



Women's
Collective
Ireland

WOMEN'S EQUALITY
&
DEVELOPMENT
ANNUAL REPORT 2022



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

Disadvantaged women are the target group for all Women’s Collective Ireland Projects - in the main, WCI 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, consultation, local statistics and information.

DCEDIY funding enables the WCI Board to employ 48 staff, 4 at national level and 44 locally throughout the 17 project areas. At local level, WCI staff outreach and engage women experiencing disadvantage and lever in programme funding to support women’s equality and voice in their communities.

At the beginning of 2022, WCI Projects developed and started to deliver local area workplans based on four strategic areas of priority: Engagement, Participation, Policy and Equality and Organisational Development & Sustainability. The objectives and actions within these strategic areas are in line with, and indeed reflected in, the National Women’s Strategy 2017-2020 whose overall goal is ‘to change attitudes and practices preventing women’s and girl’s full participation in education, employment, and public life, at all levels, and to improve services for women and girls, with priority given to the needs of those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, the poorest outcomes’.

Actions undertaken by WCI Projects in 2022 under the area of Engagement, supported and helped progress the following National Women’s Strategy 2017-2020 high level objectives to:

- *Advance socio-economic equality for women and girls.*
- *Advance the physical and mental health and well-being of women and girls.*
- *Ensure the visibility in society of women and girls, and their equal and active citizenship.*
- *Advance women in leadership at all levels.*
- *Combat violence against women.*
- *Embed gender equality in decision-making.*

WCI Strategic Priority 1: Engagement

Engage with women experiencing disadvantage through outreach and predevelopment work to reduce isolation, increase confidence, build relationships and empower women.

Objectives	Actions
<i>To support marginalised women to overcome the barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential in society.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop outreach strategies to engage the most marginalised and isolated women to support their participation.</i> • <i>Carry out needs assessments to identify appropriate services and supports.</i> • <i>Provide services and supports where needed to address barriers.</i> • <i>Facilitate access through referrals to existing services and supports available.</i>
<i>To engage, support and encourage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Retain and develop our presence in local communities, providing first point of contact including drop-in centres</i>

<i>women to participate in all aspects of community life.</i>	
<i>To engage women and promote women's equality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Organise events and information sessions/opportunities that provide hard to reach women, with information on specific issues that affect them. (E.g., Health screening, education, VAW services) and referring or signposting to existing services.</i> • <i>Support the development of networking and support structures for women in local communities.</i>
<i>To raise awareness of women's equality issue.</i>	<i>Use a collective approach to raising awareness by marking key dates and engaging women in a range of campaigns of key dates and events for women i.e. International Women's Day, Rural Women's Day, 16 Days of Action Against Violence Against Women etc.</i>

In 2022, WCI Projects continued to outreach to the most marginalised women in their areas. Women were supported within the Projects or signposted to other services and supports based on identified needs. Supports to women ranged from counselling, childcare, parenting, domestic abuse, mentoring, to FEAD distribution, mental health and well woman clinics and women's group support etc. Project staff worked with women in groups and individually, supporting and encouraging them to access services and supports available in their communities.

Projects also used a variety of methods to promote and facilitate access to services, including newsletters, media, websites and social media, one-to-one engagements, referrals and word of mouth. Agencies that projects referred to include training centres, VTOS, NALA, Women's Aid, Women's refuges, MABs, Pieta House, Legal Aid, SICAP, Homecare Agencies, Social Workers etc.

With no programme funding available to them, our Projects worked hard to try and source funding from a variety of sources. Money leveraged allowed them to deliver a range of engagement opportunities and capacity building and tailored learning activities, often involving extensive outreach work in hard to reach communities.

Such activities included the provision of events, information and training aimed at women. These events are also used to disseminate information and create awareness regarding their project, or issues of relevance to women in their areas; and to consult with them on issues that may be of concern or affecting them.

International Women's Day (8th March) events were hosted by all 17 WCI Women's Projects which provided opportunities to outreach, highlight women's equality issues and raise the profile of WCI work at local level and celebrate women's achievements. The IWD theme for 2022 was **#BreakTheBias**.

In 2022, 586 events involving 9,624 women took place, including information days/sessions, enrolment days, coffee mornings, open days, fundraisers, awareness-raising events, and celebration days were held. They also included mental health and wellbeing activities, a variety of exercise, and craft/ cooking activities along with awareness raising campaigns on issues such as Cervical and Breast Cancer Awareness, 16 Days of Action Opposing Violence Against Women, Gender Equality Awareness, Mental Health, Human Trafficking, and various local campaigns.

In the context of the National Women's Strategy, these events help advance the physical and mental health and wellbeing of women and girls while ongoing work on highlighting violence against women and girls and support services available to them, support NWS actions to combat violence against women.

Since the Covid-19 Pandemic, technology has played and continues to play a major part in reaching out and remaining engaged with community women especially through periods of restrictions. Staff continued to use technologies that were available to themselves, to the women in their communities, and whatever technologies women were comfortable with.

The telephone is a vital tool of engagement, both landline and mobile. Staff reach out and called women individually, giving them the space to listen to concerns, as well as communicating information about supports available locally. People understand information in relation to themselves, and calls could be tailored to suit, as many of the women we work with are known to us personally. The calls could at times be lengthy especially to older women who are finding it hard to reengage with social groups post pandemic and are missing social contact. However, this is an important part of our unique work with women at a grassroots level.

We estimate that WCI staff made at least **12,917** telephone calls to women in 2022.

Since the pandemic, many women quickly have become comfortable with smart phones and their many applications. Projects continue to text or WhatsApp thousands of messages to keep women in touch with us and our projects. In 2022, over 60,000 messages were sent to women to engage or keep women informed of activities or events.

Social media also plays a huge part in engaging with women. In 2022, social media was used to share and promote information, events and activities, and supports/services available locally and remotely.

Our social media reach was over 200, 000.

Where there was capacity and technology available, Zoom continued to be used for virtual/hybrid meetups of women who may have had issues with transport, child or elder care.

WCI projects made a total estimated 150,944 engagements with women in 2022.



Women's Collective Ireland 2022

Most WCI Projects operate a ‘Drop In’ service to women in their communities while all operate an ‘Open Door’ policy which means they welcome women into the project at any time during its open hours. This service was not always possible during the previous two years so 2022 served as a time of reengagement and encouraging women out of their homes and back into services.

Referrals

WCI projects refer women to other statutory agencies and services and community organisations and in turn also receive referrals from agencies. In 2022 as throughout the pandemic, Projects continued to get and make referrals to other community and statutory agencies around different needs and are signposting and raising awareness of resources available to women and their families during this time. Agencies referred to and from included: Tusla, PHNs, CDPs, FRCs, ETBs, Covid-19 Helpline, St. Vincent de Paul, refuges, addiction services and MABs.

WCI Strategic Priority 2: Participation

Facilitate progression of women experiencing disadvantage from engagement to active participation.

Objectives	Actions
To mobilise women, raising their consciousness of the issues affecting them	Promote and support the engagement of women experiencing disadvantage to participate in women centred capacity building programmes.
To build women’s capacity to represent the collective concerns of women especially those from marginalised communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and carry out actions that support and provide opportunities that enable women to develop their potential and make informed choices about their future. Actions to include consciousness raising, empowerment, feminism and equality. • Provide women’s community education programmes. Support and organise the delivery of a range of accessible formal and non-formal community education and training programmes, that are tailored to meet the needs of women in our communities
To represent and support women’s representation and participation in a range of relevant structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify relevant local structures for women’s participation including PPNs, local school’s committees, LCDCs, partnerships, ETBs where women’s participation • Support participation of new and existing women’s groups and build capacity by supporting volunteers with skills to participate on community policy and decision-making fora.

To challenge barriers to women's participation locally, regionally and nationally

Support women to name barriers to their participation and work with relevant organisations to identify needs and reduce barriers to women's participation

Community education is a way of working for many Projects in Women's Collective Ireland. Often our projects are the only provider of education and training specifically designed to cater for disadvantaged women in an area. In recognition of women in their role as primary carers, our Projects plan, promote and deliver a range of accredited and non-accredited education programmes in response to the identified needs in a local area. These are funded by monies leveraged in locally by the projects themselves with certain funds being ringfenced for certain activities. In 2022, WCI leveraged in €127,519.00.



The summer months are normally quieter for the women's projects in terms of activities and participation and projects spent a lot of time loosely planning for activities for the autumn/winter months. This involved revising and adapting workplans and trying to adjust

programmes, so that not only was delivery possible but was compliant with the everchanging guidelines and accessible to women in the community.

WCI Projects identify and actively participate in local social inclusion and education and training networks to highlight the needs of local disadvantaged women and promote the activities and services that local education and training organisations have to offer. In 2022, committees/interagency groups with WCI members included family support networks, community education networks, training networks, mental health and domestic violence networks to public participation networks, childcare networks and committees, feminist networks, women in business, social inclusion, and other interagency groups.

Such participation of women helps put a greater focus on gender issues and not only women’s participation in general, but on the voices of socially excluded women at a community level and in policy and decision-making fora. The participation of women at a community level supports the progression of the NWS objective of ensuring the visibility in society of women and girls, and their Equal and Active Citizenship in Irish society.

WCI local, regional and national structures also further provide an effective framework for challenging barriers by building capacity and enabling women not usually heard to have a voice.

Projects have identified that one of the main barriers to women’s participation is childcare. Projects support women to access affordable childcare through provision of places at childcare facilities attached to our Projects, or by signposting women to community childcare in their areas thereby improving access to these opportunities for many disadvantaged women. Some of our Projects offer crèche, preschool and afterschool services. In 2022, we had four childcare centers with over 200 childcare places.

WCI Strategic Priority 3: Policy & Equality

Develop strategies to promote women’s equality and inclusion and highlight policy issues.

Objectives	Actions
To promote disadvantaged women’s equality and inclusion locally and nationally	Research, identify and articulate the needs of disadvantaged women at decision making arenas locally, regionally and nationally, to influence the development of policies and decisions that affect their lives.
To highlight the needs and perspectives of disadvantaged women by challenging inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop relevant awareness raising events and campaigns. • Engage with all Government Departments on issues in relation to women.

To collaborate and work in partnership on relevant representational structures in relation to women’s equality issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategically collaborate and work in partnership with local, regional and national organisations on relevant and agreed objectives to benefit disadvantaged women • Feed into policy development in relation to women experiencing disadvantage through representations, submissions and contributions to policy documents • Join and become active in the Community Platform
To build capacity of WCI Projects to outreach, engage and support participation of women experiencing disadvantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build and strengthen the capacity of local women to identify and voice their concerns and participate in society.
To highlight women’s equality issues	Develop and effectively implement local area work plans and results framework, based on local needs and in line with agreed national equality priorities.

WCI Women’s Projects continue to play a critical role in raising awareness of gender equality through engagement with local development companies, rural development agencies and other local, regional and national bodies tasked with community and local development.

The Women’s Equality & Development Programme provides an opportunity for greater visibility for women in poverty and living in disadvantaged communities.

WCI Projects have the capacity and the experience to act as a link between national policy actions and what happens on the ground. The local workplans of our projects respond to locally identified needs but are also informed by national policies such as: *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people*, *National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland*, *LGBTI Inclusion Strategy*, *Connecting for Life: Ireland’s National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020*, *National Disability Inclusion Strategy*, *Our Communities: A framework policy for local and community development in Ireland*, *Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021*

WCI Projects work collaboratively in their area to ensure that they resource individuals and communities that are most socially excluded to access participate and become involved with policy, practice and decision-making processes on matters affecting them and their local community.

The WCI Women’s Projects provide opportunities for greater influence and synergies with local government structures, and particularly in ensuring that gender equality is mainstreamed across local government and through the work of local community and development organisations.

Projects have actively participated in planning and consultation workshops feeding into Local Community Development Plan, ensuring that the voice of women was heard at local planning and decision-making tables.

Alignment and the restructuring of local government in recent years has meant changes in many of the areas in which WCI works, however some project staff have been elected on to the new Local Community Development Committee in their area while others are members of local community development and social inclusion working groups.

A major strength of WCI is the way in which it effectively connects women at the local level to a strategic role at the national level, and in turn links national priorities to the local level. WCI staff represented women’s affairs at local level and participated in decision making structures. WCI staff and advisory committee members sat on boards and committees including LDC Boards, RAPID AITs, PPNs, Youth Forum, local education networks.

Communication between WCI staff and the wider network of community and interagency workers who have built up great working relationships over the years and were able to respond to issues as they arose. Some projects such as WCI South Kerry were part of the Kerry Ukrainian Interagency Response Forum working to meet the needs of the hundreds of Ukrainian refugees who fled the war in March 2022.

Nationally, the WCI are represented on the NWCW Board, NSWG Implementation Committee and NGO sub-group, Aontas, Abortion Working Group, Irish Observatory on Violence against Women, Policy Advisory Group on Women in Local Government and Development, Community Work Ireland (CWI), Community Platform, Crann Childcare Support Agency, the Irish Network against Racism (INAR) and the Ukraine Civil Society Forum.

WCI Strategic Priority Area 4: Organisational Development & Sustainability

Develop the WCI to be able to fulfil its objectives and to ensure the sustainability of the organisation.

Objectives	Actions
To build capacity of WCI management to support the WCI locally and nationally to develop and enhance operational capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the WCI Board by ongoing capacity building and upskilling. • Ensure highest levels of governance and accountability. • Ensure the NCCWN Board are complying with employment responsibilities and obligations
To ensure the sustainability of WCI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide staff development and training. • Ensure feedback mechanisms are in place to support communications between local and national structures. • Ensure Advisory Groups locally are supported to participate in governance structures at local and national level. • Identify organisational needs and develop strategies to ensure adequate resources to support the sustainability of the organisation

<p>To develop and consolidate the collective approach of the WCI.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new organisational strategic plan reflective of the organisations vision & mission and of changing structures • Continue to maintain and develop robust planning and reporting processes and procedures
<p>To develop a national profile</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to develop and strengthen WCI national profile under the new Department. • Further strengthen and develop a collective WCI brand.
<p>To build capacity of WCI management and staff to inform and input to organisational and policy development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and agree a format for projects to promote the mission and vision of WCI. • Coordinate local actions and promote and brand these actions under the banner of WCI.

- STRATEGIC PLAN
- REBRANDING
- DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
- ALL ISLAND FORUM

- WCI Strategic Plan was launched at an event on 7th April 2022.
- Organisational rebranding and digital transformation processes have been completed. Strategic implementation planning training and supports have been provided to staff.
- WCI have been actively participating in Shared Island dialogues and are a member of the Shared Island Women’s Forum (including membership of the Business Committee of the Forum). As part of the Encounters Programme, WCI North Leitrim and WCI Monaghan have met with Herstory-Women in Loyalism and WCI Ronanstown met with Shankill Women’s Centre and the Falls Road Women’s Centre.
- WCI submitted a funding application to DFA Reconciliation Fund with letters of commitment from Northern Ireland Rural Women’s Network (NIRWN) and Shankill Women’s Centre to be partners in the ‘Community Grassroots Women’s Groups North/South Connectivity Initiative’ which would support WCI to work with Women’s Centres/Groups in the North to engage and connect grassroots women from different geographic communities in the south of the island namely, urban (WCI Ronanstown) rural (WCI South Kerry) and border (WCI North Leitrim), with grassroots women from urban, rural and border communities in the north of the island, identified through NIRWIN and Shankill Women’s Centre culminating in an in-person event bringing women from each of the six communities together.
- CEO gave a presentation on the potential of a shared island approach from a community perspective at a National Economic and Social Council (NESC) Shared Island Shared Opportunity event.
- WCI South Kerry Coordinator gave a presentation at an NWC members meeting looking at the impact of the conflict in Ukraine and how WCI Women’s Projects provide supports to Ukrainian refugees.

- WCI Pre-Budget Submission was submitted to the Minister in June. The submission is on the WCI website and had been circulated by each of the 17 Local WCI Projects to their public representatives.
- WCI have been working with Safe Ireland on their Sovereignty Project - Action Learning Reflection Community Development and DSGBV - which seeks to centre domestic, sexual and gender-based violence as an issue which all communities face.
- MEP Frances Fitzgerald hosted a group of 15 WCI staff and board members on a visit the European Parliament in Brussels from the 16th-17th November 2022.

ONGOING STAFF ENGAGEMENT

WCI staff are placed in the 17 projects around Ireland which can make it challenging to have personal interaction. However, all staff came together in March 2022 for the launch of our new strategic plan and our rebrand.

Throughout 2022, staff took part in online Zoom sessions to share experiences and learn from each other and WCI have developed shared learning online spaces. They also took part in various staff training sessions regarding our new branding, designing written communications and social media.

Staff also took part in online wellbeing sessions and all staff are offered Employee Assistance Plans.