

Submission

To

Committee for the National Plan For Women

From

The Justice Commission of

The Conference of Religious of Ireland

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Introduction.

The Conference of Religious of Ireland has over 12,000 members of which 9,000 are women. Our members are involved in a wide range of activities and services to women addressing poverty, inequality and social exclusion.

The twelve areas identified from the Beijing Platform for Action are comprehensive. However, a critical area of concern to women not identified in the draft is that of Women, Religions and Spirituality. We have included this critical area for consideration and we recommend that it be taken on board in drawing up the National Plan for Women 2001-2005.

Despite some progress being made in recent years regarding the status of women in Irish society, inequality between women and men continues to pervade many aspects of Irish life. We welcome the opportunity to address these outstanding issues in this draft consultation document and at the outset we draw attention to a number of key points that we view as core elements to producing a just, measurable, achievable and comprehensive National Plan for Women. These core elements include:

- having an integrated approach to the whole plan while recognizing the importance of identifying individual critical areas of concern.
- recognizing that while the Girl Child is one critical area of concern it is also a cross cutting issue.

- ❑ taking into account specific target groups such as Asylum Seekers and Refugees, Older Women, Lone Parents, People with Disabilities, Travellers and other people subjected to racism in any of its forms etc.
- ❑ taking into account the rural/urban dimension.
- ❑ setting achievable targets, short-term and long-term for each of the critical areas of concern for the period 2001 - 2005. These need to be monitored, and evaluated on a regular basis over the lifetime of the plan.
- ❑ The collection and processing of relevant data.
- ❑ The National Plan for Women should consider the role of men in achieving the aims and objectives of this plan.

As a useful approach we have addressed the twelve areas of critical concern identified in the Beijing Platform. We have also included 'Women, Religions and Spirituality'. In addressing each area we have three sub sections, A, B and C.

A, we have identified the key issues of concern;

B, we have identified how progress could be measured and in

C, we have proposed practical actions that could be undertaken to advance the ideals underpinning the Beijing Platform for Action.

1/ Women and Poverty

A/ Issues.

There are two key issues regarding this area of concern:

- to ensure that all women have sufficient income to live life with dignity,
- to provide *every* woman with an income *in her own right*.

B/ How can Progress be Measured?

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- Benchmark and index social welfare payments at 30% of Gross Average Industrial Earnings (GAIE).
- Raise the 'qualifying adult' social welfare payment to reach the single adult payment.
- Measure the risk of financial poverty as measured by the 50% and 60% of national median income using OECD modified equivalence scale.
- Assess the impact of poverty on specific groups at greatest risk e.g. unemployed women, lone parents, women with disabilities, Travellers, asylum seekers and immigrants.
- The impact of the reform of the tax and social welfare systems on women.
- Measure the trends in the numbers of women who are homeless, unemployed and on minimum wage.
- Measure the relativity of the rural/ urban dimension for women in poverty.
- Compare income distribution of women in relation to men.
- The degree to which the recommendations of the National Economic and Social Forum report No. 20 on Lone Parents has been implemented.
- The degree to which the recommendations made in the report of the P2000 working group on Women's Access to Labour Market Opportunities have been implemented.

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key actions.

1. The provision of a Basic Income for all.

A basic income is an income that is unconditionally granted to every man, woman and child on an individual basis. It is paid to the individual irrespective of any income from other sources and paid without conditions, tax-free and guaranteed. By guaranteeing the income it would relieve stress and anxiety of poor people and free them to develop themselves, their families and their communities. It would be an incentive to improve

one's economic status by facilitating access to employment. It would enable all to live life with dignity, improve the quality of life of Irish society and lead to a more stable and equitable society.

2. Gender Proof and Poverty Proof the Budget and all Public Policy.

Research has shown that women in Ireland experience a greater risk of poverty than men. This is mainly due to the risk of poverty faced by single adult households (mainly headed by women) and households headed by someone working full-time in the home (mainly women). CORI Justice Commission was involved in a dialogue led by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs to develop mechanisms for poverty proofing policies of government departments. A document was agreed that sets out how civil servants responsible for policy should assess policies for

- impact on poverty
- contribution to achieving the NAPS targets
- ability to address inequalities leading to poverty.

This is an important development that has the capacity to give a new direction to policy and the distribution of resources. Its development has been reviewed by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and recommendations have been made for improving the process. These recommendations should be implemented.

3. Make tax credits refundable.

Increasing tax credits, combined with standard rating of all discretionary tax allowances, provides government with a means of achieving greater equity among the top two-thirds of households in income terms. However, tax credits would have to be made 'refundable' if low paid employees were to benefit equally with the better off. When tax credits are refundable those whose tax bills are less than the credit receive a payment equal to the difference. The main beneficiaries of refundable tax credits would be low-paid employees (full-time and part-time). The major advantage of making tax credits refundable would be in addressing the disincentives currently associated with low paid employment. If refundable tax credits were introduced, subsequent increases in the level of the tax credit would then be of equal value to all employees.

4. Implement gender proofing in all aspects of the National Development Plan 2000-2006

5. Move towards individualization of Social Welfare Payments

The issue of individualizing payments, so that all recipients receive their own social welfare payments, has been on the policy agenda in Ireland and across the EU for several years. CORI Justice Commission welcomed the report of the Working Group *Examining the Treatment of Married, Cohabiting and One-Parent Families Under the Tax and*

Social Welfare Codes, which addressed some of the individualization issues. More work needs to be done to progress this issue in a fair and equitable manner.

6. Individualisation of the tax system should not disadvantage women in the home.

7. RAPID Programmes.

All RAPID Programmes (RAPID and CLAR) should ensure the participation of local women in the planning, monitoring, implementation and evaluation of the programme. The participation of the specific target groups in the programmes should be gender proofed in terms of access, participation and outcomes.

8. Employment Action Plan 2002

The Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment are at present in the process of consultation with the Social Partners to draw up the National Employment Action Plan 2002. This plan should be gender proofed and poverty proofed in terms of its provision of access and outcomes to employment and training opportunities for women and the specific target groups such as Asylum Seekers and Refugees, Older Women, Lone Parents, People with Disabilities, Travellers and other people subjected to racism in any of its forms etc. This plan should also take account of the urban/ rural dimension.

9. Criminal Records

One of the difficulties encountered by ex-prisoners in accessing employment is their criminal record. We propose that the NESF Report (No 22 on the Re-integration of Prisoners) recommendation that criminal records should be expunged after a period of time (bar exceptions necessitated due to public safety concerns) should be implemented. We also agree with the recommendation that the Employment Equality Act should be amended to include protection against discrimination on the grounds of a criminal record. Also, the bar on the employment of those with a criminal record in the civil and public services should be lifted (bar exceptions).

10. Overseas Development Aid.

The National Plan for Women should ensure that the aid allocation to ODA reaches the United Nations target of 0.7% of Ireland's Gross National Product by 2007.

2/

Education and Training of Women

A/ Issues.

The key issues to be addressed within this critical area include:

- eradicating any remaining stereotyping of women in Education, for example in educational materials and subject choices,
- the provision of basic levels of literacy and numerical skills,
- the provision of sufficient children's services and childcare services,
- supports to access lifelong learning.

B/ How can Progress be Measured?

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- Numbers of early school leavers (who leave without a qualification)
- Numbers attending Third Level Education and types of courses being followed
- Ongoing education by type.
- Comparisons of outcomes in adult education for women in relation to men.
- Absence of sexist bias from schoolbooks and subject choices.
- Trends in Literacy and numerical skills.
- Access to education of groups such as people with disabilities and people with learning difficulties.
- Levels of access to and the provision of childcare services and elder care.
- Levels of provision of children's services
- Monitoring the integration of a gender perspective in all policies e.g. education and media.
- Data on geographical spread of educational opportunities for women.

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key actions.

- 1. Encouraging and incentivising women to enter trades and professions traditional male dominated.**

2. By developing an awareness-raising programme.

This programme would aim to highlight and redress the stereotyping of women through awareness raising activities. Organising conferences, seminars, media campaigns and events would further facilitate addressing this critical area of concern.

3. To provide adequate second chance education

Specific attention would be required in the provision of second chance education for all women especially lone parents.

4. To remove barriers to lifelong learning opportunities in particular, lack of childcare and elder care facilities.

5. Implement the recommendations in the Adult and Community Education White Paper.

3/

Women and Health

A/ Issues.

Among the issues are:

- to ensure equality of access to the Healthcare Service at all levels,
- equality of outcomes from the Healthcare Service at all levels,
- the role of women as carers needs to be addressed.

B/ How can Progress be Measured

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- Implementation of the Travellers Health Strategy Report recommendations.
- Life expectancy at birth of special groups i.e. Travellers
- Health status by income level
- Numbers caring for dependent relatives (parents etc)
- Gender breakdown of carers
- Disaggregation of data on hospital waiting lists
- Data on health status of women in specific groups such as Asylum Seekers, Travellers, older people, people with Disabilities etc
- Implementation of the recommendations on Health and Treatment Services in the NESF Report No. 22 Re-Integration of Prisoners have been implemented.

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key actions.

1. Primary healthcare provision.

The development of Primary healthcare provision focuses on the promotion of health and is not primarily on healing illness although this would be part of any service. Its principle aim should be health promotion and the prevention of illness. Central to the development of any primary healthcare service is the involvement of the local community in the decision-making processes. Each service should offer a wide range of services; provide a high quality integrated service and coordinated care and case management. It should be person centered and set in an environmentally friendly atmosphere. Each service would involve a broad range of professionals in the provision of the services. The practices could be based on the needs of a defined population and the recognition of/implication of geographic/demographic factors. A way to help facilitate this would be the implementation of the PPF commitment (3.10.19) to pilot primary healthcare centres on a

seven-day, 24-hour basis. An up to date information technology/ information management system would enable an effective and efficient service.

2. Adequate financial support and professional support for carers.

Give far greater priority to community healthcare and development. Provide childcare services with the additional resources necessary to effectively implement the Child Care Act. Develop day care centres for older people, people with disabilities and for children (pre-school and crèche facilities). Develop nursing care of elderly people in their own community on the model of the hospice care programme. Provide for increased levels of community supports for care of the elderly i.e. home nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, home-help services. Provide respite care for elderly people and people with disabilities. Develop services for older people with learning disabilities. Develop mechanisms to ensure improved co-ordination of services between the government departments, health authorities and voluntary service providers and the local community.

3. Breast check, The National Breast Screening Programme.

Carry out an evaluation of the programme. Any evaluation must take account of the views and experiences of the users of the programme. Then implement the learnings from the evaluation.

4. Cervical Smear Test.

This service should be available to all women free of charge.

4/

Violence Against Women

A/ Issues.

The issues include:

- the elimination all types of violence (physical, emotional, sexual and psychological etc) against women in the home, work and social life,
- the elimination of the trafficking of women and children,
- recognise prostitution as violence against women.

B/ How can Progress be Measured?

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- Gender records on violent crime against women.
- The number of violent incidences reported to state and voluntary bodies.
- Research the prevalence of prostitution in Ireland.
- Identify scale of the trafficking of women.

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key actions.

- 1. Awareness raising, training and educational measures for frontline personnel, especially in health areas such as hospitals, social welfare, teachers, gardai, judiciary and Churches.**
- 2. Provision of adequate emergency Centers and Services.**
- 3. Legislation to decriminalize prostitution for women but not legalisation.**
- 4. Prosecution of offenders.**
- 5. Research, data collection and dissemination of information on all violence against women.**
- 6. Grant short-term residence permits to victims of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.**
- 7. Education awareness campaigns in schools for girls and boys.**
- 8. Research the attitudes and practices of Religions to women.**

A/ Issues.

The issues include:

- women who seek asylum,
- Northern Ireland situation,
- to recognise that women have been directly and indirectly impacted by the armed conflict.

B/ How can Progress be Measured?

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- Data on the International reality regarding: military budgets, arms production and production of implements of torture.
- Data on numbers of women and children forced to carry arms.
- Numbers of women asylum seekers requesting asylum in Ireland.
- The numbers of women asylum seekers granted refugee status.
- Trends regarding access to adequate accommodation, healthcare, educational opportunities, income, employment, participation etc.
- The trends in the number of women affected by armed conflict who participate in the decision-making structures and forums in Northern Ireland.
- The level of provision of supports (financial, developmental, educational etc) for women who are affected by armed conflict.

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key actions.

- 1. Through Irelands participation in the UN and other International For a.**
- 2. Support the work of agencies such as Trocaire, working against the enslavement and brutalisation of women and children.**
- 3. Provide counseling services for victims of armed conflict in Ireland and be prepared to support other countries in developing these services.**
- 4. Give asylum seekers the right to work.**
- 5. Provision of services and supports for asylum seekers.**

- 6. Give asylum seekers in direct provision, who are more than six months waiting the processing of their application, equal rights to accommodation and other social welfare provision as other Irish residents.**
- 7. Build on existing research and studies that have been carried out in Northern Ireland regarding the gender dimension of the armed conflict and the potential to build peace through innovative initiatives and approaches of women.**
- 8. The provision of, or expansion of services and resources to women impacted by the conflict in the North.**
- 9. Support and resource cross border initiatives that work for peace and co-operation.**
- 10. Provide for the education and training of women in political skills, communication skills, conflict resolution skills and assist women to assert their human rights.**
- 11. Resource educational programmes that seek to promote justice and peace through mutual understanding and respect for a diversity of cultures, beliefs and traditions.**
- 12. Provide comprehensive intercultural training for all service providers.**
- 13. Incorporate an intercultural dimension into the curriculum training of professionals such as teachers, nurses and social workers.**
- 14. Implement the recommendations of the Task Force Report on Travelling people.**

A/ Issues.

Of the many issues regarding this area we highlight the following:

- equality of access and of outcomes within the economic sphere,
- women's work should be equally remunerated with men's work,
- adequate financial remuneration for caring for children and other relatives,
- structures and procedures in careers should take account of the lifecycle of women,
- the development and implementation of family friendly policies in the work place,
- provision of facilities for women in employment e.g. crèches,
- access to services i.e. public transport and relevant education.

B/ How can Progress be Measured?

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- Levels of employment e.g. (Professional, skilled, semi skilled, unskilled)
- Salary and pay levels
- Type of work (status, part time)
- Levels of unemployment and underemployment
- Level of provision of accessible childcare services
- Commission research projects to ascertain why promotional structures in careers are not favourable to women.
- Research the role of trade unions in advancing this critical area of concern.
- Measure the degree to which terms and conditions of work and promotional opportunities are family friendly.

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key actions.

1. Tackle low pay

We advocate three actions to tackle low pay, firstly, make tax credits refundable, substantially increase tax credits and take all those on the minimum wage out of the tax net.

2. Encourage and facilitate ongoing education and training of women.

3. Social Economy Programme

The Social Economy is that part of the economy that falls between the public and private sector; a good example would be 'meals on wheels'. The Social Economy Programme can maximize the opportunity to generate sustainable employment by targeting disadvantaged communities and long-term unemployed while providing much needed local services. This programme should be widely promoted, expanded and adequately resourced. More work is needed to speed up the processes so that the targets set in this programme are met.

4. Community Employment Scheme.

Ensure adequate numbers of places on active labour market programmes such as Community Employment.

5. Terms and conditions of work that are family friendly.

6. The implementation of the Partnership 2000 Women's Access to Labour Market Opportunities Report.

7. Provision of support facilities for women in employment (crèches etc)

8. Implement the recommendations of the Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities- A Strategy for Equality.

9. CAIT (Community Application of Information Technology)

As part of PPF (Programme for Prosperity and Fairness), the CAIT (Community Application of Information Technology) initiative provides funding for community and voluntary sector projects that harness the new information and communication technologies for social development purposes. This has proved very successful. We recommend that this initiative be expanded.

10. The Equality for Women measure in the National Development Plan.

Measures such as these we are suggesting here are both time consuming and costly. Therefore it is essential that this N.D.P measure receive adequate funding and that outcomes be given the required time for implementation.

11. National Employment Action Plan 2002

The guiding principle underlying Ireland's National Employment Action Plan 2002 should be to ensure that all people have meaningful work. It is critical that the National Employment Action Plan should be both poverty proofed and gender proofed.

11. Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Asylum seekers should be granted the right to work. Recognition should be given to the qualifications of asylum seekers and refugees.

Women in Power and Decision Making

A/ Issues.

Among the many issues we highlight the following:

- that it is critical that women's vision for the world is articulated leading to a reform of structures,
- that there are opportunities and resources to participate in decision-making arenas and processes at local, regional, National and International levels,
- that 'female family' structures be developed.

B/ How can Progress be Measured?

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- The trend in the number of women involved in party political activity and the roles they play.
- The trend in the number of women involved at all levels of decision-making i.e. the various institutions in Irish society, e.g. business, finance, media, academia and religions.
- The degree to which gender balance is achieved in memberships of Boards, State Agencies etc.
- Data collection on the participation of women in the community and voluntary sector and their involvement in the decision-making structures of this sector.

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key actions.

- 1. Research the political issues that of interest to women.**
- 2. Research the degree to which women's interest in politics is developed.**
- 3. Develop programmes to encourage and develop skills for women to participate in decision-making structures.**
- 4. To support and develop the community and voluntary sector.**
- 5. Provide financial support and other services to enable women to participate in decision-making structures.**

- 6. Promotion of women in the formal political systems at National Government and local level.**
- 7. Research and publicise Institutions, which promote women in decision-making.**
- 8. Research the barriers to women's participation in this critical area of concern.**
- 9. Research the role of religions regarding women in power and decision-making.**
- 10. Support and develop Local Agenda 21, which provides a framework and process to address this critical area of concern.**

8/ Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women.

A/ Issues.

We highlight the following issues:

- appropriate institutional mechanism to ensure equality,
- to establish structures that are both efficient and effective.

B/ How can Progress be Measured?

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- The degree to which structures are established that ensure that the plan is monitored, implemented and evaluated.
- The degree to which there is involvement of women at local, regional and national levels.
- The degree to which these structures are resourced.

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key actions.

- 1. Establishment of a National Monitoring and Evaluation Committee on this issue.**
- 2. The production of a progress report on a regular basis. This report, as well as indicating progress would indicate barriers and gaps etc.**

A/ Issues.

This critical area of concern needs to guarantee women the following seven basic rights:

- **Right to sufficient income in their own right,**
- **To ensure that all women have a right to meaningful work,**
- **To ensure the right to adequate and appropriate accommodation,**
- **Right to essential healthcare,**
- **Right to relevant education,**
- **Participation Rights.**

Right to participate in the cultural life and heritage of their community and wider society. This includes the right of minorities to have their culture respected. It also includes the right to participate in the decision- making processes that affect their lives and contribute to the developing of society.

B/ How can Progress be Measured?

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- The degree to which progress is being made in guaranteeing these rights through legislative and Constitutional arrangements.
- Trends in the numbers of women homeless and in sheltered accommodation.
- The length of time a woman is on a Local Authority waiting list for accommodation.

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key actions.

1. Legislation

The Irish Constitution should make provision for real, effective recognition of social, economic and cultural rights.

2. Policies

All policies at local, regional and national level should be formulated to ensure that citizen's social, economic and cultural rights are respected, protected and facilitated.

3. Education

The education of all, particularly, our young people regarding humans provides the fora to discuss, explore and promote this whole dimension of human rights at National and International level.

10/

Women and the Media

A/ Issues.

This critical area of concern should ensure that:

- the dignity of women is upheld by treating them as equals in Irish Society,
- that the mass media should reflect this perception,
- equal treatment of men and women,
- how issues regarding women are portrayed, content and timing in the electronic media and position in print media.

B/ How can Progress be Measured?

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- Gender balance on all issues, political, economic, cultural and social.
- Ongoing review of the standards in advertising and other forms of media especially in regard to how women are portrayed. The same holds in regard to news items, features and programmes generally
- Legislation is required to eliminate the portrayal of physical and sexual abuse of women for entertainment.

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key actions.

- 1. More women involved in the decision making process in the media.**
- 2. Research the barriers to women's involvement in the media.**
- 3. Provision of media education and training courses**
- 4. Awareness Campaigns on these issues.**
- 5. The Equality Authority or the establishment of a similar authority could serve as a means to address these issues.**
- 6. Use media to promote the contribution of women in all areas of society i.e. sport.**

A/ Issues.

To ensure that all developments within which women live and work are consistent with environmental sustainability

B/ How can Progress be Measured?

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- Housing quality.
- Disability access to accommodation, facilities, transport, amenities etc.
- Provision of care for older women
- Levels of childcare and elder care facilities.
- Access to services and facilities i.e. health centers, shops, schools, post office, parks, sporting and leisure facilities for all age groups of women.
- Social participation such as enjoyment of and participation in arts, local culture and heritage.
- Crime rates and fear of crime
- Access to the internet
- Progress in ensuring an effective and efficient transport system citywide and nationally.

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key action.

1. Through Agenda 21 process in Local Government.

Local Agenda 21 is a process that facilitates sustainable development within a community. It is an approach, based upon collaboration and participation, which respects the social, cultural, economic and environmental needs of the present and future citizens of a community in all its diversity and which relates that community and its future to the regional, national and international community of which it is a part. Local Agenda 21 guidelines have been recently revised against the backdrop of significant local government reform in recent years, i.e. County Development Boards, Strategic Policy Committees etc. The framework and process of Local Agenda 21 provides an opportunity to address this critical area of women and the environment at local, regional and national level. However, the participation of women requires resourcing and support i.e. relevant training opportunities, childcare provision etc.

12/

The Girl-Child

A/ Issues.

The issues include:

- that the dignity of childhood is respected and protected by the provision of a safe, loving, caring and educational environment in which the girl-child can grow to her full potential,
- rights of all children particularly girls be promoted.

B/ How can Progress be Measured?

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- Trends in the Trafficking of children both reported and prosecuted cases.
- Trends in the numbers of girls in prostitution
- All other forms of child abuse reported.
- The trends in early school leaving (without a qualification).
- The trends in the participation of girls in social activities such as youth clubs and sports etc.
- Trends in child poverty
- Trends in teenage pregnancy
- Trends in homelessness
- Trends in alcohol and drug abuse

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key actions.

- 1. Sufficient resources are made available to develop services for all families.**
- 2. Co-operation between the law enforcement officers across Europe and Internationally.**
- 3. Provision of services and supports for children to ensure their protection and development.**
- 4. Prosecutions of traffickers**
- 5. Legislation guaranteeing the rights of children.**

6. Implement the National Youth Work Development Plan and guarantee the support and resources to do so.

7. Adequate resources should be made available to resource and expand the provision of temporary accommodation to homeless young girls. These services need to be backed up with additional provisions such as drop-in centers, youth clubs, access to education, training etc.

8. Educational Credits

Introduce a system where young people receive educational credits up to their 21st birthday. If these credits are not used when they reach the age of 21, they should be held as a fund for future use in further training and educational opportunities.

9. Policy guidelines for people working with young people.

Ensure that all organizations and service providers to young people have operational policy guidelines that ensure the safety; well-being and rights of the child are respected, facilitated and protected. Such guidelines should cover areas such as:

- safe recruitment practices,
- safe management practices and policies
- detailed actions to be taken when an allegation of child abuse is made against an employee or volunteer.

Awareness raising programmes, training, support and resources should be provided to organizations in order to establish good policy practice and to build on existing practice through regular reviews and evaluations.

10. Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

11. That the Irish Government uses its position in International Fora to influence international policy in these areas.

13/ **Women, Religions and Spirituality**

A/ Issues.

As stated in the introduction, the twelve areas identified from the Beijing Platform for Action are comprehensive however an area of concern not identified is that of 'Women, Religions and Spirituality'. The churches and Religious Institutes in Ireland remain significant carriers of meaning. The religious dimension in an individual's life is inextricably related to all other aspects of the person's personality and their relationships. Many people are experiencing a time of spiritual crises. People who feel alienated from religious institutions are seeking to satisfy their religious needs through secularized means. It is our view that 'Women, Religions and Spirituality' should be included as the thirteenth area of critical concern.

We believe that spirituality is at the heart of culture. CORI Justice Commission favours a broad understanding of spirituality. We see spirituality as the 'habitual stance' of the person; it is what shapes and moves the person and influences her/his relationships. These relationships include self, people, environment and God. This is a dynamic and inclusive understanding of spirituality that recognizes that every person has a spirituality. It influences all their decisions and actions. Whether this spirituality is acknowledged and how it is articulated will vary with the person. Transferring this understanding of spirituality to the social group or society helps us to see society in a larger context of meaning and value.

Below we outline how progress could be measured and how the ideals of the Beijing Platform For Action could be advanced in Future.

B/ How can Progress be Measured?

Among the measures of progress we suggest the following:

- The formal opportunities afforded to women to explore these issues by Religions.
- Informal opportunities afforded to women to explore their issues (yoga, transcendental meditation).
- The number of educational programmes and courses available to women to develop their spirituality and the resources available to develop similar initiatives.
- The extent to which the participation of women in courses are resourced.
- Numbers interested in and numbers participating in courses and programmes.
- The degree to which research into the social impacts of religions on women's lives is resourced and researched.

C/ How might the ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action be advanced in the Future?

The ideals in the Beijing Platform For Action would be advanced through the following key actions.

- 1. Religions have responsibility to promote and facilitate women in exploring their spirituality.**
- 2. Providing the resources necessary and the educational opportunities for women to explore spirituality.**
- 3. Build on existing works and studies in the area of Women, Religions and spirituality.**
- 4. Establish an independent public institute on the study of religions and development, particularly, their impact on women, justice issues and spirituality.**

Values.

CORI's interest in the development of a National Plan for Women is deeply rooted in Christian values. Christianity subscribes to the values of both human dignity and the centrality of the community. The person is seen as growing and developing in a context that includes other people and the environment. Justice is understood in terms of relationships. The Christian scriptures understand justice as a harmony that comes from fidelity to right relationships with God, people and the environment. A just society is one that is structured in such a way as to promote these right relationships so that human rights are respected, human dignity is protected, human development is facilitated and the environment is respected and protected.

Despite some progress being made in recent years regarding the status of women in Irish society, inequality between women and men continues to pervade many aspects of Irish life. While the aspiration that everyone should enjoy the good life, and the good will to make it available to all, is an essential ingredient in a just society, the good life will not happen without the deliberate establishment of structures to facilitate its development, particularly for women.

Conclusion

In this Submission CORI Justice Commission has presented its analysis of the key issues regarding each area of critical concern. We have also proposed that a thirteenth area of concern – Women, Religions and Spirituality, should be included in the development of a National Plan for Women. We have identified practical indicators of measuring progress and outlined a wide range of policy initiatives that should form the basis of any movement towards building a just and more inclusive society for women in the years immediately ahead.

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