

**UN Questionnaire to Governments on Implementation of the
Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome of the
Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000)**

National Report of Ireland

For further information on the implementation of Ireland's international commitments on gender equality please refer to Ireland's Combined Fourth and Fifth Reports under the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (2003) and Ireland's Report to the UN on the National Plan for Women, 2002.

June 2004

Part 1: Experience of implementing UN commitments on gender equality since 1995

1.1 Background

The first official report examining the position of women in Irish society was the 1972 Report of the Commission on the Status of Women. This report identified a range of legislative and policy actions required in order to advance the position of Irish women. The implementation of this report was reviewed in the 1993 Report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women which contained 210 recommendations for further action. National progress reports, published in 1994, 1996 and 1999, indicate that the majority of these recommendations have been implemented.

Thus, the Fourth UN World Conference on Women took place at a very opportune time for Ireland. We had reviewed the progress to date on gender equality and identified forward looking strategies. As the national and international agendas for gender equality overlapped in the 1990s, it was decided to combine the national and international monitoring and reporting systems for gender equality. Currently, the national programme for gender equality is set out in the Report to the UN on the National Plan for Women, 2002. Further details on the implementation of specific policy areas may be found in Ireland's Combined Fourth and Fifth reports under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 2003).

1.2 Main developments in the period 1995-2004

The main developments in the period 1995-2004 are identified below. Further detail on these matters is contained in Part Two:

- An increase in women's labour force participation to 55% (for those aged 15-64).
- A narrowing of the gender pay gap from 18% to 15% during the period 1994-2000.
- Among significant mainstream measures to benefit women was the introduction of the Statutory Minimum Wage in 2000.
- There have been improvements in women's representation at management levels. The 2002 Census shows that percentage of women who are employers and managers is 45.8% in the Border, Midland and Western Region and 47% in the Southern and Eastern Region¹. However, only 3% of CEOs in private companies and 6% of Secretary Generals of Government Departments are women.
- Women now constitute 30% of state board representatives and 36% of Government nominees to these bodies.
- A strengthening of the anti-discrimination legal framework in relation to the labour market under the Employment Equality Act, 1998 and the extension of the anti-discrimination approach to the area of goods, facilities and services under the Equal Status Act, 2000. To ensure effective implementation of this legislation two new bodies

¹ Census 2002, Principal socio-economic results

were established: the Equality Authority (formerly the Employment Equality Agency) and the ODEI- the Equality Tribunal.

- The adoption of a strategy to gender mainstream most of the expenditure of €50 billion under the National Development Plan 2000-6. A new unit which is co-financed by EU Structural Funds, the NDP Gender Equality Unit, was established in 2000 in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to advance the implementation of this strategy.
- The introduction of a new budget line of €35 million under the National Development Plan to fund the Equality for Women Measure, a positive action initiative for women.
- Improvements in family- friendly working arrangements including legislative provisions, childcare supports and funding for the development of family-friendly working. The Irish Civil Service has introduced a comprehensive range of family- friendly working arrangements
- Improved performance rates of girls in second level State examinations as compared with boys and increased transfer rates for girls to third level. A new Unit, which is co-financed by EU Structural Funds, has been established within the Department of Education and Science to support the incorporation of a Gender Equality perspective in the education system.
- The development of a women's health strategy in 1997.
- The publication in 2000 of a report on women's issues in agriculture and in rural communities.
- The incorporation in 1996 of a gender equality perspective in Ireland's overseas aid programme.
- Improved structures for combating violence against women.
- The adoption of gender goals for certain senior positions in the Civil Service.
- The ratification by Ireland of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW in 2000.
- The election/appointment of women to key public positions. At 31 March 2004 women hold the positions of President, Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister), Supreme Court Judge (2), Permanent Representative of Ireland to the European Communities, Irish Member of the European Court of Auditors, Irish Member of the European Court of Justice, Ombudsman, Leader of the Seanad (Senate) , Government Chief Whip and Government Press Secretary.

1.3 Experience of implementing the PFA

The 1993 Report of the Commission on the Status of Women gave Ireland a very strong basis for participation in the preparations for the Fourth UN World conference on Women. The report had documented successes and mapped out further work required for women to achieve equality in Ireland. The Irish delegation to Beijing had much to share with other delegations and was also eager to learn from the experience of others.

The PFA marked a milestone in the work on gender equality. National policy up to that point was framed around an objective of addressing women's rights and women's equality. Following Beijing, national policy embraced the concept of gender mainstreaming where the focus became gender equality rather than women's rights. Thus policy and performance is assessed with reference to both men and women with special attention given to areas where there are significant gender differences. This allows for a continuation of policies focused on women within a broader framework. In addition, Government supports specific actions for women in areas where they are significantly under-represented.

A gender equality perspective has formed part of the policy framework in development co-operation since 1996. Gender equality has been an objective of training policy since the early 1990s and became a goal of education policy in 1998. It was not, however, until the introduction of the National Development Plan in 2000, an investment plan of over € 50 billion, that the gender mainstreaming strategy was formally adopted for a wide range of Government policies. The Plan includes programmes on infrastructure, business supports, human resources and regional development. The Plan is delivered by a range of measures with each measure manager reporting on performance against agreed indicators and targets. All 'people indicators' across the plan are gender dis-aggregated. In addition, measures are expected to support the achievement of gender equality. Learning to date would indicate the need to focus on the gender mainstreaming of key measures which are particularly relevant to supporting gender equality.

Ireland's gender mainstreaming strategy is complemented by positive action measures, particularly the Equality for Women Measure which has a budget of €5 million under the National Development Plan 2000-6.

Ireland has found the move to gender mainstreaming to be generally useful. It has given a new impetus to gender equality issues and set them in a broader policy context. It has ensured that gender equality has become a concern in areas outside of the field of employment. It has also facilitated greater participation by men in advancing gender equality. However, gender mainstreaming is a long-term strategy.

The adoption of a gender mainstreaming approach presents some difficulties for maintaining a women-only focus. For example, in co-ordinating material for this questionnaire across Government Departments, some Departments also gave material relating to men. A particularly stark example was in the area of health where men score worse than women on most of the national indicators. Irish men on average die five years earlier than women and have higher death rates for all ages and for all leading causes of death. Men from the lower socio-economic groups have much worse health than the rest of the population. Sex differences are particularly pronounced in the case of road traffic accidents and suicides. There is now a new awareness of the need for men to take their health more seriously and to engage in preventative action where necessary. A men's health strategy is currently under preparation.

The period 1995-2004 also saw a move in Ireland to an increased emphasis on evidenced-based policy making and on data systems. Labour force data is collected regularly and data is gender dis-aggregated. However, comprehensive data systems are only now being developed in a number of areas. For example, the existing economy-wide data on male/female wage differentials is based on a survey (the "Ireland in Living" Survey) which is carried out every four years. The Central Statistics Office has commenced a new survey which will be carried out annually and provide gender dis-aggregated data on pay levels. Other employment related surveys are also planned. In addition, the Government has agreed on the need for better social and equality data. However, in the short term there is a deficit of data to support the incorporation of a gender perspective in many areas of policy making. Furthermore, there is a danger that the emphasis on data collection arising from gender mainstreaming can be seen as an end in itself and may be undertaken as an alternative to undertaking active work on gender equality.

Ireland supports the move to indicator-based reporting on international commitments with monitoring at regular intervals. However, the Millennium Development Goals and Targets currently only relate to our development co-operation policy. There is probably a need for regional indicators to better reflect a country's stage of development. A particular priority for

Ireland is to support an increased number of women into areas of decision making. However, it is difficult to focus on this given the breadth and scope of indicators against which we report.

The existence of international instruments on gender equality has assisted the development of national policy in this area. This is particularly true in relation to the political commitment to gender mainstreaming which was agreed under the Platform for Action. However, as Ireland had already introduced equality legislation to meet EU requirements, meeting the legal obligations arising from CEDAW does not pose undue difficulty. Ireland would support the need for ongoing work by the UN on the implementation of gender mainstreaming, particularly in relation to identifying best practice.

It is necessary to more closely align the reporting systems under CEDAW and the Platform for Action. Some guidance in relation to whether Member States are required to report within a women's rights framework or a gender mainstreaming one might be provided. Duplication of what is reported under the two instruments should be kept to a minimum.

While Ireland has attempted to achieve coherence between its national and international reporting on gender equality, it is not clear that framing national policy around the twelve critical areas of the PFA allows for a sufficient prioritisation of issues which are of central importance to Irish women. For example, given the increased numbers of women working outside the home, more prominence for family-friendly policies is needed. This item currently sits as one of many items under the 'women in the economy' chapter. Scoping work on developing a National Strategy for Women in Ireland has commenced and will present an opportunity to explore how best to accommodate the specific needs of Irish women. On the other hand we find it difficult to provide material specifically dealing with the Irish girl child, as boys and girls have equal rights in Irish legislation. Also, as the independence of the media and freedom of the press is a cornerstone of democracy, the formulation of policy to address issues such as stereotyping must be balanced.

The period 1995-2004 saw considerable advances in the area of gender equality. Ireland experienced very high economic growth rates in this period which sustained increased Exchequer spending, including on areas with important impacts for women. For example, the National Development Plan 2000-6 brought with it expanded budgets for public transport, investment in the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (€49 million) and budgets for the Equality for Women Measure (€35 million) and the NDP Gender Equality Units in the Departments of Education and Science and Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Skill shortages led to a renewed interest in retaining women employees and attracting women back into the workforce. Arising from the increased participation of women in the Irish workforce, gender equality issues are increasingly seen as mainstream matters.

Ireland has been operating under a system of social partnership agreements since the 1980s where changes to national policy, including gender equality, are agreed between Government, employers, trade unions and representatives of voluntary organisations including women's groups. The various social partnership agreements have contained specific commitments on gender equality and progress on the implementation of these was monitored under social partnership structures. This supportive framework combined with a favourable economic climate has facilitated consideration of gender equality issues within the national policy-making framework.

Part Two: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the further initiatives and actions

2.1 Women and Poverty

Those experiencing consistent poverty in Ireland, (i.e. having less than 70% of median income) has fallen steadily from 15.1% in 1994, to 8.2% in 1998, to 5.2% in 2001² reflecting the positive impact of increasing employment, reductions in unemployment (especially long-term unemployment) and enhanced income supports. The most recent survey³ results indicate that in 2001, 4.7% of women as compared to 3.5% of men were experiencing consistent poverty. At EU level, poverty is measured by what is known as the "at risk of poverty" indicator (i.e. the percentage of persons below 60% of median income). In 2001, in Ireland, 22% of women over 16 years of age fell below this level, compared to 18% of men.⁴

Addressing poverty and social exclusion is a priority area for Government. National policy in this area is set out in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-5. The overall objective is to reduce substantially and, ideally, eliminate poverty in Ireland and to build a socially inclusive society. The strategy sets high level objectives and key targets across five policy areas: income adequacy, employment and unemployment, education, health and housing. It also recognises a number of social groups as being more vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion because of their circumstances and establishes policy objectives and key targets in their regard. In addition to women, these groups include children and young people, older people, Travellers, people with disabilities, migrants and members of ethnic minority groups, prisoners and ex-prisoners as well as those living in situations of urban poverty and rural disadvantage. Tackling poverty therefore involves a multi-policy and cross cutting approach as well as a societal response involving Government at all levels, social partners, communities and families working together to achieve the collective aim.

The Plan stresses women's vulnerability to poverty and seeks to remedy this by improving access for women to appropriate health care, education and employment, thus reducing the risk of poverty for such women and their families. Other objectives include addressing the gender pay gap, adapting the social insurance system to remove any further obstacles to reconciling work and family life and determining the right mix of policies and supports required to effectively combat poverty and social exclusion for women. The key targets established in relation to women's poverty are:

- Over the period to 2007, to reduce the numbers of women who are 'consistently poor' below 2%, and, if possible, eliminate consistent poverty.
- Increase the employment participation rate of women to an average of more than 60% in 2010, as envisaged under the National Employment Action Plan 2003-5.

New structural arrangements to oversee the implementation of the NAPS strategy include the establishment of an Office for Social Inclusion and Co-ordination Units in each Government

² National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Inclusion 2003-2005, Office for Social Inclusion, Ireland, 2003.

³ Results for the 2001 Living in Ireland Survey, ESRI, Dublin 2003

⁴ Statistical annex to EU Joint Social Inclusion Report, 2004

Department. In addition, progress on the implementation of the Plan is reported to and monitored by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion. Government Departments are required to “poverty proof” significant areas of policy and all Government Memoranda require an identification of how measures will impact on poverty and on women.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs provides income maintenance to households on a non-discriminatory basis, with special provision for poorer households. Social welfare rates have increased, particularly those impacting on older people. Since 1997 the monthly child benefit payment has been increased to €31.60 (for the first and second child) and €65.30 (for the third and subsequent children), increases of 246% and 234% respectively. The annual expenditure on child benefit has increased from €505 million in 1997 to approximately €1.66 billion in 2004. This payment is made directly to the mother except in cases where the father has custody of the child/children. In addition, the Department provides grants for small projects to assist the unemployed, people with disabilities and lone parents to return to work, education and training. In 2003, 23 projects catered specifically for women. These projects involved training in literacy skills, computer skills, pre-employment skills, confidence building and guidance sessions for lone parents, travellers and other women; who are distant from the labour market.

Much attention has been given to women’s access to pension entitlement in both State and private schemes. Measures are in place since 1994 to protect the pension entitlements for up to 20 years for those who take time out of the paid workforce for caring duties. In 2000 the qualifying period for the State old-age contributory pension was reduced. The Pensions Board has produced a booklet for women called “Women and Pensions” which describes the ways in which women can provide financial security for themselves and their dependants in retirement. The booklet highlights a number of areas of particular interest to women such as maternity leave, career breaks and re-entering the workforce. An Inter-Departmental group on Pensions for Women in Farming which reported in 2002 concluded that the formation of business partnerships offers an immediate way by which farm spouses can access social insurance cover and its associated benefits.

2.2 Education and Training of Women

As set out in Ireland’s recent CEDAW report, equal opportunities between women and men in the education system are underpinned by statute. The Universities Act 1997 and the Education Act 1998 place obligations on school authorities at primary, secondary and third level to provide equal opportunities including gender equality. A review by the Higher Education Authority carried out in 2003 on *Access to Education and Equality of Opportunity to Employment within Universities* will be published shortly. Boards of Management of Primary and Second level schools are required to produce a School Plan setting out how they propose to deliver on the equal opportunities objective. In addition to mainstream provision, the Department of Education and Science supports positive action measures to address social exclusion and inequality in the education system.

The Employment Equality Act, 1998 prohibits discrimination in vocational training, including in relation to gender equality, and sets out redress mechanisms. The achievement of equal opportunities between women and men is an objective of Ireland’s Employment and Human Resources and Development Operational Programme 2000-6. Most State-assisted labour market training is covered by this Programme. The combination of the overarching equal opportunities policy in this area, together with increased labour market demand, has supported improved gender equality outcomes in training.

For a number of years now girls have been out-performing boys in second level State examinations. In 2002, 22.2% of girls achieved a minimum of six grade C's in their Leaving Certificate as compared with 14.1% of boys. We are also seeing an increase in the numbers of girls succeeding at higher levels in non-traditional subjects. Women constitute the majority of third level entrants - 53.5% overall – (60% of entrants into universities, 47% into Institutes of Technology and 88% into colleges of education⁵). These figures indicate that Ireland will have a good foundation from which to build greater levels of equal opportunities within third level education and in the labour market. However, women's representation in engineering has not progressed beyond 16% and women continue to be over-represented in the social sciences. More promisingly women now constitute the majority of law, accounting and medical entrants on graduate programmes.

Adult education is a growing area in Ireland and in this area women participants outnumber men approximately four to one⁶. Adult education participants tend to have long paths before they take the step to enter a third level course or the labour market. The Back to Education Initiative, a programme targeted at the unemployed, gives participants the chance to combine a return to education and training with family, work and other responsibilities. Part-time education is now a feature of some courses in response primarily to requests from women.

Vocational training is delivered through a combination of State and private organisations. State training is provided to the unemployed and is delivered sectorally. FÁS, the national training authority, tracks gender participation in all courses and in 2001 secured funding to provide childcare for trainees. In 2003, 78,694 people completed either a Training or Employment Programme with FÁS, of which 33,557 (43%) were women. Apprenticeships continue to attract very few women and the classification is somewhat arbitrary as it excludes those training to be hairdressers which are predominantly women. In 2003, women represented 45% of throughput on *Specific Skills Training* programmes, an increase of 35% from 2001. In addition to mainstream measures, FÁS is delivering a *Gateway's Initiative*, targeted at women returning to the workforce, where participants receive personalised supports and are facilitated in progressing to skilled training if required.

Fáilte Ireland provides training for the tourism sector. Reflecting the profile of this sector, 57% of trainees are women. This participation rate is indicative of all levels of training including management levels. Teagasc, the body which provides training for the agriculture sector, has developed women-specific training programmes.

The specialist Gender Equality Units in the Departments of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Education and Science support gender mainstreaming in education and training.

2.3 Women and Health

A National Health Strategy; Quality and Fairness - a health system for you which was published in 2001 incorporates the approach outlined in the 1997 Plan for Women's Health. Women's health issues are overseen by the Women's Health Council. The Council is also assisting the development of national and regional policies and strategies designed to increase women's health.

⁵ Teacher training colleges.

⁶ Department of Education and Science

Ireland is among six countries who have been invited by the WHO to conduct a case study with the aim of performing a gender analysis of a national health policy. The Women's Health Council has identified the National Cardiovascular Health Strategy as the policy area to be examined. The WHO publication of the project will be launched at the end of 2004. The Women's Health Council is also involved in a project which is developing a set of gender sensitive health indicators for the EU.

Ireland prioritises antenatal and post-natal care. Under the Maternity and Infant Care Scheme, expectant mothers can avail of combined community and hospital programmes where they are supported in their pregnancy and receive medical care free of charge. National maternity hospitals have developed programmes which provide a high level of personal assistance to birth mothers. Ireland has one of the highest rates of natural births in the developed world. The maternal mortality rate in 2003 was zero. Breast feeding programmes are also being supported. Breast Cancer and Cervical Cancer screening programmes are being rolled out nationally.

The Fertility Rate in Ireland was 1.98% in 2003 and 2002. Since the ICPD conference in Cairo (1994), a formal policy on family planning has been developed and implemented. Each health board (statutory regional health authority) is required to ensure that an equitable, accessible and comprehensive family planning service is available in its area and increasingly women are approaching their local doctors for such information.

Abortion in Ireland is prohibited except in very limited circumstances. Information on abortion services abroad can be provided within the terms of the Regulation of Information (Services outside the State for Termination of Pregnancies) Act, 1995. Figures from the UK Department of Health indicate that in both 2000 and 2001, approximately 6,000 women with Irish addresses had abortions in either England or Wales. The Crisis Pregnancy Agency, which was established in 2001, was given the task of drawing up a national strategy to address crisis pregnancy and to oversee its implementation, in consultation with government and other non-statutory bodies. A comprehensive strategy to address crisis pregnancy was published in November 2003.

The incidence of AIDS has been steadily decreasing in recent years. This is mainly due to the success rates of drug therapy. The total number of AIDS cases reported in Ireland to date is 731. Seven of the twelve cases (58%) reported in 2002 were among heterosexuals.

In Ireland HIV is now seen as a chronic rather than a fatal illness. Recent statistics show an increase in the numbers of reported cases of HIV. Of the 364 cases diagnosed in 2002, 54.4% were female. Heterosexual transmission has replaced injecting drug use as the main route of transmission of the virus.

Routine antenatal testing was introduced in 1999 and is effective in identifying women who are HIV positive at an early stage in pregnancy. These women can be treated with drug therapy, which reduces the risk of the baby acquiring HIV by up to 66%.

2.4 Violence Against Women

A National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women was set up in 1997 to bring together State organisations and voluntary bodies working with women who are the victims of violence including domestic violence, rape, sexual assault and prostitution. The Committee is chaired by the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Regional Committees have also been established in each of the eight health boards to co-ordinate the relevant services at local level. The Committees have supported public awareness campaigns, research and the training of professionals working in this area. It is also overseeing a programme aimed at addressing the behaviour of men who perpetrate violence against women. This initiative is currently being evaluated.

Ireland's Combined Fourth and Fifth reports under CEDAW give statistics on domestic violence and list the range of legislative initiatives, which have been taken to combat violence against women. In addition, the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Act 2002 amended the Domestic Violence Act 1996 and provides that an interim barring order may be made ex-parte by the Circuit or District Court, for a period not exceeding eight working days. This means that an application for an interim barring order with immediate effect may be made without notice to the other party. In such cases, the full hearing must take place within 8 days.

Ireland signed the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime and two of the protocols thereto, including the protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Legislation to enable Ireland to ratify the Convention and the two protocols is being prepared. It is expected that the legislation will be published in 2004.

An NGO, Ruhama, which works with women involved in prostitution, receives annual funding from the State. Ireland En-Route, which is a forum comprising statutory organisations and voluntary groups, has also received funding. This forum is conducting research into the extent of the problem of trafficking of women and children into Ireland.

The National Domestic Violence Intervention Agency is currently operating on a pilot basis in two District Court areas in Dublin. The Agency aims to ensure that victim safety is maximised by institutionalising policies and practices, in the civil and judicial systems and other key agencies, which hold the perpetrator accountable. The project is based on similar Domestic Violence Intervention Projects in other jurisdictions which have proved very successful in reducing incidents of domestic violence and domestic murders.

Ireland has developed a social and personal health education programme for use in post-primary schools. As part of this programme, a module specifically for boys in the Transition Year entitled Exploring Masculinities, which deals with a range of issues including violence against women, has also been developed.

Irish employment equality legislation contains a provision outlawing sexual harassment in the workplace. As an aid to combating sexual harassment, the Equality Authority prepared a Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment and Harassment at Work in 2002. The Code requires employers to have in place accessible and effective policies and procedures to deal with sexual harassment.

2.5 Women and Armed Conflict

In recent years, Ireland has seen at first hand the benefits of involving women in conflict resolution and peace processes. In Northern Ireland, women played and continue to play a pivotal role in building peace and are essential contributors to the ongoing process of fostering reconciliation. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), which draws members and support from the two main communities in Northern Ireland, made a major contribution to the Good Friday Agreement, signed in April 1998. This Agreement provides the template for peace and stability in Northern Ireland. During the multi-party talks, NIWC emphasised that the conflict was a shared problem and that in order to resolve it, the negotiation process should be a collective one. The party contributed strongly to the drafting of some of the clauses of the Good Friday Agreement, including the importance of mixed housing, the particular difficulties of young people, and the need for resources to address these problems.

The elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly took place for the second time in November last year. Although the overall number of women elected rose, NIWC was not successful in returning any of its candidates in these elections. Women's groups in Ireland, north and south, have forged alliances. In partnership together these groups have made, and continue to make, a valuable contribution in building and maintaining a peaceful society. The grass-roots initiatives promoted by women, which continue to grow, have been instrumental in restoring peace and promoting good community relations across both communities in this post-conflict society. These women's groups are also supportive of women in situations of conflict in other parts of the world, and have used their skills and expertise to aid women suffering the consequences of conflict.

The Government is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for men and women in the Defence Forces and to the full participation of women in all aspects of Defence Forces activities. The trend for general service recruitment has been that 9% of all applicants have been female and that on average 9% of enlistments have been female. Female officers are generally being promoted at the same stage in their careers as male officers.

2.6 Women and the Economy

Ireland's strong economic performance in recent years has delivered significant advances for gender equality. Between the third quarters of 1998 and 2001 female employment increased by over 18%. Current labour market participation for women stands at 50% of those over aged 15 or 55% for those aged 15-65 years. Over three quarters (76%) of part-time workers are women and most in this category indicate that they are not under-employed. There is now almost no difference between female and male unemployment rates (4.2% female, 4.8% male) while long term unemployment is lower for women than men (0.7% as compared with 1.2%).

Although the earning differential between women and men has narrowed, in 2000 there remained an economy wide gender pay gap of approximately 15% per hour. The Irish work force continues to exhibit high levels of sex segregation. About two thirds of women are concentrated in five occupational categories: clerical and office workers, sales health and related occupations, teachers and personal services and childcare.

The social partnership agreements provided for a consultative group, comprising Government departments and the social partners, to oversee research on the male/female wage differentials in Ireland. The Consultative Group advised on the preparation of two research reports: one at

national level⁷ and one done at sectoral level⁸. In addition, the Group presented a report on actions required to address the gender pay gap to Government in November 2003. On-going work in this area by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform includes the commissioning of research into the gender pay gap for graduates in first employment.

The introduction of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) in 2000 had a greater impact on women's earnings as compared with men and this remains the case following the recent up-rating to seven euros per hour. The impact by gender of the NMW is set out in the following table:

	% labour force on NMW	% males on NMW	% females on NMW
1999	21%	15%	30.5%
2001	4.3%	2.7%	7.3%
2002	4.5%	2.9%	7.0%

The period 1995-2004 also saw an expansion of the equality legislation with the introduction of the Employment Equality Act, 1998 and the Equal Status Act, 2000. The Employment Equality Act prohibits discrimination on nine grounds⁹, including gender, marital status and family status, in employment and vocational training. The Equal Status Act prohibits discrimination on the same nine grounds in relation to the provision of goods, facilities and services. Two State agencies were set up to support the implementation of this legislation: the Equality Authority, which promotes equality and advises complainants; and the Equality Tribunal which adjudicates in the first instance on complaints under this legislation. In 2003 the Equality Authority dealt with 164 case files under the Employment Equality Act relating to gender and 55 under the Equal Status Act. In the same year the Equality Tribunal made recommendations in 107 cases on the gender ground under the Employment Equality Act and 7 under the Equal Status Act.

Funding of €149 million has been allocated to the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme under the National Development Plan 2000-6. The Programme is part-funded by European Union Structural Funds. The Programme is working to address the childcare needs of parents who are working or who are engaged in training and education activities. It offers capital grants to community/not for profit organisations and to private childcare providers to increase the supply of childcare places or enhance the quality of existing places. Staffing grants are provided to community based/not-for-profit organisations which have a focus on meeting the childcare needs of disadvantaged families. The Programme is also supporting the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations, City and County Childcare Committees and other groups working to improve the quality of childcare in Ireland.

To date the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 has allocated over €15 million to private and community- based childcare providers which is intended to create 28,000 new childcare places and will also support over 26,000 existing places on completion of the projects. In addition, almost €43 million has been allocated towards Quality Improvement

⁷ *How Unequal, Men and Women in the Irish Labour Market*, Economic and Social Research Institute Dublin 2000.

⁸ Study of the Gender Pay Gap at Sectoral Level in Ireland, by Indecon International Economic Consultants, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Dublin, 2002

⁹ gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community

Measures which includes supports for the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations and the establishment and support of 33 City and County Childcare Committees.

The increased participation of women in the work force has been accompanied by improvements to maternity and adoptive leave provisions as well as the introduction of parental and carer's leave. The Carers Leave Act 2001 enables employees to get leave of absence of up to 65 weeks to care for a relative. A Carer's Benefit is available to workers who avail of this entitlement if they have the relevant number of social welfare contributions. Government is also providing funding to support the work of the Social Partnership National Framework Committee for development of work/life balance policies.

Since 2001 part-time workers enjoy a number of rights under the Protection of Workers (Part-Time) Act including a right to non-discrimination as compared with full-time employees. The Act is also intended to improve the quality of part time work and to contribute to the flexible organisation of working time in a manner which takes into account the needs of employers and workers. This Act is estimated to have improved the working conditions of some 291,000 part-time workers, a majority of whom are women.

The City and County Enterprise Boards (CEBs) have recognised the need for a specific strategy to address the particular issues facing women entrepreneurs. Programmes have been designed to provide potential women entrepreneurs with support systems that will enhance their self-confidence and actively encourage their participation in greater numbers in new business generation and investment. During the period 1993-2003 over 36,700 women participated in a range of training schemes operated by the CEBs.

An Advisory Committee on the role of women in agriculture and rural communities reported in 2000 with 36 recommendations covering a broad range of policy and operational areas including the need for maintaining better data on women in this sector and to support women's participation in farming organisations. A comprehensive progress report on the recommendations relevant to Government Departments was finalised in 2004. Continued attention to issues of concern to women in agriculture and rural communities is provided at the National Rural Development Forum which meets in open session twice yearly.

The Government has a commitment to assist persons on low incomes through the tax system. Initiatives to address low incomes, which have been put into operation since 1997, include an increase in the threshold above which a person becomes liable for tax. The tax wedge - that is the difference between what a worker receives and the total payroll costs to the employer of hiring a person - for the average Irish production worker is the lowest in EU and OECD countries. This is a significant step in improving access for women to employment and in increasing the income levels of all those on lower incomes.

The tax system also provides dedicated assistance to lone parents through the mechanism of the one-parent family credit. The statistics indicate that over 60% of those in receipt of the one-parent family credit are single women. In 2004, a lone parent in the PAYE sector will pay no tax on the first €20,400 of income annually, which is almost 60% greater than the equivalent figure for a single earner - €12,800. The tax system makes a major contribution in encouraging the uptake of employment by those who head up one-parent families.

In addition to mainstream labour market measures, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform provided funding over a three year period to 47 labour market positive action projects

under the Equality for Women Measure. These projects are intended to develop learning for mainstreaming gender equality.

Last year, for the first time ever, the Central Statistics Office produced statistics on how ICTs are used in homes and businesses in Ireland. These statistics showed that 48.9 % of women had used a computer compared to 44.3% of males. 38.1% of females have used the Internet compared to 37.2% of males. In addition, research on the uptake of Information Technology in the Dublin Region concluded that the strong correlation between social class, income, age, economic status and education and ICT uptake, clearly demonstrates that the digital divide (i.e. e-exclusion) is inseparable from broader forms of social inequality. However, national policy recognises that social inequalities do not constitute an insurmountable barrier to the wider use of digital technologies.

2.7 Women in Power and Decision-making

Ireland has elected two women Presidents, Mary Robinson in 1990 and Mary McAleese in 1997, who currently holds this office. Women represent 13% of the national parliament and 16% of local government representatives. Out of 15 Cabinet Ministers in the present Government, two are women - the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Social and Family Affairs. Two of the seventeen Junior Ministers are women.

Achieving progress in relation to women in political life is an area in which Government has limited influence. The Irish electoral system is extremely competitive with party colleagues initially competing against each other for nominations and competing against party colleagues as well as other political parties for election under our system of proportional representation in multi-seat constituencies.

The Electoral Act, 1997, provides for the public funding of political parties. Payments are deemed to include, inter alia, provision for expenditure by the party in respect of the promotion of participation by women in political activity. Annual returns are required to be made to the Public Offices Commission indicating the matters to which the funding was applied, including the amounts applied to the participation by women in political activity.

In addition to this mainstream funding, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform offered funding in 2000 under the Equality for Women Measure to all political parties in line with the terms of the Electoral Act, 1997. Three parties applied (Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Sinn Féin). A further project, involving the Labour Party was also funded. They were awarded funding to promote the development and implementation of gender-balanced policies and encourage participation by women within the parties. A further twenty projects led by social partner organisations, women's groups and community groups are also in receipt of positive action funding to address the gender gap in decision-making.

The Department of Education and Science has funded the development of a resource pack for teachers of Civic, Social and Political Education wishing to explore the concept of democracy with their students. The aim of this work is to engage and make students aware of the necessity for balance, fairness and equality of representation in the democratic process and to enable them to participate in it. This is achieved using simple participative classroom activities that are both interesting and instructive and which stimulate thought and discussion.

The Government is committed to achieving a minimum target of 40% representation of both men and women on State Boards. At end December, 2003 women constituted 30% of State Board nominees and 36% of Government nominees covering the State Boards set up under 15 Government Departments. Progress on this issue is reported to Government at six monthly intervals.

Since June 2000 Government policy with regards to equal opportunities in the Civil Service has focused on increasing the representation of women in the key middle management grades with the aim of ensuring that a sufficiently large pool of women would be available to provide more senior managers in future.

The adoption of strategic objectives and targets, both centrally and at individual Department level, has proved successful in addressing the representation of women in the key middle management grade of Assistant Principal. The target is that one third of all posts at Assistant Principal level be filled by women by June 2005. Figures from December 2002 show that significant progress is being made: the data show that 32% of Assistant Principal posts are filled by women, an increase from 27% in June 2000. The next challenge will be to ensure that the increases achieved at this key grade are followed through in the senior management grades. The development of further strategic targets, together with the on-going implementation and monitoring of policies in relation to work life balance programmes will be considered in order to achieve this goal.

2.8 Human Rights of Women

The Human Rights Commission was formally established on 25 July, 2001 in accordance with the provisions of the Human Rights Commission Acts 2000 and 2001. The functions of the Commission are set out in section 8 of the Act and they include to "keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in the State relating to the protection of human rights". For these purposes human rights means (a) the rights, liberties and freedoms conferred on, or guaranteed to, persons by the Constitution, and (b) the rights, liberties and freedoms conferred on, or guaranteed to, persons by any agreement, treaty or convention to which the State is a party". In its work, therefore, the Commission would have regard to the provisions of CEDAW.

The Human Rights Commission Act, 2001, increased the number of Human Rights Commissioners from 9 to 15 and amended the statutory provision for equal gender representation so that at least seven Commissioners must be women and seven must be men. The Commission held a Consultation meeting in May 2004 on gender and women's rights. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform under the Equality for Women Measure provided funding to the Pro-Beijing Women's NGO Coalition which supports the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Ireland has gender equality as a goal and priority in relation to development co-operation. The Department of Foreign Affairs has recruited an expert in gender mainstreaming to enhance the implementation of its overall objective. The Department adopts a mainstream approach and focuses in particular on developing broad-based institutional arrangements that ensure the responsibility for meeting gender equality objectives is shared by all professionals working to deliver the policy objectives of development cooperation. The Department's support for gender mainstreaming is carried out through identifying a number of strategic entry points as follows:

- policy dialogue with partner governments in third countries, multilateral and bilateral agencies, civil society, development and humanitarian organisations
- strategic support to Ministries responsible for gender and women's affairs
- mainstreaming gender equality objectives in sector-wide programmes in partnership with relevant Ministries and other stakeholders
- mainstreaming gender equality objectives in provincial or district level area-based programmes in partnership with local governments and other stakeholders
- targeted programmes aimed at addressing the practical and strategic needs of women and girls
- undertaking evaluations which examine the impact of development programmes on gender equality objectives
- ensuring that key policy, planning and programme documents demonstrate an explicit commitment to gender equality objectives.

In response to these challenges, the Development Co-operation Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs is developing a new gender equality policy which outlines effective institutional arrangements to enable gender mainstreaming to work effectively as a strategy. The policy is at final draft stage and a three-year action plan will be developed to implement the policy, which will be subject to review at the end of the period.

2.9 Women and the Media

The media in Ireland is independent of Government. Statutory codes prepared under the Broadcasting Act, 1990, provide, inter alia, that television advertising shall not include any discrimination on grounds of sex. The Advertising Standards Authority has a mechanism for dealing with complaints.

The National Broadcasting Authority, RTÉ, receives State funding through a licence fee. Under the Broadcasting Act, 1993 there is a statutory requirement for gender balance on the board of the RTÉ Authority.

RTÉ has been allocated €254,000 under the Equality for Women Measure to compile a Diversity Database for the use of programme makers. The database will include women with specialist knowledge from a range of different backgrounds who are willing to speak on air on various topics. The project also reviewed the career progression of women in the organisation.

2.10 Women and the Environment

Policies framed to protect the environment do not have a particular gender dimension. There is now a big emphasis on re-cycling and as women continue to be responsible for most household duties, they play a large part in the implementation of environment policies in this area.

The Planning and Development Act, 2000, provides that in future local authority development plans must include an objective relating to the provision of services for the community including schools, crèches and other education and childcare facilities.

The last Assessment of Housing Needs carried out by local authorities in 2002 did not provide a gender breakdown of those in need of housing and therefore it is difficult to accurately assess gender impact in relation to housing. However, the results of the Assessment did indicate that over 40% of households on the waiting lists comprised lone females with one or more children compared with just over 3% for lone male parents. It is intended to include a gender analysis in the next assessment in 2005 and to extend the analysis across all participants.

Recent studies have confirmed that there are important gender differences in travel patterns and transport use, underlining the need for policymakers and transport operators to take account of the needs of both women and men when developing and implementing their transport policies and services. Fewer women (particularly older women) drive cars, and they are therefore more likely to rely on public transport. This underlines the need for public transport that is comprehensive and responsive in terms of provision, and safe and affordable in terms of use.

2.11 The Girl Child

National policy aims to treat girls and boys equally within Irish society. Policy on youth is set out in the National Youth Work Development Plan, 2003-2007. Implementation of the Plan is overseen by the National Youth Work Advisory Committee. The Plan has four broad goals:

- To facilitate young people and adults to participate more fully in, and to gain optimum benefit from, youth work programmes and services.
- To enhance the contribution of youth work to social inclusion, social cohesion and citizenship in a rapidly changing national and global context.
- To put in place an expanded and enhanced infrastructure for development, support and coordination at national and local level.
- To put in place mechanisms for enhancing professionalism and ensuring quality standards in youth work.

Two priority areas have been identified for 2003 – the implementation of the Child Protection Training Programme and the appointment of an Assessor of Youth Work.

The National Development Plan 2000-6 contains a Youth Services Measure which provides funding for a range of activities targeted at young people.

Part Three: Institutional Development

3.1 Parliament

The Joint Oireachtas (Parliamentary) Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights reports on the impact of national equality policy and legislation on women. The Joint Committee has established a Sub-committee on Women's Rights to assist the process. The Committee debates legislation on women's rights and provides a parliamentary focus for women's groups and others to discuss women's policy concerns. The committee has contributed significantly to research on women's issues. Two special sessions of the Sub-committee, held on 5 February 2002 and 19 November 2003, were devoted to reviewing progress on gender equality. The Committee has made recommendations on equality in educational and social welfare provisions, the portrayal of women in the media, sexual violence, equal opportunities in employment, childcare, women's presence in local administrative decision making, the barriers to women in business and the impact of European equality legislation on women's affairs in Ireland.

3.2 Government

3.2.1 Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Cabinet responsibility for gender equality rests with **the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform** who has the support of a Minister of State. The Gender Equality Section of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, under the direction of the Minister, is responsible for implementing a number of Government commitments on gender equality, supporting policy development on gender issues, and monitoring national and international commitments on gender equality, including reporting on gender equality issues for which other Government Departments and State agencies are responsible. The Gender Equality Section has a dedicated staff of ten working solely on policy matters. In addition, the NDP Gender Equality Unit, which has five staff, reports to the Gender Equality Section.

A *Childcare Directorate* has been established with a staff of 21 to administer a budget of €449 million to increase the supply and quality of childcare throughout Ireland as part of the National Development Plan 2000 - 2006.

A *National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women*, was set up in 1997 to bring together State organisations and voluntary bodies working with women who are the victims of violence, including domestic violence, rape, sexual assault and prostitution. Regional Committees have also been established in each of the eight health boards to co-ordinate the relevant services at local level.

The Equality Authority (previously the Employment Equality Agency) was created under the Employment Equality Act, 1998 and operates under the aegis of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. It has statutory responsibility to work towards the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunities on all nine grounds of the equality legislation¹⁰, including gender, in employment and vocational training and in the provision of goods, facilities and services. It also provides information to the public in relation to equality legislation and assistance on a strategic basis to individuals seeking redress under the equality legislation. The

¹⁰ Ireland's equality legislation prohibits discrimination on the following grounds: gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community

Authority has a staff of 45 and its budget for 2003 was €4,851,000. Because the Authority operates an integrated equality agenda across the nine grounds of the equality legislation, it is difficult to itemise the staff working on gender except on casework where in 2003, 19% of the caseload was on gender. The Authority also provides information on legislation governing maternity, adoptive and parental leave. For more information on the work of the Authority, see www.equality.ie.

The Office of Director of Equality Investigations (ODEI - the Equality Tribunal) operates under the aegis of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and provides the main locus of redress of first instance for equality cases arising under both employment equality and equal status legislation. The Equality Tribunal has a staff of thirty-one including its Director, and its budget for 2003 was €1,849,000. For more information on the work of the Equality Tribunal, see www.odei.ie.

3.2.2 Department of Education and Science

The Department of Education and Science established a Gender Equality Unit in 2001 to advise and promote the incorporation of a gender equality perspective in all areas of education. The Unit is co-financed from Structural Funds. The Unit works with all the stakeholders in the education system, including policy development staff, teachers and those concerned with human resources, to increase awareness of gender equality. As a complementary activity, the Unit is funding research into discrete areas of the education system where there are significant gender equality issues and has run a series of public debates on the theme of masculinities. The Unit has a staff complement of four dedicated employees. Further information on the work of the Unit can be obtained from www.education.ie.

3.2.3 Department of Finance

The Department of Finance has an Equality Unit which supports the development of equality initiatives in the civil service, including on gender equality. The Unit drafted a new gender equality policy and monitors Government targets in this area. The Unit liaises directly with Personnel Managers in Government Departments who are required to report annually on gender equality issues.

3.2.4 Department of Foreign Affairs

Development Co-operation Ireland is the Government of Ireland's programme of assistance to developing countries. Ireland's development co-operation policy and programme reflect our longstanding commitment to human rights and fairness in international relations and are inseparable from Irish foreign policy as a whole. DCI have recruited a Senior Development Specialist with specific responsibility for advising on gender issues and supporting the mainstreaming strategy within the development co-operation programme.

3.2.5 Department of Health and Children

The Women's Health Council was established in 1997 with the following remit: advising on all aspects of women's health; assisting the development of national and regional policies and strategies designed to increase health gain and social gain for women; developing expertise on women's health within the health services, and liaising with other relevant international bodies, which have similar functions to the Council. The Council has a staff of seven and its current budget is just over €500,000.

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency was established in 2001 and was given the task of drawing up a national strategy to address crisis pregnancy and to oversee its implementation, in consultation with government and other non-statutory bodies.

3.2.6 Other

Each Government Department has a focal point to assist with reporting on gender equality matters. In addition, each Government Department has a Unit dedicated to promoting the implementation of the *National Anti-Poverty Strategy*. As there are significant gender aspects in the Plan, the work of these units is also relevant to promoting greater equality for women. The implementation of this Strategy is overseen by a Cabinet Sub-Committee and a Senior Officials Group.

3.3 Social Partnership in Ireland

The six Social Partnership Agreements to date - which are focused principally on incomes, fiscal, social, economic and competitiveness policies - were negotiated between the Government and the social partners. The social partners are organised into four pillars as follows:

- Trade Union Pillar
- Employer and Business Pillar
- Farming Pillar
- Community and Voluntary Pillar (included for first time in negotiations on *Partnership 2000*)

Management of the Implementation of the current agreement *Sustaining Progress* is overseen by a Steering Group comprised of the social partners and Government Departments. The Steering Group meets quarterly in plenary session.

Structures set up under the Social Partnership framework which impact on gender equality include the following:

- The Centre for Social Partnership (set up in 1997 to support change and innovation in the workplace including in relation to work/life balance policies)
- The National Framework for Work/Life Balance Policies
- National Framework Committee for Equal Opportunities at the Level of the Enterprise.

In addition, ad hoc working groups are set up as required, for example, the Committee which reported in 2001 on Women's Access to the Labour Market.

3.6 NGO and other structures

3.6.1 National Women's Council of Ireland

The National Women's Council of Ireland represents an affiliated membership of 156 women's organisations, ranging from network groups such as the Irish Countrywomen's Association to groups active in issues like health, violence against women and education. The NWCi receives annual funding from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform towards general operating expenses and programmes. The allocation for 2003 was €557,000, including €7,600 for developmental services for the organisation 'Women in the Home' (WITH).

3.6.2 The Equality for Women Measure of the National Development Plan 2000-6 is currently funding 70 projects with the objective of increasing women's participation in the labour market, business and decision-making. The Measure is also supporting networking among projects. Further information on the Equality for Women Measure can be found on www.ewm.ie.

3.6.3 Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women

The Irish National Observatory on Violence Against Women, which was launched on 15th April 2002, is a mechanism developed by the European Women's Lobby for monitoring Ireland's progress on the issue of violence against women. It was the first observatory to be launched. Three other national observatories have now been launched in Denmark, Greece and France.

Part Four: Main challenges and actions to address them

4.1 The Programme for Government

The current Programme for Government (June 2002) contains a number of commitments in the economic, social and cultural spheres which will impact positively on women, including commitments on childcare. In addition, the Programme contains the following specific commitments to achieve further equality for women:

- to publish regular reviews of the operation of equality legislation and ensure that the enforcement authorities are in a position to effectively carry out their duties;
- to ensure that each public sector entity implements a structured programme to address imbalances in gender representation in management positions;
- to ensure that life-long learning policies are responsive to the needs of women and, in particular, ensure that qualifications authorities fulfil their mandates to develop appropriate mechanisms for recognising alternative modes of progression;
- to ensure that a minimum of 40% of State board nominations are from each gender.

4.2 Social Partnership Agreement, *Sustaining Progress 2003-5*

Further national objectives and actions are outlined in the current agreement between the Government and the social partners, *Sustaining Progress 2003-5*. While many of the commitments in the agreement are important for the overall advancement of gender equality, for example, the special initiatives aimed at those experiencing social exclusion in chapter 2 and the commitments to delivering a fair and inclusive society in chapter 5, the following commitments are particularly relevant:

- development of a five-year National Women's Strategy
- up-rating of the National Minimum wage to €7 per hour with effect from 1 February 2004;
- development of a code of practice on access to part-time work,
- support for work on the gender pay gap;
- improvements to maternity, adoptive and parental leave;
- development of work/life balance and equal opportunities policies at enterprise level;
- establishment of a sub-committee to examine childcare arrangements for working parents, and
- establishment of a working group to develop an inclusive model of social insurance.

4.3 National Women's Strategy

The Government is committed in the current social partnership agreement, *Sustaining Progress*, to developing a National Women's Strategy as the framework for Ireland's gender equality agenda for the coming years. The scoping work for the development of the Strategy is being finalised and proposals will shortly be presented to Government for the development of the Strategy. The scoping exercise is concerned with defining the process by which the Strategy is developed and in broad terms, the framework of the Strategy. The Strategy will build on the progress made towards greater gender equality in Ireland in the coming years.

Because Ireland has succeeded in addressing some forms of direct discrimination against women and because women are entering and advancing within the labour market, there is a belief among some that we have achieved gender equality. People are now much more open to addressing issues of social inequality rather than specific gender issues. The development of a National Women's Strategy will serve to highlight the issues that remain to be addressed on the road to full equality between women and men in Ireland.

The following material on future challenges and actions is framed around the PFA critical areas of concern.

4.4 Women and Poverty

Notwithstanding the considerable progress made towards the achievement of gender equality in Ireland, women remain a group vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion because they generally take on the main responsibility for caring for children and other family members. As a result, their earnings are still, on average, significantly lower than those of men, as are their employment participation rates. They form the majority of those in part-time employment and other vulnerable groups such as lone parents and home-based carers of elderly and disabled relatives. Their longevity and relatively poor pension entitlements, based as they are on employment records, mean that many women are also at risk of poverty and social exclusion in old age. Part-time workers are now fully insured for social welfare purposes and arrangements have been put in place since 1994 to protect the pension rights of people who leave the workforce to care of children, elderly or disabled relatives.

The vulnerability of women to poverty is recognised in Ireland's National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005. This Plan together with the Employment Action Plan 2003-5 constitutes the Government's approach to addressing this issue. It involves the interaction of most areas of Government with each other as well as with the social partners and NGOs.

4.5 Education and Training of women

Equal opportunities in education and training are recognised as a prerequisite to the achievement of equal opportunities in Irish society. Girls are out-performing boys in second level examinations and the transfer rate of girls to third level education is higher than for boys. These successes demonstrate the effectiveness of earlier policies. Future challenges in this area concern addressing subject choice, particularly increasing the numbers of girls in engineering. In 2001, women constituted 49% of third level graduates in science, mathematics and computing.

Women's increased labour force participation is now reflected in their participation in a broader range of training provision. However, the numbers entering apprenticeships remain small. Special bursaries for women apprentices have been introduced in an attempt to increase their numbers. The current Gateways Initiative for women returning to the workforce needs to be mainstreamed.

Education and training policy has now embraced the concept of lifelong learning. This presents a challenge for gender equality to ensure that parents, both men and women, can continue to combine ongoing learning and up-skilling with caring responsibilities.

Overall education and training needs to provide for more flexible delivery forms where certification is provided in a national qualifications framework.

Women's low representation in senior management positions in academia is a cause of concern.

4.6 Women and Health

As mentioned in Part 1, men score worse than women on all of the national health indicators. The challenges in relation to women's health are as follows:

- Targeting a reduction in smoking in young women is one of the actions to achieve targets set in the National Health Promotion Strategy;
- Extending the programmes of screening for breast and cervical cancer;
- Implementing the strategy to address crisis pregnancy;
- Continue to support female victims of domestic violence, and
- Reduce the incidence of cardio-vascular disease among women.

4.7 Violence Against Women

The inter-disciplinary approach fostered by the National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women will remain the focus of Ireland's policy in this area. Differences in approaches and priorities have emerged between the statutory and voluntary sectors which need to be clarified in order to ensure effective interagency and partnership working on the issue. Rates of attrition in rape and sexual assault cases continue to be a matter of concern. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is providing funding for research on the question as to why victims choose not to report cases to the Gardai (police) and also why, of the cases that are reported, only a small percentage result in a court hearing.

4.8 Women and Armed Conflict

The Millennium Development Goals which direct the policies of Development Cooperation Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs, place gender equality and women's empowerment as a goal in its own right, as well as being central to achieving the seven additional goals. Despite this commitment, the link between poverty reduction and gender equality is not fully understood. Operationalising the commitment to gender equality in development cooperation continues to face institutional and resource challenges. There is a need to develop management information systems that provide data on the levels of funding invested in gender equality interventions and the analytical capacity to assess the costs and benefits of that investment.

4.9 Women and the Economy

The recent increase in women's labour market participation has highlighted the urgent need for family friendly policies. To this end Government is investing in the development of a childcare infrastructure and has increased child benefit by over 200% since 1997. New legislation giving a right to carer's leave and protecting part-time workers has been introduced and there have been improvements to legislative provisions in maternity and adoptive leave. Improvements to parental leave are also planned. The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme is a new initiative dating from 2000. Its implementation in the period to 2006 will make significant inroads to the childcare supply deficit.

Ireland's equality legislation which originally covered discrimination on grounds of sex and marital status was extended in 1998 to nine individual grounds including gender, marital status and family. The fact that many new categories enjoyed for the first time a right to non-discrimination has meant that the focus to some extent has switched from gender equality in its own right to other areas such as racism, disability and age and to multiple forms of discrimination which focus on disabled women, traveler women etc. Within the broad anti-discrimination framework, it is a challenge to maintain a focus on gender equality in its own right.

There is a need for all bodies, public and private to carry out gender equality reviews in an effort to address both vertical and horizontal sex segregation in employment.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform will monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the November 2003 report of the Consultative Group on Male/Female wage Differentials.

4.10 Women in Power and Decision making

The lack of gender balance in decision making is perhaps the weakest area of Ireland's performance in gender equality. This position is due in no small part to tradition role of women before EU membership, particularly the fact that until 1973 married women's employment was prohibited in the public sector. Although married women's employment in the private sector was not unlawful, that sector also followed the standard of the public sector. Where women were retained in employment post-marriage, it was generally on a temporary, non-pensionable basis. Even though this practice was outlawed in 1973, women continued for many years to surrender their jobs on marriage. With current labour force participation rates for married women at 48%, it is expected that this should be reflected in the positions occupied by women.

Government recognises the importance of having gender balance in decision making areas and has included a specific commitment to achieve a minimum of 40% gender balance on State boards. This target is monitored regularly. Government has also adopted gender targets for key management grades in the Civil Service. The equality legislation permits positive action in areas where there is significant gender under-representation. With regards to the private sector Government promotes the development of best practice and encourages positive action. For example, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is currently funding 23 projects on 'women in decision making' under the Equality for Women Measure and is participating on an EU transnational project on this theme under the EU Programme for Gender Equality 2001-5.

Advancing women's participation in areas of political decision making is also difficult. Ireland does not operate a list system so women must be selected by their party or come forward as independent candidates to be elected. Once selected, candidates compete in many cases against their party colleagues as well as against other parties under our system of proportional representation in multi-seat constituencies.

Government has highlighted the gender gap in political life in Ireland. As a support for increasing women's representation, a portion of the allowance paid to the parties is provided for gender equality. In addition, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform offered funding to political parties under the 2000 call for proposals of the Equality for Women Measure. Three parties sought and were granted funding over a three year period. A fourth party was involved in a project which was funded.

The local elections are taking place on 11 June 2004. For the first time, members of the national parliament are not permitted to run for local county and urban councils. It is expected that this development will lead to an increase both in the number of women candidates running for election and numbers elected. An analysis of this will have to await the election results.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform provides an annual grant to the National Women's Council of Ireland, one of the objectives of which is to campaign for gender balance in decision making.

4.11 Conclusion

Ireland is making progress across the spectrum of gender equality issues. The development of the National Women's Strategy presents an opportunity to refine current approaches and to decide on future priorities.