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INOUE Submission to the National Women's Strategy 2017- 2020

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INTRODUCTION

“The INOU is a federation of unemployed people, unemployed centres, unemployed groups, community organisations and Trade Unions. The INOU represents and defends the rights and interests of those who want decent employment and cannot obtain it. We promote and campaign for policies to achieve full employment for all. We also campaign for an acceptable standard of living for unemployed people and their dependents. The INOU is an anti-sectarian, anti-racist, non-party political organisation which promotes equality of opportunity within society.” (INOUE Mission Statement)

The organisation has over 210 affiliated organisations and 2,100 individual members. We work at the local and national level on issues affecting unemployed people through the provision of training and welfare rights information services; analysis of Government policies and related advocacy work; and working with a wide range of other organisations on issues of common concern.

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the development of a new National Women’s Strategy 2017-2020. In the Department of Justice and Equality’s consultation document on ‘Towards a new National Women’s Strategy 2017-2020’ five high level objectives are proposed:

- (i) Advance socio-economic equality for women and girls;
- (ii) Improve women’s and girls’ physical and mental health;
- (iii) Promote women’s and girls’ equal and active citizenship;
- (iv) Advance women in leadership; and
- (v) Embed gender equality in decision-making.

Each of these objectives is important and indeed none are realisable unless progress is made on each of them separately and their collective impact is built on, but of particular interest to the INOU is the first goal, which will form the basis of this submission.

CURRENT CONTEXT

According to the latest Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), Quarter 3 2016, there were 2,040,500 people employed in Ireland. The majority, 77% or 1,578,900 people were in full-time employment, while 461,600 were in part-time employment. 21.7% or 100,400 of the people who are working part-time view themselves as underemployed i.e. they would prefer more hours or full-time jobs.

Looking at these figures from a gender perspective, in Quarter 3 2016 45.6% of those employed were women. However, this percentage changes dramatically when part-time work is explored: 68.3% of those working part-time are women. For the majority of women this appears to be a preference, but women represent 52.2% of those who view themselves as underemployed.

In Q3 2016 there were 177,700 people unemployed: 67,500 of them were women and of this figure 73% were seeking full-time work. Of the 92,300 people who were unemployed for more

than one year, 28,800 were women. 54.2% of this group were aged between 25 and 44 years; 30.9% were aged 45 years+; and 14.6% were aged between 15 and 24 years.

The overall employment rate was 65.4% in Q3 2016, but for women the rate was lower at 59.8%. Under the Europe 2020 Strategy Ireland has set itself an employment target *“To raise to 69-71% the employment rate for women and men aged 20-64, including through the greater participation of young people, older workers and low-skilled workers, and the better integration of legal migrants, and to review the target level of ambition in 2014, in the context of a proposed mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy.”* The QNHS employment rate figure includes young people aged 15-19, and this is the only age group where the female employment rate is higher than the male rate, by 0.3%.

In December 2016 there were 276,701 people on the Live Register, of whom 116,007 were women. Of the 119,911 people who were on the Register for more than a year, 38% were women. In December 2009, women represented 26% of those who were on the register for more than a year, and though the number of women did not rise as dramatically as the number of men, similarly women’s unemployment has not dropped to the same extent. The number of women on the register for more than a year was 85% higher in December 2016 than in December 2009.

The Live Register only captures data on people in receipt of a Jobseekers payment or signing-on for credits and does not capture other key working age payments including the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) and disability payments. The OPFP is overwhelmingly female, the only other payment with such a stark contrast is the Farm Assist payment, which is overwhelmingly male.

ADVANCE SOCIO-ECONOMIC EQUALITY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

As noted earlier Ireland’s employment rate target is an overall one, but to be meaningful for women and to advance their socio-economic equality, a separate target should also be set for women. Such an approach would be in keeping with fifth high level objective: to embed gender equality in decision making.

The Department of Social Protection (DSP) now incorporates and oversees the Public Employment Service (PES). PES is a service that should be open to everyone of working age but which focuses primarily on people in receipt of certain social welfare payments, in particular Jobseekers payments which now include the women transferred from the One Parent Family Payment onto a Jobseekers Allowance or a Jobseekers Transition payment. This later development highlighted the importance of a holistic approach to policy making and implementation, including the incorporation of equality and social inclusion, and the difficulties that arise when such an approach is not pursued.

The poverty rates experienced by lone parents and their children warrant proper redress, but employment is only a route out of poverty if it is decent and sustainable, and access to supports such as childcare and transport are adequate and affordable.

In 2012 the National Women's Council of Ireland and SIPTU published *Careless to Careful Activation - Making Activation Work for Women*¹. In it they highlighted the importance of activating the State and the need to gender mainstreaming the three legs of activation which should include:

- (i) The provision of effective and flexible social welfare;
- (ii) Activation case management processes that support quality job search support, access to meaningful work experience, training and education;
- (iii) Support access to decent jobs and in-work income support if required.

The INOU continues to urge the Government *"to develop a person centred activation process that ensures that the individual is supported to make an informed choice: a process that seeks to enable people to participate but refrains from coercing people into unsuitable activation programmes or unsustainable jobs."* Such an approach is key if improved socio-economic equality of outcomes for women and girls are to be realised. It would also be in keeping with one of the strategic objectives of the Department of Social Protection to *"Put the Client at the Centre of Services and Policies"*. To that end employment services must:

- Be a person centred service for everyone of working age;
- Be pro-active and supportive;
- Ensure the full & pro-active provision of information;
- Ensure flexibility in the system to facilitate participation;
- Deliver good support services with a particular focus on re-skilling; provision of childcare; accessible transport;
- Ensure integrated provision within and across relevant Departments, Agencies, organisations on the ground;
- Identify clear pathways from Activation Programmes out into the wider labour market;
- Commit to and deliver on an inclusive service and identify how the requirements of 'public sector duty' will be met; and,
- Be provided with the proper resources to deliver on such a service.

In the Programme for Government Further it notes that *"The new Partnership Government will develop our social protection services into an active employment service that works with, and helps, jobseekers to return to work. We are determined that nobody will be left behind in the recovery and for this reason the Government needs to be more radical to end the plight of jobless households. In addition to implementing the 'Pathways to Work' 5 Year Strategy which aims to help 50,000 Long-Term Unemployed people into jobs, we will publish a dedicated*

¹ Ref: http://www.nwci.ie/download/pdf/carelesscarefulactivationreport_final.pdf

'Pathways to Work for Jobless Households' to support jobless households into employment.
(p40)

In the current *Pathways to Work*² document there are six strands:

- (i) Enhanced engagement with unemployed people of working age;
- (ii) Increase the employment focus of activation programmes and opportunities;
- (iii) Making work pay – incentive the take-up of opportunities;
- (iv) Incentivising employers to offer jobs and opportunities to unemployed people;
- (v) Build organisational capability to deliver enhanced services to people who are unemployed;
- (vi) Building Workforce Skills.

If key Government commitments and policy instruments are to play a role in advancing the socio-economic equality of women and girls then a different approach to that currently used will be required. In particular to meet the recommendations made in *Careless to Careful Activation* and to build on the INOU's call for 'a person centred service for everyone of working age' with the necessary 'flexibility in the system to facilitate participation'. The adoption of an 'active inclusion' approach underpinned by 'positive duty' could make a serious and positive impact on women's lives.

Similarly if High Level Goal 5, which seeks to 'embed gender equality in decision-making', is to be realised, then policy and its implementation should be gender-proofed to ascertain if it will address the particular challenges facing woman. It will be important that as part of the fifth strand of *Pathways to Work* that positive duty and gender-mainstreaming are built into the 'organisational capacity to deliver enhanced services'.

ACTIVE INCLUSION

In *Pathways to Work 2016–2020*, in the section entitled Expanding Scope and Coverage – Active Inclusion, that this P2W “includes specific actions to increase labour market participation and employment progression of people who are not currently active in the labour market and to apply the concept of active inclusion as a guiding principle – particularly in the period from 2018 – 2020.” (p18)

So what does 'active inclusion' mean? In 2008, the European Commission adopted a Recommendation on the active inclusion of people most excluded from the labour market. This recommendation sought to promote a comprehensive strategy based on the integration of three key elements: adequate income support; inclusive labour markets; and, access to quality services.

² Full document available at <https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/PathwaysToWork2016-2020.pdf>

In January 2013 the European Commission published the Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion *“Assessment of the implementation of the European Commission Recommendation on active inclusion: A study of national policies”*. In this report they noted *“The most common weakness is that, while some elements of all strands are often present, many Member States’ strategies tend to be imbalanced. Often far greater attention is given to the inclusive labour market strand, and in particular to activation measures, than to the adequate income support and access to quality services. The unbalanced approach often seems to reflect a lack of understanding amongst policy makers as to what the term active inclusion means. Thus, while the phrase “active inclusion” increasingly appears in policy documents, in fact in practice it is mostly being interpreted simply as labour market activation.”*

It is critically important that in further rolling-out the changes envisaged in *Pathways to Work* and other policy documents that the means of engaging with unemployed people and others of working age distant from the labour market moves away from a conditionality approach, to one that seriously strives to be person-centred, pro-active and inclusive. This demands that the starting point is not how people can be fitted in, but how services can be designed and evolve to truly include, how services interact and work together to produce long-term and sustainable outcomes. Such an approach is absolutely critical to advance women’s socio-economic equality.

It is critically important that Employment Services staff are supported by way of access to continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, so that they provide constructive employment services to women of working age. Employment services that incorporate good guidance and an ability to match the individual with the most appropriate intervention for her will be ultimately more effective and efficient. This development needs to happen across a range of services as at present the National Employment Service is delivered by the Department of Social Protection’s Intreo service; the Local Employment Service; JobPath; Employability Services; and supported through programmes like the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government’s Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

POSITIVE DUTY

The introduction of ‘Positive Duty’ for public bodies should provide an important mechanism to address issues of equality and inequality facing women. In particular it could provide a useful tool to assist in addressing the different issues that can affect women because of their age, whether or not they have a family, whether or not they have a disability. Embedding the promotion of equality of opportunity and treatment, the protection of human rights into policy making and implementation could have a major impact on women’s lives and realise the ambition contained Strategy’s consultation document: *“an Ireland where all women enjoy equality with men and can achieve their full potential, while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life”*.

According to Section 42 (1) of the IHREC Act *“A public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to-*

- a) Eliminate discrimination,*

- b) Promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and*
- c) Protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.”*

In their May 2011 briefing paper³, the Equality Rights Alliance note *“A positive duty seeks to ensure that the promotion of equality and human rights becomes a core part of the way in which the organisation operates and conducts its business by:*

- *Supporting an informed and evidence-based approach to the work of public sector organisations,*
- *Requiring public sector organisations to not only take steps to avoid discriminating against employees and service users, but to actively promote equality for, and respect and protect the human rights of, service users and employees,*
- *Seeking to ensure that public sector organisations meet the needs of all service users and employees,*
- *Aiming to make tangible differences in the lives of people experiencing inequality, exclusion and human rights abuses.*

Positive duties are not about creating more red tape and bureaucracy. They are not an add-on or a further burden but an integral part of the way in which business is conducted.”

Practical Application

A theme in the INOU’s Regional Discussion Forums in 2016 was employment programmes. Amongst the issues raised was the importance of these programmes in facilitating local people’s participation in their community; and the key community development role these programmes can play in both rural and urban disadvantaged areas. And so in keeping with High Level Goals 1 and 3 it is vitally important that women, regardless of their social protection status, are facilitated to participate on education, training and employment programmes. Engagement in such programmes may not only be beneficial for the participant, but could also be beneficial for her family and wider community. It is absolutely imperative that proper supports for participation are put in place, in particular childcare and transport; that women are supported to make an informed choice, and a choice that facilitates them to access decent and sustainable employment. To that end the realisation of High Level Goal 5, *embedding gender equality in decision making, including policy design and implementation*, will be critical. Similarly, the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 5: *achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls* and its mainstreaming into SDGs is vital; and for INOU the realisation of Sustainable Development Goal 8: *to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*.

³ Full document available at: <http://www.eracampaign.org/uploads/ERA%20briefing%20paper-%20%20Public%20sector%20Positive%20Duty.pdf>