their terms was identified.

(c) Women in Leadership, Positive Action and Quotas

More women in leadership in politics, business and in STEM and in particular a diversity of women. Positive action and special measures are needed, designed and implemented with the groups involved (e.g. in Ireland Traveller and Roma women, migrant and asylum seeking women). Quotas in the political system are needed to ensure that more women are involved in politics.

(d) Public Services

Sensitising public services to the needs of women and resourcing them, including the judicial / courts and health systems.

Addressing the accommodation issues including the homeless crisis, this should include Traveller accommodation and accommodation for applicants of international protection.

It was deemed very important to implement the redress and on recent scandals including: Magdalen Laundries; Mothers and Baby Homes; Cervical cancer; Mesh scandal. Women should not have to spend years or go through the courts to gain redress.

There needs to be greater investment in the healthcare needs of trans women and girls in relation to medical transition. This needs to involve a holistic wraparound

psychosocial model, mirroring best practice internationally as outlined by the World Health Organisation and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health moving away from the diagnostic model that practitioners, due to a lack of training, are still relying on.

(e) Work and Childcare

Flexible work arrangements are needed for both women and men and also opportunities for men to take up parental duties.

Universal childcare and early childcare for all and fair wages for working in childcare.

(f) Encourage debate and awareness

Implement a range of public education and awareness programmes that focus on sexual consent, pornography, sexuality and social media. The national strategies should also be promoted. A debate on broadening taxes and funding public services would be welcomed.

(g) New Legislation

- Gender recognition for trans girls and non-binary and intersex young people under 16 years.
- Recognition of Traveller ethnicity through legislation.
- Regulation of Social media

Organisations Attending

BeLonG To Youth Services
Chambers Ireland
Dress for Success Dublin
Higher Education Authority
Ibec
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
Irish Women Lawyers Association (IWLA)
National Collective of Community Based Women's Groups (NCCWN)
National Traveller Women's Forum
National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI)
Pavee Point
Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU)
SIPTU
Southside Traveller's Women's group
Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI)
Women in Technology & Science (WITS)
20x20 campaign.
<i>and</i> Government Departments represented on the Strategy Committee for the National Strategy for Women and Girls

Organisations Invited

Union of Students in Ireland (USI)	Rape Crisis Network
The Community Platform	BeLonGTo
The Wheel	LGBT Ireland
Ibec	LINC
NCCWN	TENI
ICTU	Irish Countrywomen's Association
National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi)	Akidwa
Ibec	New Communities Partnership
Pavee Point	Focus Ireland
National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi)	Muintir na Tíre
ICTU	MobilityMojo
Irish Farmers' Association (IFA)	Macra na Feirme
Community & Voluntary Pillar	Nevin Economic Research Institute
National Traveller Women's Forum	HEA
National University of Ireland Galway	Soroptimists International (Ireland)
National University of Ireland Maynooth	National Youth Council of Ireland
University College Cork	HEA
Trinity College Dublin	ICTU
Dublin City University	Dress for Success Dublin
University of Limerick	Chambers Ireland
Dublin Technological University	Diversity Charters Ireland
National Economic and Social Council	Dress for Success Dublin
Irish Women Lawyers Association (IWLA)	FLAC
Women for Election	ICCL
Women in Technology & Science (WITS)	NDA
National Union of Journalists, Irish Executive Council	One Family
Sport Ireland	Women in Film and Television
Federation of Irish Sport	Ruhama
Women on Air	30% Club Ireland
Age Action	Third Age
<p><i>and</i> Members of the Strategy Committee for the National Strategy for Women and Girls Committee</p>	