

REPORT
Stakeholder Consultation Forum
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth
9 July 2024

In 2025, the global community will mark the 30th 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 ten 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 Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is leading work across Government on Ireland’s comprehensive national review to assess progress made since Ireland’s last report on the Beijing Declaration and Platform in 2019.

A stakeholder consultation was held on Tuesday 9 July in Dublin to inform Ireland’s Beijing +30 report and brought together civil society groups and gender equality experts. A list of attendees can be found on the final page of this document. The forum was a half-day event and used the world café dialogue methodology.

Views were invited on the objectives of the twelve critical areas of concern, the achievements over the last five years, and priorities for the next five years.

The list of objectives were grouped and discussed as follows:

- A. Women and poverty;
- B. Education and training of women + F. Women and the economy;
- C. Women and health + K. Women and the environment;
- D. Violence against women;
- E. Women and armed conflict;
- G. Women in power and decision-making + H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women + I. Human rights of women;
- J. Women and the media;
- L. The girl-child.

A range of responses was received. The responses were noted through open discussion from participants on each grouping. Other mechanisms for participation were used such as mentimeter, which is an online tool for meeting contributions where participants who may not want to speak to the room, or remain anonymous, can participate. Contributions were also taken through written submissions on the questions available through mentimeter, so

that those who were unable to access the online tool could provide a written response. All these contributions are outlined and summarised over the following pages. Furthermore, points from a written submission received from the Ombudsman for Children (OCO) have been included in the report, as a representative was unable to attend.

A. Women and Poverty

Points were raised under the following themes:

- Women, particularly disabled women, are at a higher risk of poverty. Ireland has the lowest rate of employment of people with disabilities in the EU.
- The gender pension gap, which currently stands at 37%, could be improved by equalising state pensions. Despite schemes such as home carer's contribution, a total contribution approach to determine a person's entitlements would be more beneficial for women.
- Lack of services, such as education, employment, transport and childcare, can lead to poverty, particularly for migrant women in rural areas.
- In agricultural settings, it was acknowledged that the male spouse or partner is often the one who is entitled to grants or schemes.
- The Department of Foreign Affairs was acknowledged as a strong role model for development funders due to their work to reach 'the furthest behind first'. This is often a female in a marginalised population.
- Issues exist in terms of income inadequacy and social protection for Traveller women and disabled women. Individualisation of income and taxation must ensure that women are meeting an adequate standard of living.
- A referendum on enumerating the right to adequate housing in the Constitution should be progressed, along with specific family and child homelessness strategies.
- Positive developments have been made in terms of family leaves, such as parent's leave, parent's benefit and parental leave, but women continue to face issues accessing adequately flexible childcare. In addition, the need for further support for one parent families was highlighted, as parental leave is based on the assumption of the two-parent family as the norm.
- Progress has been made in terms of understanding gender discrimination, as processes to collect data on women in politics and on sexual harassment have been established. There has also been increased understanding of the link between harassment and gender stereotypes. However, this data must be adequately disaggregated by sex and capture other intersectionalities.
- It is envisaged that the forthcoming Equality Data Strategy will provide further insights into how women are trapped in poverty through gender stereotypes.
- Social welfare services are difficult to access as entitlements are based on households.
- The establishment of the Child Poverty Unit in the Department of the Taoiseach was highlighted as a positive achievement to ensure that households can achieve adequate standards of living. The focus on child poverty as an area of concern in Young Ireland:

National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2023-2028 was also mentioned. Specific budget lines for children with ring-fenced funding should be introduced.

- The ongoing implementation of First 5: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, 2019-2028, the publication of the EU Child Guarantee National Action Plan and the Youth Homelessness Strategy 2023-2025, and the introduction of the Hot School Meals Programme, were given as examples of positive accomplishments.

Valuable responses were received via mentimeter, both online and written, acknowledging gender equality and gender transformative programming as key priorities of Ireland's 'A Better World Strategy'. As achievements, domestic violence leave and pension equality were highlighted - however, Traveller women have been largely excluded from pension equality at this point. Further achievements listed included the €1 billion investment in early learning and care.

Future priorities discussed included further support for older women and the evaluation of the potential for a universal pension. In addition, respondents called for increased support for marginalised women through programmes such as the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) Community Development Programme, and a review of the habitual residence condition and its impact on Traveller and Roma women. They also called for a whole of life measurement of employment-related differences, an extension of the jobseekers transition payment, and for all social welfare rates to be benchmarked to meet the minimum essential standard of living.

B. Education and training of women + F. Women and the economy

Points were raised as follows:

- One-to-one education and training plays a key role in helping people progress to full time employment, especially those who may have had negative experiences with education. Further government supports and multi-annual funding should be prioritised.
- Further focus is needed on lifelong learning, with literacy issues in the older cohort highlighted as a key topic, along with further training of marginalised women in the form of community education
- An education gap exists between people with disabilities and the general population in Ireland - the 2022 census revealed that up to 4% of people with disabilities per county receive no education.
- The positive achievements of the National Council for Curriculums and Assessment (NCCA) and the provision of SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education) at Primary and Secondary levels were highlighted, embedding gender equality in Ireland's education system. Furthermore, the publication of the Draft Primary Curriculum Specifications, including Wellbeing, by the NCCA, was mentioned.

- The development of an updated Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum should include a focus on young people’s right to sexual and reproductive health information.
- The economy and needs of women must be linked, as policy often centres on the needs of employers and the labour market.
- While there has been a huge advancement in terms of the framework for consent in education, training and funding must be prioritised for those in gendered occupations working with marginalised communities.
- The launch of the Equal Start Model in supporting access and participation in early learning and care (ELC) and school age childcare (SAC) for children and their families who experience disadvantage is an additional support to greater career success for women and girls. There should be further investment in similar initiatives to promote lifelong education and to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.
- Women entrepreneurs should be supported to overcome barriers such as unconscious bias.
- The impact on migrants and Traveller women should be particularly considered.

Via mentimeter, respondents noted that investment in early childhood education, and the right to remote working were key achievements. The publication of the National Framework for Lifelong Guidance in December 2023, and the Framework for Consent in Higher Education Institutes were also highlighted, as well as the recommendations on Women in STEM from the Citizen’s Assembly on Gender Equality.

In terms of future priorities, respondents called for a national policy to provide out of school education for young women who fall out of mainstream education, with emphasis on a child and female centred approach and inclusive education for minority groups. In addition, a DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) plus model should be established for schools in areas experiencing intergenerational poverty.

C. Women and Health + K. Women and the Environment

Points were raised under the following themes:

- It was noted that the Health chapter of the Beijing Declaration was particularly difficult for Ireland in 1995, in the context of the country’s reproductive laws at the time. While the referendum to Repeal the Eighth Amendment took place in 2018, the legislation connected to it may be relevant to the Beijing +30 report.
- On this point, the enactment of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 and the subsequent enactment of the Health (Termination of Pregnancy) (Safe Access Zones) Act 2024 were highlighted as achievements.
- The Women’s Health Action Plan, the new Health Data Plan, the enactment of the Health (Assisted Human Reproduction Act) 2024, the roll out of free contraception (and its extension to 17 year olds), and fertility clinic access were cited as positive achievements. The Department of Health should consider extending the free

contraception scheme to those aged 16 and over, in line with children's rights considerations.

- There should be further provision of gender sensitive mental health services, in particular around perinatal care. Challenges around sufficient clinical programmes for eating disorder treatments and meeting the needs of marginalised groups were also acknowledged. The publication of *Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone*, was highlighted as a positive achievement.
- Maintain the progress made since the advent of Sláintecare, and fully implement its commitments.
- The aging process should be destigmatised, especially around menopause supports, the breakdown of stereotypes and sexual health in old age. It was also noted that the rates of malnutrition in elderly people are high as they may find it difficult to get a balanced diet.
- A successor strategy to the Sexual Health Strategy should be progressed without delay.
- Sexual violence and the threat of sexual violence in residential and healthcare settings must be addressed. A Strategy to address sexual violence in such residential settings was suggested.
- The reality of the structural issues that link health and class must be addressed. On this, community organisations play a crucial role to ensure this link is addressed in a holistic way.
- It was noted that while the National Women's Health Forum is a positive step forward, it only names Traveller women under two headings - period poverty and homelessness. Supports are more effective when groups are specifically named.
- There must be investment in a dedicated public health nurse for children and mothers, and the new breastfeeding strategy must be prioritised, particularly in marginalised communities and socio-economically disadvantaged groups.
- There should be a phased plan with sufficient funding to achieve universal access to home visits for all first time parents by 2026. There should also be continued evidence based reform of legislation concerning termination of pregnancy.
- The review of the Mental Health Act should be reviewed as soon as possible.

On mentimeter, the Review of the Transfer of Property Act was highlighted as an achievement, with the need to implement the review's recommendations noted.

The transformation of the international protection system in anticipation of climate displacement, women's role in addressing climate change, and improved articulation of the environmental challenges that Ireland faces were highlighted as priorities. The lack of gender-affirming trans healthcare in Ireland was also cited, along with the need to revise the income threshold for access to medical cards.

Respondents called for more focus on an intersectional approach to women's healthcare, with further focus on mental health, Roma maternal health and Traveller health in general.

There should be an independent review of abortion services and further focus on the issue of conscientious objections among practitioners.

In addition, deinstitutionalisation should be prioritised, with people moved out of congregated settings to services in the community.

D. Violence Against Women

- While the wording of the Beijing Declaration was progressive at the time, there is an absence of necessary data disaggregated by sex and age. The scope of the report should include people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual characterisation.
- Ireland's ratification of the Istanbul Convention was highlighted as a key achievement.
- There is also a need for the percentage of overseas development aid that Ireland provides to be tracked.
- The risk of digital violence should be added to the report, as the online sphere adds a further element to harassment and violence towards women.
- There should be further safeguarding in terms of sexual abuse in health and education settings.
- The Third National Strategy on Domestic and Gender Based Violence (DGBSV) does not have an independent monitoring system - participants noted the need for this in terms of ensuring transparency.
- The full implementation of the Third National Strategy on DGBSV should be prioritised. The Ombudsman for Children (OCO) should be provided with adequate funding in order to carry out independent oversight of this Strategy, as it includes a recognition of children as victims of domestic violence.
- Children should be allowed to apply for orders under the Domestic Violence Act 2018 in their own right.
- All survivors should have access to professionalised services with adequate funding. In addition, participants called for a reform of legal aid and family courts for survivors.
- Recent achievements were highlighted in terms of legislation, policy, and investment, including the launch of an effective strategy blueprint for tackling violence against women by the National Women's Council, and the launch of Cuan, the new statutory DGBSV agency. Cuan should engage comprehensively with civil societies and relevant NGOs. The Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 and intimate image abuse laws were also noted.
- The enactment of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking) Act 2024 was highlighted as an achievement.
- The publication and implementation of The Family Justice Strategy and the Youth Justice Strategy should be prioritised, and amendments to the Family Courts Bill should be published as soon as possible.
- The importance of statistics and data for older people experiencing sexual violence was noted. This is gendered violence and this intersectionality must be acknowledged.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) are working on a new safeguarding strategy on this issue.

- Coercive control should not be defined solely as intimate partner violence, as 50% of older people who experience abuse experience it at the hands of their children. Reference should also be made to stalking.
- Stereotypes must be overcome to allow people who have experienced abuse to receive the necessary care.
- The successor to the National LGBTBI+ Inclusion Strategy should be developed as soon as possible, and should adopt a children's rights-based approach.

On mentimeter, respondents acknowledged that adult safeguarding policies have been advanced in recent years. There has been an increased allocation in refuge accommodation spaces.

For future priorities, they called for increased funding to combat gender-based violence in humanitarian settings and the need for intervention for boys who are perpetrators. In addition, grassroots/low level initiatives on tackling anti-women attitudes and sexual ethics workshops were suggested. Recommendations from GREVIO-the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence- should also be implemented.

E. Women and Armed Conflict

- The Defence Forces are considering promotion strategies to remove barriers that may prevent women being retained or reaching positions of leadership, with a view to ensuring overseas missions have a 30% female gender ratio.
- Women and armed conflict must be viewed in terms of corporation tax policy - where Ireland receives and spends money must be acknowledged.
- A large proportion of people with disabilities in international protection accommodation have difficulties receiving support while awaiting protection claims. Further supports should be made available for women who have come from conflict zones and who have experienced trauma or sexual exploitation. New integration teams are currently being set up.
- The Children's Rights Alliance has commissioned research with TUSLA (the Child and Family Agency) on family supports for mothers and children in international protection centres.
- The Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence has carried out research on Ireland's recent seat on the UN Security Council and work around Women Peace and Security.
- The experience of women living in areas where antisocial behaviour and criminal activity was acknowledged, as they may often act as peacekeepers in these settings.

Responses received on mentimeter included the need to support older international protection applicants as a priority, acknowledging they may not be able to integrate into the labour force.

It was also noted as a point of concern that the auto-enrolment pension policy puts money in private pension systems that invest in areas of concern. Such investment of pension funds should be transparent.

For future priorities, respondents also called for targeted investment in core funding from DFA for women's led grassroots agencies in the global south to develop their capacities as peace negotiators.

G. Women in Power and Decision-Making, + H. Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women + I. Human Rights of Women

Points raised during the discussion included the following:

- There is no stable funding pool to support advocacy groups to form.
- For those who experience DSGBV, the issues of custody and family law and how they clash as opposed to work together must be examined. Despite the establishment of the Law Reform Commission, these issues are not being addressed.
- It was noted that in 1996, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank had a large influence on social services and the global south, with a similar operating mode today. The Department of Foreign Affairs recently called for Ireland to encourage debt management reforms.
- Access to adequate childcare is a large aspect of gender equality. As an example, it is difficult for women who want to be TDs who do not live in Dublin. On this note, maternity leave for Oireachtas members must also be advanced as a priority.
- Equality law must provide improved rights on intersectionality and the various ways people may experience discrimination. An intersectional approach is particularly important to address Traveller women's issues in every aspect of life, as compared to their settled counterparts.
- In terms of support for civil society, consultations and multi-annual funding create a space for development funding.
- It was noted that the National Women's Council of Ireland have published research on women's access and retention in local government, acknowledging that women experience gendered abuse, both online and offline, and that women from minority backgrounds are largely underrepresented.
- Further efforts should be made to improve legal literacy, digital literacy, and financial understanding among women. Furthermore, while work is being done on the gender pay gap, the gender wealth gap and gender pension gap must be acknowledged.
- The new Equality Data Strategy and future strategies should address intersectionality, ensuring that the focus is also on implementation and equality budgeting.
- Further attention should be paid to women's burden of care, which can limit their ability to take part in politics and to engage in senior leadership.
- It was noted that the Department of Foreign Affairs support women defenders of human rights throughout the world.

On mentimeter, the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, the National Equality Data Strategy, and the Electoral Commission were cited as achievements.

In terms of future priorities, respondents called for representative democracy to be made more inclusive, with gender quotas introduced at the local level. There should be full implementation of the Public Sector Duty, and further funding for civil society, community development organisations, the Equality Strategies and for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in line with additional mandates. Legislation and policies should be crisis-proofed to ensure the protection of women and girls.

In addition, the impact of the EU Artificial Intelligence Act was highlighted as a future focus.

J. Women and the Media

Points were raised as follows:

- Hate speech and harassment against women in the digital space must be tackled, while ensuring freedom of expression. It was noted that gender will be not included as a ground in the proposed Hate Speech Bill.
- Improvements must be made within the media and political representation in terms of the perception of women.
- The media should be made accessible to people with disabilities, with the examples of large print newspapers and accessible websites cited.
- Publication of the Online Safety Code was cited as an achievement.

On mentimeter, respondents noted the establishment of Coimisiún na Meán (Ireland's media regulator) and the Electoral Commission, and civil society campaigns targeting stereotypes in the media such as #FixedIt as achievements.

Respondents called for the implementation of the AI Act, for Coimisiún na Meán to establish guidelines to prevent the spread of hate and issue specific guidance during elections, and called for due consideration to be given to the regulation of social media platforms in terms of the engagement of women in the public sphere and decision-making.

L. The Girl-Child

Points raised include the following:

- The risks that come with children spending a large amount of time online must be acknowledged. Online Safety Regulations have been drafted and the Children's Rights Committee of the Council of Europe is bringing a focus to the scale and impact of pornography on real life attitudes of young people.

- There is a need for greater gender awareness among families in the agricultural sector that inheritance should be gender balanced, as it is often the son who is expected to take over.
- There is increasing sexual violence against the girl child and there are gaps in specialist services for this age cohort. On the other side, there are no interventions in terms of the boy child where he is a perpetrator. Education on consent must be prioritised.
- The Defence Forces has been engaging experts on sexual ethics and respectable relationships-language relating to this can be given to children to help them to discuss sensitive topics.
- It was noted that the Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation Act) 2012, makes the performance of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or taking a girl out of Ireland to perform FGM a criminal offence. Migrant communities and international protection applicants must be made aware of this. Statistics on FGM in Ireland should be tracked.
- The Equality Acts Review should be completed as soon as possible, with due regard to children's rights, as many children stated, in the recent OCO 'Pieces of Us' report, that they experience gender discrimination in the form of gender stereotyping.
- The targets identified in Young Ireland, with a particular focus on cohorts of children who are most at risk of poverty and social exclusion (e.g. Roma and Traveller children, children in one-parent families, and children in Direct Provision), should be advanced as a priority.
- The successor strategy to the National Strategy for Women and Girls should explicitly address the needs and vulnerabilities of children.

Examples included in mentimeter responses in terms of achievements were the areas of education and the new curriculum and laws around consent, while concerns raised include the need for greater overseas development aid investment in combatting FGM in the global south, and investment in services in Ireland for survivors of FGM.

In terms of future priorities, respondents called for greater regulation of social media and platforms to protect girls and children online, the modernisation of guardian payments, and less monitoring, policy and stigmatisation of mothers, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Attendees:

Organisation	Representative
Age Action	Mary Murphy
Children's Rights Alliance	Margaret Gallagher
Disability Federation	Dr Meredith Raley
GOAL	Mary van Lieshout
IHREC	Kieran Timmons
IHREC	Roisin Putti
Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence	Roisin Gallagher
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed	Bríd O'Brien
Irish Rural Link	Louise Lennon
National Traveller Women's Forum	Lauren May
National Women's Council	Kate Mitchell
Rape Crisis Network Ireland	Cliona Saidlear
Self Help Africa	Mary Sweeney
Social Justice Ireland	Susanne Rogers

Department Representatives

Department	Representative
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)	Carol Baxter
DCEDIY	Allayne Cassidy
DCEDIY	Hannah Gaden Gilmartin
DCEDIY	Dairíne Hoban (Notetaker)
DCEDIY	Lisa Hughes
DCEDIY	Aoife Lawlor (Notetaker)
DCEDIY	Aisling O'Callaghan (Notetaker)
DCEDIY	Linda O'Sullivan
DCEDIY	Valeria Sofia
DCEDIY	Victoria Swiredowsky
DCEDIY	Slawomir Szymczyk
DCEDIY	Louise Ward
Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA)	Roisin Leonard
DFA	Saidhbh Houlihan
Defence Forces	Flight Sergeant Denise English
Department of Housing, Local Government, Heritage and Reform	Eoin Colleary
Department of Rural and Community Development	Kevin Holmes