

NATIONAL COLLECTIVE OF COMMUNITY BASED WOMEN'S NETWORKS (NCCWN)

PRE-BUDGET 2022 SUBMISSION

NCCWN Key areas of Work with Grassroots Women in 17 Communities.



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Introduction

This proposal is being submitted to Minister Roderic O’Gorman - Minister of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth, Carol Baxter - Assistant Secretary General, International Protection, Integration and Equality Division, Jane Anne Duffy - Principal Officer Equality Division, seeking reinstatement and investment of funding to NCCWN.

The National Collective of Community Based Women’s Networks (NCCWN) very much appreciates Government’s commitment to funding the NCCWN. However, since 2008 NCCWN funding has been cut from €1,946,000.00 to the current level of €1,560,000 in 2021. The lack of reinstatement of funding has impacted on our capacity to provide a full range of needs-based services and supports to disadvantaged women due to the reduction and impact on staffing hours and pay. NCCWN welcomes the Programme for Government commitments in relation to gender equality and socio-economic equality. NCCWN is a national women’s community development organisation, core funded by the Department of Justice & Equality, to advance disadvantaged women’s equality through women’s community development. NCCWN represents and works directly with, women experiencing disadvantage, through our 17 Grassroots Women’s Community Development Projects. We have 47 mainly part-time staff, most of whom work on the ground in NCCWN Women’s Projects throughout Ireland, and 3.5 staff members who comprise our national team overseeing the Projects.

17 NCCWN Local Grassroots Women’s Projects

At local level, NCCWN Projects work directly with disadvantaged women and with statutory and non-statutory organisations and agencies to increase disadvantaged women’s social capital. At national level, we participate on key national structures supporting women’s equality. In 2020, operating under Covid 19 restrictions, NCCWN projects made a total estimated 123,333 engagements with women through technology and telephone. As the only national organisation working specifically and directly with grassroots women from disadvantaged communities, NCCWN have demonstrated that we are an experienced and essential part of the infrastructure to support and advance disadvantaged women’s equality both locally and nationally. Our work is rooted in grassroots feminist approaches which underpin all aspects of NCCWNs work and organisational structure.

The NCCWN addresses a wide diversity of issues impacting on the most disadvantaged women in Ireland. The specific focus is support and capacity building for working class women, women without formal education, women living in poverty, older women, lone parents, women from the Traveller community, minority ethnic and migrant women, women with disabilities, lesbian and bisexual women, women living in rural areas, homeless women and women experiencing domestic violence. NCCWN Projects recognise disadvantage in relation to women’s socio-economic circumstances. In addition, rural Projects work with women who are often further disadvantaged through social isolation and lack of access to supports and services. Marginalised women are identified through outreach, referrals from statutory and community agencies, consultation, local statistics, and information.

As NCCWN projects are only core funded for staff and some overheads; local projects lever in programme funding from a variety of sources to outreach and deliver their programme of work to support disadvantaged women’s inclusion in education, training, cultural and community life and overcome barriers. Our work not only implements NCCWN objectives but also

supports other government policy objectives, i.e. women's health & well-being, education, employment and domestic abuse supports. NCCWN holistic services and supports represents excellent value for money.

Supports and services provided by the NCCWN Projects include targeted outreach strategies, accredited and non-accredited needs-based community education, training, health and well-being, childcare centres, drop-in/information centres, referrals, and counselling. In the 17 Projects, this has resulted in the additional employment of approximately **200 people**, managed and coordinated by NCCWN staff.

Impact of Covid 19 on Women

In these Covid-19 times where access to communities and the women we work with is limited due to restrictive measures, NCCWN Projects had to look at alternative ways of engaging with and remain connected to women. NCCWN staff, for whom the normal way of working is meeting with women as individuals and in groups, were presented with the challenge of how to keep engaged with the women. Technology has played a major part in reaching out and remaining engaged with women. NCCWN staff had to assess not only what technologies were available to themselves at home, to the women in their communities but also what technologies women were comfortable with. The telephone was a vital tool of engagement, both landline and mobile.

Staff reached out and called women individually, giving them the space to listen to concerns, feedback, myths and rumours about Covid-19 as well as communicating information about the virus and supports available locally. Social media was used to share and promote public health information and advice, positive mental health awareness and supports/services available locally and remotely.

NCCWN Survey on Impact of Covid 19 on Women 2020

In response to significant anecdotal evidence from women we work with, NCCWN compiled a survey aimed at gathering information on women's experiences of the impact of Covid-19 on their lives. **3,369** women responded to provide a valuable insight into the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of many women in Ireland. The survey covered topics including age breakdown, family and household breakdown, lifestyle impacts of COVID 19, personal challenges, supports and personal benefits to reflect how COVID-19 has impacted women in different ways. The findings of the survey have shown that the COVID19 Pandemic has had a huge impact on women in many areas of their lives including:

- Isolation & Loneliness
- Strain on Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Medical Issues
- Disconnected from support systems
- Lack of access to the adequate Internet services
- Fear & Concern

NCCWN recognize that consulting with women through a survey format is a useful tool for gathering information that will help us to target supports for women. NCCWN will continue to carry out research on issues affecting women's lives. The findings of this survey will help support NCCWN's collective voice; identifying the needs, issues and challenges now experienced by women; feed into work planning; and help NCCWN to influence new strategies

being developed in response to COVID 19 both locally and nationally. NCCWN will continue to support women throughout and beyond this pandemic. Link to survey can be found [here](#)

National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG) 2017-2021

The NCCWN also have an important role to play in furthering government commitments to women's equality outlined in the National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG) 2017-2021. As a member of the NSWG Strategic Committee, NCCWN represents the voices of disadvantaged women in developing and monitoring the NSWG. We look forward to working with the Minister and his officials on evaluating the current strategy and developing and implementing a new National Strategy for Women and Girls.

Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

NCCWN welcomed the recommendations of the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality (24th April 2021), as a huge step in the advancement for women's equality and urge the Government to prioritise their implementation of the recommendations without delay. The recommendations by the Citizens send a strong and clear signal that women's equality needs to be at the centre of our Constitution, our legislation and our policies. The recommendations have the potential to really transform women's' and girls' lives in this country and include the key elements that we need to achieve gender equality.

NCCWN made submissions to the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, seeking 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, particularly in relation to disadvantaged women.

NCCWN recognises that while there have been many successes in the fight for equal rights for women globally and nationally, equality has yet to be realised, particularly for disadvantaged women. In line with the Citizens Assembly' recommendations and through our work with women across the country, it is evident that while gender inequalities impact on all women, women experiencing disadvantage are impacted disproportionately. Women living in poverty face barriers to health services, which in turn makes them more vulnerable to ill-health, physical and mental, thus exacerbating health inequalities. Furthermore, access to education is impacted by lack of finance, leading to multi-generational unemployment and poverty. While the management of wealth falls mainly to men, the burden of managing poverty is usually carried by women. Families headed by a lone parent, the majority of whom are women, are consistently and significantly more likely to be living in poverty and deprivation than the general population.

The income of women in paid employment continues to be significantly less than that of men. In addition, the concentration of disadvantaged women in part-time and low paid insecure work is of concern to NCCWN.

Domestic and sexual violence remains a serious issue for women we work with which can be further intensified by social exclusion and poverty. Women and children are all too often forced to stay in violent homes, as we have seen particularly during the Covid-19 restrictions, because of lack of financial resources or a viable alternative due to lack of education or social capital.

Conclusion

NCCWN look forward to working with you and your officials to ensure the sustainability of our valuable work carried out with disadvantaged women throughout the country, framing our work in line with commitments to the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals and Citizen's Assembly recommendations, underpinning sound community development practices, and reflecting a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on women's poverty and social inclusion. We are seeking your consideration under two key areas to ensure sustainability and development of NCCWN work - seeking **reinstatement** and **investment** of funding to NCCWN. **Key areas of reinstatement and investment:**

1. The NCCWN Board have serious concerns about **current limited financial and human resources** and the implications for the sustainability of the organisation and, particularly, our work on the ground. As outlined above, we are working with a shortfall of funding of €386,000 in relation to 2008 funding levels.
2. NCCWN recognise that the current crisis has underlined how the community and voluntary sector is crucial to the lives of many women in terms of social outlets, work, and community participation. The impact of the pandemic has highlighted the extent of gender-based inequality across the Irish economy and society. Women engaging with NCCWN highlighted that the pandemic had a disproportionately negative impact on their lives, incomes, access to childcare, employment opportunities and women's health. The burden of home care and home schooling was carried disproportionately by women, with the more vulnerable and disadvantaged carrying the greatest burden. NCCWN are concerned with the prospect of spending cuts and austerity to follow due to the pandemic, which will be likely to impact women more negatively. Findings from our survey highlight that **women's well-being and mental health** will be one of the key areas of work for NCCWN local Projects going forward. NCCWN holds women's well-being as a core value.
3. We aim to make NCCWN internally and externally digitally ready. NCCWN Survey findings show that there are gaps between those who have access to technology equipment and those who do not and women who were further disadvantaged by having no ICT skills. For many learners, digital literacy and access to digital technology is a real barrier to engaging in our courses and workshops. NCCWN projects are working on breaking down barriers to participation through mitigating educational disadvantage.
4. NCCWN aim to highlight the understanding of the systemic change that is needed to achieve full equality for women and girls. Work at local level to forward the work on the Citizens Assembly recommendations and ensuring that we address the challenges faced by women in their diversity, including also migrant women, women of colour, Traveller women and women from ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ women.
5. Focus for NCCWN on the development of our new strategic plan encompassing prioritisation of the needs and experiences of those women most affected by inequality. Governance and Organisational development is key to advancement and success of our vibrant organisation

Actions Required

Area 1 – Reinstatement of Funds to 2008 Levels – Increase to current funding

The staff of NCCWN are our most valued asset and provide highly skilled, unique interventions, not provided elsewhere. NCCWN are a national organisation that work with grassroots women from disadvantaged communities at a grass roots level that enable those who would not otherwise, participate in all aspects of society.

- **Reinstatement of funding would enable the NCCWN Board to further implement good governance procedures and processes in relation to bringing pay parity for staff in line with other organisations in the sector. The collective cuts to already low pay and the stagnation of this pay, has resulted in a lack of pay parity both in the community/voluntary sector and with public sector pay scales.**

The country has now moved into an unforeseen situation in relation to the COVID 19 Pandemic, thus leaving disadvantaged women in society more vulnerable than ever. The valuable community work of NCCWN staff has never been more required nor the sector more in need of support. NCCWN staff have a vast insight and knowledge of what is happening for women and their needs because NCCWN Projects work directly with grassroots women.

The reinstatement of the NCCWN funding to 2008 levels will allow for the resumption of supports and services for disadvantage women that were lost due to the cuts. A further increase in funding and investment will allow for an expansion of our work to other geographic areas and support more women experiencing disadvantage. Evidentially, when women are supported, it impacts positively on their children, families, and communities. It can halt multi-generational unemployment, low educational attainment and increase participation in both community and society.

NCCWN need continued reinstatement and investment in core funding to enable us to continue our work to advance disadvantaged women's equality. While it is evident that gender inequalities impact on all women, women experiencing disadvantage are impacted disproportionately.

Area 2 -Investment in National organisation

Strategic & Research Coordinator – 20 hours per week

At present, the NCCWN have a national team comprising a National Coordinator, National Financial & Operations Coordinator and National Operations Officer who oversee all 17 Women's Projects. To maximise our limited resources, NCCWN have centralised our administration, including accounting and payroll processes, increasing efficiency, and enabling better governance and accountability. However, a stronger expanded, national team would further strengthen and increase our sustainability. NCCWN are a unique grassroots women's organisation that work with the most marginalised women in disadvantaged

communities. By expanding our national team to include a Strategic & Research Coordinator, we will have the scope to capture and communicate those women's voices at a national level, informing new policy development and initiatives to advance disadvantaged women's equality from the ground up. This link between local community development delivery and national strategy is vital to the successful implementation of national policy objectives. A stronger, expanded national team will link grassroots women with the government's programme for Gender Equality including:

- Plans for a new National Strategy for Women and Girls.
- Implementation of the Citizens' Assembly' recommendations on gender equality.
- Analysis of Equality Budgeting Programme
- Gender recognition process
- Socio-economic Equality

Appendix 1

1. NCCWN Blayney Blades
2. NCCWN Clare
3. NCCWN Claremorris
4. NCCWN Clondalkin/Lucan
5. NCCWN Dochas for Women
6. NCCWN Donegal
7. NCCWN Limerick
8. NCCWN Mullingar
9. NCCWN North Leitrim
10. NCCWN Ronanstown
11. NCCWN Roscommon
12. NCCWN Rowlagh
13. NCCWN Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown
14. NCCWN South Kerry
15. NCCWN Tallaght
16. NCCWN Waterford
17. NCCWN Wexford

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Locations of NCCWN Women's Community Development Projects

