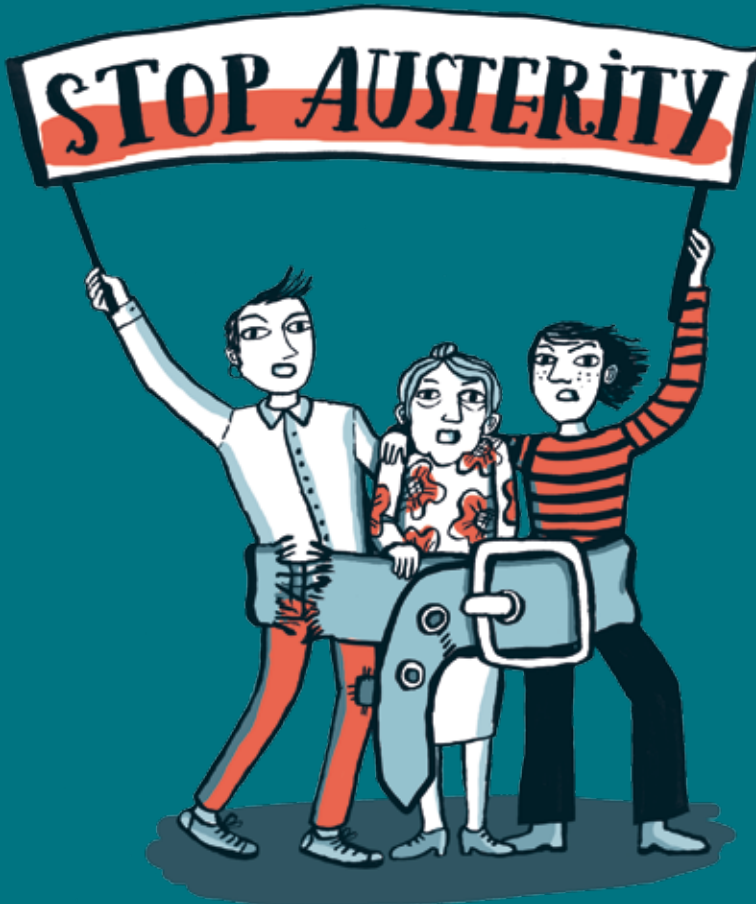


I R E L A N D

AUSTERITY, GENDER INEQUALITY AND FEMINISM AFTER THE CRISIS

# Irish Feminist Approaches against Austerity Regimes

Mary P Murphy and Pauline Cullen





AUSTERITY, GENDER  
INEQUALITY AND FEMINISM  
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ROSA-LUXEMBURG-STIFTUNG

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## Executive Summary

**W**e find austerity is gendered and that, following almost a decade of austerity, the position of women in Ireland has regressed economically and socially. Different dynamics shape gendered austerity which in some instances re-feminises care, while in other instances forces a process of de-domestication for some women. Contradictions in state policy produce ambiguities that arise when family policy creates logics that pull women towards caring roles while labour market policy activates women into employment despite key questions about the durability of the care regime. We find progress on some social issues through legislative changes (Marriage Equality, recognition of Traveller ethnicity and gender recognition). For vulnerable women we see less progress and more historical continuity in reliance on institutionalization as a response to social problems, including homelessness, disability and criminal offences.

Legislative progress has been largely revenue neutral and consistent with the underlying logics of neoliberalism and the overall common sense of a crisis 'within' rather than 'of' capitalism. Key narratives of gender equality reinforce the business case and downplay more radical versions; demands which situate feminism within a class project are rarely visible. Irish feminist approaches against austerity illustrate a range of complex realities and responses. Political responses have to be understood in the context of processes of de-politicisation and de-democratisation. Processes at an EU level weakened the commitment to gender equality as a goal, with the case for gender equality increasingly understood through a business lens. This translates into the national level where we see a weakening of both state and civil society infrastructure and a narrower, instrumentalised state approach to gender equality. We note tensions within feminism as both liberal

and radical versions respond in distinct ways to these trends creating different alliances with the state and forms of left politics.

These varying resistances and contradictions reflect the diverse realities experienced and strategies employed by different classes of women and varying levels of intersectionality, raising questions of 'what and whose crisis?' While the two are interrelated, women appear to respond at two distinct levels, campaigning against austerity and specifically for sexual and reproductive freedoms, sometimes together but more often separately. Strategies that can find common ground between these forces of feminism are more likely to create critical mass and attract a wider range of left alliances and overcome the fragmentation so far evident in Irish feminist approaches to austerity.

# Introduction

**T**his paper is one of a number of national case studies commissioned by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Europe on the current situation of women under austerity regimes in Europe, the impact of societal changes concerning gender roles and images, and body politics or autonomy. This Irish country study proceeds by first outlining the impact of austerity measures on women. We proceed to outline key legislative changes over the last five years and provide an account of the corresponding public discourse about such change. We use an intersectional approach to analyse underlying societal changes and impact as well as an analysis of conflicts and resistance addressing these changes. The final section asks how left actors (parties, civil society actors) can address the nexus between austerity and gender relations. We explore what a feminist approach for an economic, financial, social policy and/or an alternative to austerity which provides gender justice might look like,<sup>1</sup> what left actors should demand and struggle for and how such allies might co-operate.

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<sup>1</sup> Feminist Review special issue Feminism and the Politics of Austerity <https://link.springer.com/journal/41305/109/1/page/1>.



# Irish political architecture and political economy

**Ireland has a centralised** governance structure with a strong cabinet and weak parliament, and Irish local government is among the weakest in Europe; this institutional framework is heavily gendered (Connolly 2013). The Proportional Representation Single Transferable Vote (PRSTV) electoral system is associated with a localist and clientistic political culture and gendered candidate selection processes (Bacik 2009). Irish political culture is characterised by progressive incrementalism and consensus policymaking (Kirby and Murphy 2011), as well as anti-intellectualism and a strong ideology of both the market and charity (Lynch et al. 2016, p. 23).

While there have been crisis-related electoral upheavals, with redistribution of votes to and within the left (see below), to some degree the centrist nature of Irish political cleavage has held over the crisis (Murphy 2016a). There remains an absence of a strong critical left or feminist analysis of public policy (Lynch et al. 2016, p. 263). Irish policy-making veto points include a bicameral parliament, and the 1937 constitution, which only weakly articulates social and economic rights, is heavily gendered in style and content and is a focus of feminist campaigns for reform. An early consequence of crisis was the collapse in 2009 of national wage agreements and the 2011 dissolution of Ireland's social partnership institutions. However decades-long personal networks and relationships survive and maintain policy consensus consolidating forms of path dependency, giving a strong sense of continuity over the crisis (Murphy and Dukelow 2016). Power was centralised through the Economic Management Council (EMC) comprised of four senior Ministers from 2011-2016. The International Committee on Civ-

il and Political Rights (2014) strongly recommended action on gender equality and greater participation of women in Irish public and private life (CCPR 2014, p. 3). Despite the introduction in 2016 of a gender quota for national electoral candidates, Ireland occupies 80<sup>th</sup> place in the global league of parliamentary inequality, as women comprise 22% of the national parliament and 16 % of local authority members.

Ireland is an open highly globalized economic regime with a hybrid welfare system that combines strong liberal characteristics with conservative and catholic features. Devitt (2016) describes the Irish welfare state as characterized by 'Catholic Liberal Familialism'; others describe a strong variant of the male breadwinner regime (Loftus and Murphy 2015). Different actors, policies and institutions combine to shape this particular brand of patriarchy, gender regime and its approach to austerity. International competitiveness is central to the Irish economic model, the small open economy operates a low corporate tax rate that attracts a disproportionate level of foreign direct investment (FDI) (Kirby and Murphy 2011). Dependence on FDI has specific consequences for tax policy, collective bargaining, labour legislation, health and safety and environmental regulations, all of which impact on the working and living conditions of women and gender relations. Specifically, a low tax economy lacks capacity to fund socially necessary reproductive and care work. Such work remains feminized in the sphere of the private household (and even more so after austerity).

In November 2017 Ireland, with some South-European countries, came under the regime of the European Central Bank and European Commission along with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (the Troika). It regained economic growth faster than the South-European countries and exited the financial crisis in late 2013 but continues to use external regulations and the EU Fiscal Treaty (2012) as an opportunity to implement and legitimate neoliberal policies. Ireland remains cognitively locked into balanced national budgets and avoidance of new public debts, a condition of permanent austerity (Murphy 2014a).

## *Impact of austerity measures on women*

### 2.1 Governmental bodies/budgets for women issues, cuts in public spending and gendered examination Troika or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Key institutions governing the Irish budgetary process are visibly gendered in both composition and public narratives (Murphy 2014a). There has been no formal gender analysis of Irish budgets or the Troika MOU but feminist analysis shows a highly gendered impact. To date there has been no gender proofing of policy, budgets or practice and little recognition of key international commitments to do this (EBC 2013; IHREC 2017; and Murphy 2017b,c). Women are more likely to be in receipt of state income support, to be in public sector employment and to use public services (Murphy 2017b). As such the political choice to address fiscal deficits in a two to one ratio by way of expenditure cuts rather than raising revenue has immediate gendered impacts.

Unlike previous crises, in this crisis initial gender gaps in employment and poverty tended to narrow due to an early levelling down of employment and decline in earnings among men (Barry and Conroy 2013). However, over time women became more severely affected as fiscal consolidation curtailed service sector jobs, public sector job cuts increased and social expenditure became more restrictive and selective. Pressure was pushed back onto communities and families where women traditionally serve as care buffers and managers of reduced family budgets. Changes to lone parent's payments and child benefit particularly impacted on women and women's experience of low pay intensified. The disproportionate gendered impact of budgets was highlighted by TASC (2011), Barry and Conroy (2013) and Murphy (2014a) and confirmed in 2014 by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Equality Authority which showed how tax and benefit chang-

es reduced the individual income of women more than men, particularly among women on lower incomes (Keane et al. 2014, p. 5). A 2009 Universal Social Charge (since modified) was also regressive for the low paid, the majority of whom were women (Barry and Conroy 2013).

Ireland has experienced cuts in welfare, childcare and health care; disinvestment in the wider care infrastructure leaves women doing unpaid care work while working in low paid care work. While Ireland always had a mixed welfare system the decline in provision from the third sector and churches and the shift to privatized delivery has commodified social and public infrastructure including schools, crèches, homes, hospitals and care for the elderly. Disproportionate cuts to funding (in the order of 40 %) for some women's groups (Harvey 2014), means the overall feminist architecture remains badly damaged with major challenges for left-based feminist resistance and mobilization. Lynch et al. (2016) describe a 'careless state' with high levels of pain and mental distress, where female self-harm increased by 26 % from 2008-2012. Institutionalised forms of 'care' including state responses to homelessness that involve warehousing families, often female headed, in forms of institutional provision have been characterized as forms of 'structural violence' (Hearne and Murphy 2017).

## 2.2 UN 2030 SDG, EU Gender Equality Strategy, CEDAW reports/recommendations

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have yet to have a significant impact on policy formulation in the Irish context. Despite a July 2018 schedule to report its national review on progress on the SDGs at the UN, the Irish state has yet to publish an Irish National 2030 action plan (Coalition 2030 Alliance, 2017). However, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) is currently developing a set of indicators based on the UN SDGs and these may be gender disaggregated. Some SDGs are outlined in the National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG).<sup>1</sup>

EU initiatives on gender equality have been characterized as narrow in focus and lacking in specific targets (Jacquot 2017; Cullen and

1 2017-2020, for example SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 8 on environmental equality and SDG 10 advancing economic equality.



Murphy 2017). This limited framework is somewhat emulated in the recent NSWG (see below). The European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020) is reflected in statements of various government departments while the 2017 NSWG reflects Article 3 (3) of the Treaty on European Union as well as the current strategy statement of the European Commission in the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019<sup>2</sup>. The NSWG has been cautiously welcomed by the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) for its recommendations on family leave, affordable childcare and pay and pensions, a Women's Health Action Plan and a commitment to gender budgeting. However, this is critiqued for the aspirational nature of commitments and its lack of specific timelines or targets. Implementation requires significant investment and prioritisation of resources from across government (NWCI 2017).

March 2017 CEDAW recommendations to Ireland reflected crucial gaps in Ireland's compliance with international obligations. Specific recommendations require: immediate attention to Access to Justice in Relation to Historical Abuses of Women's Rights;<sup>3</sup> ratification of the Istanbul Convention and introduction of a specific definition of domestic violence and other emerging forms of gender-based violence such as online stalking and harassment; state action for indigenous Traveller women; addressing overcrowding and alternatives to custody for women in detention; and ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).<sup>4</sup> Other points of action require measures to address the impact of austerity measures on social benefits for women, particularly disadvantaged women and pensioners, and extension of the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act of 2012 to local government elections. Most of these issues reflect recommendations and argument in the NWCI CEDAW Shadow report<sup>5</sup> and the IHREC CEDAW submission.<sup>6</sup>

2 This prioritizes the following areas: equal economic independence for women and men; equal pay for work of equal value; equality in decision-making; dignity, integrity and ending gender-based violence; and promoting gender equality beyond the EU.

3 Magdalene Laundries' Symphysiotomy and Mother and Baby Homes.

4 [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fIRL%2fCO%2f6-7&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fIRL%2fCO%2f6-7&Lang=en).

5 [http://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWCI\\_CEDAW\\_SHADOW\\_REPORT\\_2017.pdf](http://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWCI_CEDAW_SHADOW_REPORT_2017.pdf).

6 <https://www.ihrec.ie/un-publishes-assessment-irelands-womens-rights-equality-record/>.

In summary there are knowledge deficits regarding the longitudinal impacts of austerity; some issues like homelessness are emerging late in the crisis and others like pensions cuts will emerge over a generational time frame. We find gender infrastructure, both national and local, is damaged with a decline in the policy capacity of organisations working on gender and equality issues. There are also generational divisions and splits within the feminist left. Crucially we see arrested development due to social disinvestment in services. Using an intersectional lens we see a significant burden on those women already experiencing disadvantage, and a cumulative form of structural violence. This is reinforced through gendered, classed, and racialized subjectivities where women including lone parents, ethnic and racial minority women are the scapegoats for social problems. Women also act as the safety valves as they compensate for the material and social deficits created by structural adjustment. Finally women are subjected to the social controls inherent in austerity-led institutional and paternal approaches to social disadvantage.

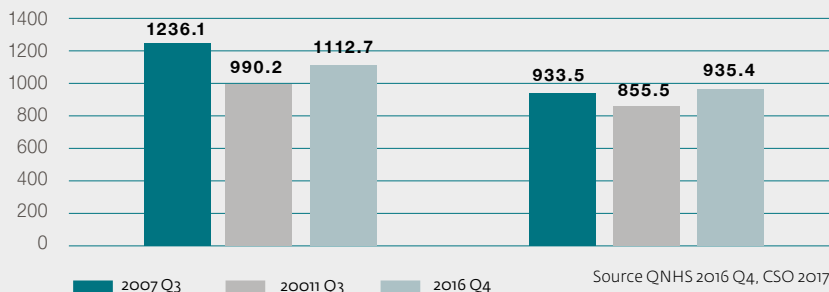
### 2.3 Gendered analysis of unemployment and labour market participation, gender pay gap, women working in domestic work, black market

Mass unemployment began in the male construction sector and women were initially sheltered from the effects of the recession due to job segregation, apparent progress in female labour market participation was thus achieved by a levelling down rather than levelling up between genders (Barry and Conroy 2013). However, by 2011, job loss extended to sectors with a high concentration of women workers (retail and hospitality), and women have stayed unemployed longer and are more likely on average to return to lower paying jobs (Kinsella 2017, p. 10). Graph 1 shows women are less likely to be employed. The pre-crisis employment rate for men in Ireland having peaked at 78 % before the crisis fell sharply in 2009 to 66.8 % and declined to a low of 62.4 % in 2012 before stabilising at 65.7 % over 2014-17. Women's employment rate fell from the 2007 high of 60.6 % 55.2 % in 2012 before rising to 55.9 % in the first quarter of 2014 and reaching 60.1 % in 2017 (CSO 2017). However 34 % of these women are in part-time employment, with women compris-

ing 80 % of part time employees (Murphy 2017a). The gender pay gap increased from 12.2 % in 2012 to 14.1 % in 2014, the pension gap remains severe at 34 % (IHREC 2017).

**Graph 1.** Persons employed 2007, 2011, 2016

**Persons aged 15 years and over in employment (thousand)**



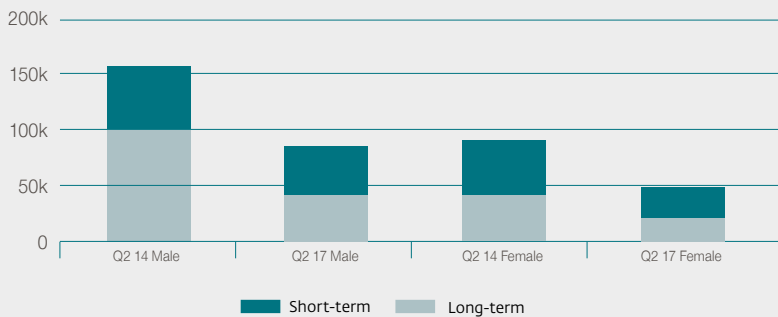
While a 2010 cut to the minimum wage was reversed in 2011 overall the rate was frozen over 2007 to 2015 impacting more women than men. Low pay had been growing in Ireland since 2004 with Ireland the most unequal for market income of all OECD countries with 30.3 % of employees (approx. 400,000) below the Eurostat low-pay threshold (two-thirds of median hourly earnings) €12.20 (OECD 2015). Only 20 % of Irish women earn more than €50,000 per year and 60 % were low-paid in 2013, with almost three in every ten female full-time workers low-paid (Murphy 2017a). In 2015 the real median equalised disposable income for males was €20,014 in 2015, 3.7 % higher than the corresponding figure for females (€19,292) (CSO 2016).

Limited state-funded childcare and crisis-related labour market policy responses have increased the likelihood that women are locked into combining unpaid care work and low pay. This is particularly the case for lone parents, for migrant women and for young women. Loftus and Murphy (2015) and Murphy (2017a) use the term 'flex-insecurity' to describe a number of precarity traps relating to the male breadwinner tax system, welfare and activation regimes as well as significant occupational segregation, as women are found in five dominant low paid sectors (Collins and Murphy 2016). Loftus and Murphy (2015) and Spillane (2016) report significant psychological strain in feminised low-paid precarious employment. Cuts to the social welfare system have

eroded these workers' social protection entitlements.

We see a disproportionate emphasis on the male experiences of crisis and an absence of gendered assessments of public policy responses to crisis. A neglect of gender equality targets and erosion of gender equality mechanisms (Barry 2014) contributed to a reversal in gender equality gains (Duwry and Finn 2014). Patriarchal norms that place caring responsibilities upon women, coupled with inadequate supports for working parents, worsen work-life conflict for working mothers. Cuts in state-spending on public services, where women workers are concentrated, contribute an additional burden in the deterioration of working conditions, while cuts to flexi-time disproportionately reduce work-life balance options for female public sector workers.

**Graph 2.** Number of persons employed by sex and gender Q1 2014, Q2 2017



Source QNHS Q2 2017, CSO, 2017

Unemployment figures consistently record higher male unemployment throughout the recession. In June 2017 the unemployment rate was 7.1 % for males, unchanged from May 2017 (down from 9.4 % in June 2016), while for women it was 5.4 % (down from 6.9 % in June 2016) suggesting a slower decline in female unemployment. Murphy (2016c, 2017a) argues labour market policy responses to unemployment at first ignored female unemployment focusing as they did on a male breadwinner or careless version of activation entitled *Pathways to Work* and leaving most women ineligible to return to work supports. Subsequent policy shifts incorporated first lone parents and more recently partners of unemployed claimants in the *Pathways to Work* programme (DEASP 2017). This turn towards activation of women is less a case of re-do-

mestication and more a case of de-domestication, where women, many of them carers, are placed under the scope and expectation of activation measures. While these policy shifts took place in the context of a 2016 investment in childcare, there remains a serious deficit (NWCI 2017), leaving women forced to 'work like a man, but care like a woman' (Rubery 2015).

The situation for domestic workers, who are predominantly ethnic minority women, has been particularly perilous with use of zero hour contracts in both state and private sector care industries and a significant level of exploitative working conditions reported by unions and NGOs, particularly among female migrant workers (Cullen and Murphy 2016). Despite difficulties organizing in the informal economy domestic workers achieved significant legal victories addressing the use of zero hour contracts in state contracts and requiring payment of the minimum wage to au pairs (MRCI 2016). Ireland's informal economy is thought to be relatively small at 14 % of the GDP,<sup>7</sup> but women are structurally likely to be found in un-insured work as 'relatives assisting' in small business enterprises and family farms, in domestic child care work and unquantified new forms of 'gig' economy work.

7 <https://www.atkearney.com/documents/10192/1743816/The+Shadow+Economy+in+Europe+2013.PDF>.



## The gendered impact of cuts to social welfare

**C**allan et al.'s (2015) analysis of budgets 2009-2016 showed that most income groups incurred losses between 7.5 % and just over 10 %.<sup>1</sup> Budgets 2009 and 2012 marked a series of structural reforms to payments for the unemployed that made it more difficult for part-time and atypical workers to qualify for support and reduced the level of payments due to them. Given women are over-represented in low-paid, atypical and part-time work these changes have a gendered impact. Poverty rates are relatively close for men and women nonetheless as Graph 2 shows women experience higher pro-rata rates of deprivation, consistent poverty and risk of poverty than men, and this pattern intensified from 2014-2015 (CSO 2016; SILC 2015). Sub-groups of women are particularly vulnerable: in 2015, the consistent poverty rate for women was 9.1 % compared to 8.3 % for men while for lone parents it reaches 26.2 % (compared to 8.7 % for the population), while 57.9 % of lone parents experienced deprivation in 2015 (CSO 2016), more than double the average 25.5 %.

Graph 2. Poverty rates, men and women

	2014	2014	2014	2014	2015	2015	2015	2015
	% population	Risk of poverty	Deprivation poverty	Consistent poverty	% population	Risk of poverty	Deprivation poverty	Consistent poverty
<b>State</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Male</b>	49.5	48.8	47.6	48.4	49.4	49.3	47.1	47.1
<b>Female</b>	50.5	51.2	52.4	51.6	50.6	50.7	52.9	52.9

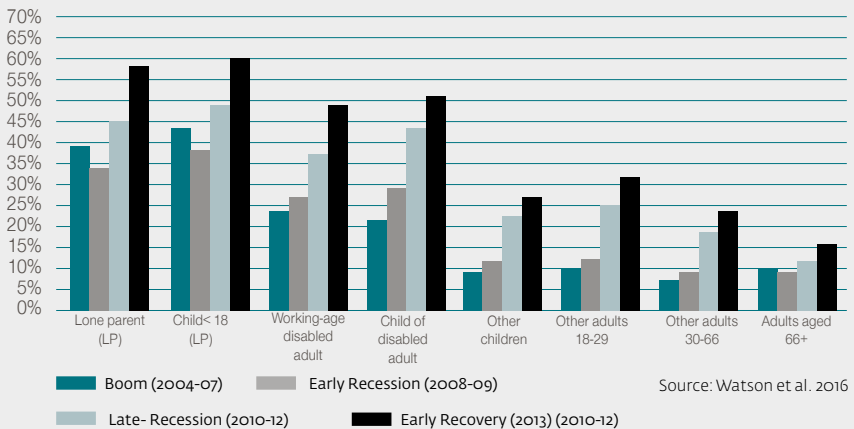
Source CSO 2016, SILC 2015

<sup>1</sup> The greatest policy-induced losses occurred in the top income group, at just over 14 %, and the lowest income group, at 12.75 % and there were also a significant impact for the young unemployed. Employed lone parents lost 9.8. % while non-earning lone parents lost 10.7 percent.

### 3.1 Maternity leave, changes in child benefit/family benefit and childcare, care time for pension

Austerity has impacted on gender relations and the gendered distribution of paid employment, unpaid housework and caring tasks.<sup>2</sup> Women's payments were targeted for specific cuts, criteria for lone parents tightened and access to welfare was made more conditional on seeking paid employment (some rules were subsequently mitigated in Budgets 2015-2018). Maternity benefit was taxed and restricted while Budget 2014 restricted a lone parent tax credit worth €1,650 per year to the main carer (Murphy 2017c). A 2017 Indecon Independent Review of the Amendments to the One-parent Family Payment (OPF) since January 2012 (DEASP 2017b) found increased poverty risks for lone parents (see Graph 3 below) and directly attributed this increase to loss of access to OPF payments. The state had made considerable savings of €45m as a result of denying lone parents access to their traditional source of income support. Further employment increases were negligible with welfare dependency decreasing by only 3 % amongst lone parents (DEASP 2017b).

Graph 3. Trends in basic deprivation



<sup>2</sup> This re-privatization of care and reproductive work, increasing reliance on the gendered division of labour and gendered knowledge of care is a form of crisis management by subjectivation (Hajek and Opratko 2016). Austerity policies draw on gendered allocation and (re) allocation of social responsibility that insists on women as caretakers in terms of motherhood and in care for the elderly. Techniques of governance work to assign gendered



Budget 2009 announced a phased withdrawal of the universal payment to mothers with children, Child Benefit (CB). A payment that had supported families with pre-school children to support childcare costs, the Universal Early Childcare Supplement was halved and then abolished at the end of 2009. However, this was replaced in 2010, with a universal (school) year of free half-time pre-school Early Education (ECCE) which in 2016 was extended to two years. CB was cut by a further 10% in 2010. In 2011, CB rates were cut by a further 7% while Budget 2012 announced the phasing out of higher CB rates for larger families and introduced cuts in other mean-tested child education income supports. Further CB and means-tested cuts were implemented in 2013, so that cumulatively, rates have been cut by 22% for smaller families and by a third for larger families. Budget 2015 signalled a reversal with a €5 increase in CB and an increase in back-to-school supports, while Budget 2017 introduced a significant investment in childcare (NWCI 2017).

Child poverty doubled over the crisis, a function of child benefit cuts, parental unemployment and under employment and increased charges (SILC 2015; CSO 2016), as well as the lone parents cuts discussed earlier (see Graph 3 above). Six years into the crisis there were double the number of children in consistent poverty compared to the rate of adults. Childcare investment is poor and, despite Budget 2017 innovations, Irish childcare remains the second most expensive in OECD, with consequences for older women (grandmothers in inter-generational care roles) and for working-aged women's capacity to access employment, education and training (O'Hagan 2015). Maternity leave was made taxable under the 2013 austerity budget, at a cost of €2,700 per year for almost 50,000 women per annum. While two weeks paid paternity leave was introduced in 2017 the low take-up by men illustrates the challenge of transferring care responsibilities, with men fearing work-based consequences. Budget 2012 changes in entitlement criteria for the state pension disadvantaged women (Basset

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 specific tasks and responsibilities to individuals, in this case assigning low or unpaid care work to women. This is an important part of an effective crisis management that includes gendered invocations of individuals by the state as well as the civil society, closing down opportunities for critique and including forms of crisis governance feminism that trivialise feminist concerns while further embedding a masculinised, white and elitist culture of global financial privilege (Griffin 2015).

2017), a policy where pension eligibility is determined by averaging over the entire span of working life clearly disadvantaged carers, where over 28,000 women lost up to €35 per week from their state pension. This was somewhat mitigated in early 2018 when pension entitlements were strengthened for those performing unpaid care work, but there was no plan to include retrospective payments.

## 3.2 Gendered analysis of public infrastructure spending and cuts in public services

### 3.2.1 WOMEN WORKING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Public sector cuts were achieved through public sector wage cuts implemented through various Public Service Agreements (named Croke Park and Haddington Road). The gender analysis of public sector work highlights Irish data gaps<sup>3</sup> but education and health sectors exposed to the largest cuts employed the highest proportion of women, with an 80 % share of the total at work in health, 85 % in primary education and nearly two-thirds in second level education (62 %)<sup>4</sup>. Wage cuts and pensions levies had an adverse gender impact as did the cumulative effect of reductions in overtime, premium payments, increment freezes and increased working hours for no extra pay.<sup>5</sup> There are serious data deficits regarding women's employment and earnings in the public sector. However, we know women have done less well in terms of employment than men in the period 2008 to 2015, with women's employment in public administration (down 7.8 % compared with men's 3.7 %) and rising by less in education and health. European Public Service Union (EPSU) analysis shows male employment in education increased by 7.2 % over the period, women's by only 4.2 %, while in health 26.9 % more men were employed in 2015 than in 2008, compared to 11.5 % more women. Younger male and female workers were also disadvantaged by the reduction of wages for new entrants to the feminised professions of teaching and nursing as well as a reduction in work-sharing

3 [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/government-at-a-glance-2015/women-in-public-sector-employment\\_gov\\_glance-2015-23-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/government-at-a-glance-2015/women-in-public-sector-employment_gov_glance-2015-23-en).

4 <https://www.ictu.ie/equality/gender/csostatisticson.html>.

5 <http://www.epsu.org/article/cuts-public-sector-pay-and-employment-impact-women-public-sector-o>.

and flexible working arrangements. Primary teachers (86 % women<sup>6</sup>) appointed before 2011 started at €31,213, those appointed after that started at €28,092, a cut of 10 %, and likewise for nurses. An equality audit of these proposals found a 'disproportionate and negative impact on women employed in the public sector' (Spillane 2015).

### 3.2.2 WOMEN, HOUSING AND AUSTERITY

Women experiencing chronic homelessness were a hidden population in Ireland but over the crisis women's homelessness became visible. In the Dublin region 47 % of individuals who are currently homeless are women, compare to the European norm of between 20 % and 33 % (Mayock and Bretherton 2017). These women distrust homeless services and service staff due to experiences of infantilisation, loss of autonomy and decision-making capacity leading women to 'disappear' temporarily by moving from homeless services to unsustainable precarious living situations (Mayock et al. 2015). Lack of investment in social housing, along with reduced rental subsidies, impact specifically on vulnerable families. Lone parents comprise a significant proportion (over 30 %) of both the social housing list and rent supplement recipients and are disproportionately impacted by homelessness. The capital budget for social housing construction was severely curtailed over the crisis (Hearne and Murphy 2017) with only 75 houses built in 2015 (compared to over 7,000 in 2007). Lone parents (90 % women) subsequently comprised 70 % of the peak of 1,178 (DRHE 2017) homeless households with children in 2017. Migrant families are also vulnerable to homelessness, as are women experiencing VAW.

The response of family homelessness has not been to build homes but to divert families from emergency accommodation in hotels into institutional accommodation known as family hubs (DRHE 2017). While in some respects better than hotels they have also been characterised as a form of therapeutic incarceration (Gerstel et al. 1996) where state housing policies subject families and children to forms of surveillance and social control that are repressive, pathologising and counterproductive for parents and children (Hearne and Mur-

6 <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/the-gender-gap-in-education-at-its-widest-for-50-years-1.1771782>.

phy 2017). This continues Ireland's reliance on institutionalised forms of care and is indicative of a paternalistic state still seeking to control and punish women and their children. While such family homelessness is also a function of a failed private housing market, intimate (male) partner violence also forces many women to leave their homes while some women, without the resources to leave, remain in abusive home situations.

## Rise in VAW, gender-based violence and its connection with the economic situation

**W**omen's refuges and shelters that provide domestic violence and childcare services experienced funding cuts of up to 40 %, while remaining funding is restricted to service delivery leaving VAW policy and advocacy work diminished (Harvey 2014). Essential new refuges cannot open and existing refuges struggle to maintain their services while coping with increasing demand (Spillane 2015). The number of women in Ireland accessing domestic violence services increased by 43 % to 7,400 in the period 2007-2009. In 2014 Safe Ireland argued the cutting-edge of austerity 'has compounded what was already a crisis regarding our response to violence against women in this country.' Advocacy organisations and service providers for victims of gender-based violence testify to the links between the austerity-induced housing crisis and the crisis in refuge accommodation (Cullen et al. 2017). Refuges report that women can live there for up to 18 months, creating pressure on spaces with almost 5,000 unmet annual requests for such accommodation. New forms of VAW including cyber-bullying, harassment, stalking, sexist hate crime and revenge porn (IHREC 2017). Migrant women are thought to be particularly vulnerable to VAW in the absence of legal status. Rural women also experience significant barriers to accessing refuge accommodation, women with specific needs (addiction, deafness, Roma, Traveller) also experience barriers and discrimination in accessing such services.

Evidence is mixed as to the level of causality between increased levels of violence against women and economic crisis. Some argue that rapid increases in the unemployment rate correlate with a rise in male controlling behaviour when anxiety associated with sudden macroe-

conomic downturns negatively effects relationship quality, above and beyond the effects of job loss and material hardship (Schneider et al. 2016). Women's Aid<sup>1</sup> present a nuanced account of domestic violence and recession. While economic difficulty does not cause domestic violence, austerity and poverty traps women in abusive relationships so they are more vulnerable to abuse during recession. Women reported to Women's Aid (2017) that while they experienced domestic violence before the recession, the economic downturn had led to more frequent and severe abuse.<sup>2</sup> In addition, women disclosed that abusive men were using the recession to excuse their behaviour. Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC 2012) reported a 'disturbing' year-on-year increase in calls to the National 24 Hour Helpline from victims of adult sexual violence since the recession and a 23 % increase in first-time callers to the DRCC between 2009 and 2012. At the same time rape crisis centres lost up to 31 % of their funding between 2009 and 2012, leaving them exposed to arrested development, with outdated IT systems and no capacity to operationalise targeted campaigns for ethnic minority groups.

1 <https://www.womensaid.ie/about/newsevents/faqs.html#q18>.

2 In 2016, there were 16,946 disclosures of domestic violence against women noted during 19,115 contacts with Women's Aid Direct Services. There were 11,078 incidents of emotional abuse, 3,502 incidents of physical abuse and 1,671 incidents of financial abuse disclosed. In the same year, 695 incidents of sexual abuse were disclosed to our services including 316 rapes. The Women's Aid National Helpline responded to 15,952 calls in 2016. (Women's Aid Impact Report 2016). Notably, official criminal justice data collection on gender violence including domestic violence, domestic homicide and sexual assault is poor.

## Minority rights under austerity: intersectional approach

**H**ere we draw attention to specific groups of women who experience an intersectional impact of the underinvestment and disinvestment in public infrastructure and public services in housing and accommodation, health services, appropriate prison accommodation and supports for gender mainstreaming services. Austerity has arrested the development of gender sensitive services for such vulnerable groups, sometimes reversing previous progress.

Female asylum seekers living in direct provision centres suffer not only material poverty but are also denied of the right to work, education and training. Many experience rural isolation alongside lack of information and access to legal aids and supports. Mental ill health, stress and anxiety are common and mothers are particularly stressed by barriers to effective parenting and the ability to cook for and feed their families (Akidwa 2010), and lack of access to effective maternity services and breast-feeding supports. Restrictions on international travel alongside poverty makes accessing reproductive rights particularly challenging. Women also report sexual harassment in direct provision centres and in local rural communities where they have been approached as prostitutes (DJELR 2017).

Women with disabilities suffer specific issues particularly those in institutionalized care; for example in the central mental hospital all women are in one ward, regardless of stratified need (IHREC 2017). More generally disability policy is not developed or implemented in a gender-specific way. Budget 2012 saw controversial cuts in social as-

sistance entitlements related to disability and caring.<sup>1</sup> Mental health services experienced significant disinvestment while both suicide and self-harm rates increased (IHREC 2016). While Disability Federation Ireland (DFI)<sup>2</sup> points to obligations to ensure the equal rights and advancement of women and girls with disabilities (Article 6, UNCRPD) there has been a 9.4 % cut from the Health Service Executive (HSE) funding for disability services over the period 2008-2013, with individual organisations cut in excess of these amounts. These cuts might have been worse had disability organisations not successfully fought disability benefit cuts for younger people and cuts to personal assistants. DFI (2016) also draw attention to approximately 187,127 family carers in the Republic of Ireland, two-thirds of whom are women.

Traveller and Roma women experience acute disadvantage and forms of exclusion. Traveller women comprise 22 % of the female prisoner population but less than 5 % of the Irish population. Traveller education budgets were reduced by 86.6 % over 2008 and 2013, accommodation budgets by 80 % and youth projects by 29.8 %. The Traveller Violence against Women project experienced a 20 % reduction in funding since 2008 while demand increased 56 % so many women were unable to obtain places (IHREC 2017). Roma women experience particular barriers under the habitual residence rule which limits access to social welfare payments and makes no concession in the context of domestic violence (Ibid.)= Both groups are less likely to be accommodated in or find culturally appropriate accommodation. Large families experience discrimination trying to access private rented accommodation and are more vulnerable to family homelessness. Both groups also practice early family creation, as such young women experiencing barriers to the life-long education system have less options because of states supports withdrawn over the crisis (IHREC 2016).

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1 Entitlement to Carer's Allowance was made more restrictive for non-residential carers (80 % of recipients are women). Income received as a home help is now assessed in means-tests as are social welfare payments for carers; again this impacts primarily on women combining both caring and parenting roles. Home help budgets were also cut. Budget 2013 announced a cut in the Respite Care Grant: women comprise 64 % of carers and are disproportionately impacted.

2 <https://www.disability-federation.ie/download/legacy/100daysAugust2016%20-%20Final%20version%20-%20Attachment%20to%20email%2022.08.16.pdf>.



Women in detention experience inconsistent accommodation which is often overcrowded at up to 118 % over-capacity, the most overcrowded in the state. In addition, women have no step-down facilities and no open-prison as well as no gender-sensitive service delivery ethos (IHREC 2017).

LGBTQI+ people, despite the 2015 marriage equality referendum face structural discrimination in what has been described as a still homophobic state that has cut funding for LGBTQI groups (Ibid.). Discrimination impacts on a number of areas including employment, health and housing with sexuality a likely underlying cause of youth homelessness. Budget cuts and withdrawal of philanthropic funders has left a number of LGBTQI advocacy and support groups facing closure or having to reduce services. There is no provision for transwomen in Irish prisons. One positive advance was the passing of long-awaited gender recognition legislation in 2016 (TENI 2016).



## Overview of recent legislative changes and corresponding public discourse

**LAWS ON ABORTION:** Ireland has a poor record on intimate citizenship rights for women. Denied access to safe, legal and affordable termination in Ireland, Irish women continually mobilize for a constitutional amendment to repeal the 1983 '8<sup>th</sup> amendment.<sup>1</sup> Various UN committees (ESCR, CEDAW and CAT) have all made detailed recommendations on the right to health for women in Ireland, including in relation to the legal and policy framework on reproductive rights. The public discourse on abortion has been characterised by strong divisions between pro-life and pro-choice groups. In the run up to a national referendum the issue was examined in a deliberative process by first a citizens assembly and then an all-party parliamentary committee, both these deliberative processes made similar recommendations to legislate for abortion without reason up to 12 weeks. In this context Government prepared the heads of indicative legislation which would be processed in the event of a referendum to repeal the existing constitutional ban on abortion. The May 25 2018 Constitutional Referendum to repeal the constitutional ban on abortion was passed by a two third to one third vote. Expectations of strong emotive campaigning from both 'sides'<sup>2</sup> were not realised with relatively nuanced forms of discourse throughout the campaign albeit with graphic images of foetuses used to dramatic effect by the No side.

1 A 1983 8th constitutional amendment Article 40.3.3 equates the right to life of the foetus and the mother and effectively outlawed all forms of abortion save when the life of the mother is directly at risk.

2 The YES campaign to repeal the constitutional ban worked together under a Together for Yes banner, a coalition of National Women's Council of Ireland, a Repeal the 8th Coalition and the Abortions Rights Campaign. The No campaign were largely organised around two separate groups, 'Save the Eight' and 'Love Both', who co-ordinated strategies.

**LAWS ON SEXUAL ABUSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:** Laws on sexual abuse and related legal, policy and institutional measures were contained in the Criminal Law Sexual Offences Bill 2015 which criminalized the purchase of sex and creates a separate offence of making a payment for the prostitution of a trafficked person. Public discourse in the context of the criminal law sexual offences bill was dominated by a powerful national coalition 'turn off the red light campaign' which followed the logic and discourse of its international sister campaigns and have been named 'abolitionist' by those opposing (a coalition of sex workers and allied academics). However, Spillane (2015, p. 163) notes that anyone who dissents from the majority opinion risks being dismissed as an advocate of human trafficking and violence against women. In 2017 IHREC called for attention to supports, exit strategies and monitoring for those involved in sex work. A draft Criminal Justice (victims of crime) Bill 2017 will implement the EU Victims Directive and aims to establish minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime. Public discourse about the draft Criminal Justice (victims of crime) Bill 2017 has been relatively muted with NGOs and NWCI representing victims making direct representations. A forthcoming Domestic Violence Bill will not now include a specific criminal offence of domestic violence but will include a definition of domestic violence and clarify and extend legislation on emergency barring orders and protection to victims of violence who cohabit. Public discourse about the draft Domestic Violence Bill has been dominated by NGOs (so far unsuccessfully) seeking a specific criminal offence of domestic violence.<sup>3</sup>

**MATERNITY PROTECTION ACTS:** The 2017 Social Welfare Act implemented two weeks paid paternity leave on the same basis as maternity leave. This has been publically welcomed, the focus has been on information and encouraging take-up which had been lower than anticipated at 23% (Irish Times 2017).

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<sup>3</sup> The 2018 version of the Bill has widened the definition of the crime, tightened regulations on court reporting and offered some reform the treatment of plaintiffs in the judicial system. The Bill will provide for a new criminal offence of coercive control. If the crime involves a civil partner or person with whom they are in an intimate relationship, that fact shall be an aggravating factor for the purposes of sentencing.

**PENSION LAWS:** The 2012 Social Welfare Act limited entitlement criteria for the state contributory pension and extended age eligibility to 68 years by 2020. NGOs, led by Age Action and NWCI, have campaigned against the negative gendered impact of these changes to eligibility, and these cuts were partially mitigated in early 2018. Public discourse on pensions is dominated by (male) private sector workers who lost access to defined benefit pensions as well as older workers finding no access to the state pension when reaching the 65 year old mandatory retirement age (Maher 2017).

**LAWS ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY:** Various legislative changes were required to give effect to the passing in 2015 of a constitutional referendum on marriage equality creating a gender-neutral definition of married couples for relevant welfare, taxation, property and inheritance. Referendum campaigning created a public discourse of a family-friendly, inclusive and positive narrative and employed cross-generational campaigning (Healy et al. 2016).

**LAWS ON GENDER EQUALITY:** There has been no recent gender equality legislation. Article 40 of the 1937 Irish constitution has always placed a premium on the domestic role of women and privatized care work; this gendered role of motherhood is still evident in a relatively strong male breadwinner state as seen in tax, welfare and activation policy as well as care policy and reproductive rights (Spillane 2016; Heffernan 2017). Following feminist campaigns a 2013 constitutional convention recommended a gender-neutral reform of Article 40. Government is planning for an October 2018 referendum but has not yet published wording for the constitutional amendment and there are fears the proposed wording may be relatively symbolical and continue to enshrine an essentialist view of family based care. A 2007 High Court ruling that found Ireland breached obligations under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) led in 2015 to the passing of the Gender Recognition Act enabling trans people to achieve full legal recognition of their preferred gender and a birth certificate that reflects this change. TENI, the advocacy organization for trans people continue to advocate for improvements and inclusion of young, intersex and non-binary people (TENI 2016).

**LABOUR LAWS:** During the crisis many 'anchor points' of Irish employment protection were removed in a Troika-induced reform of Ireland's employment regulation, industrial relations bodies and wage-setting mechanisms (Turner and O Sullivan 2013). The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) led campaigns against dismantling sectoral labour committees but the power of Ibec, the employer's confederation, was significantly stronger. Public discourse on zero hour contracts has been led by trade union campaigns representing women shop floor workers. A 2014 campaign was led by SIPTU trade union to protect the working conditions and pay of home helps. While these care workers were predominantly women, this campaign was not seen by SIPTU as a feminist or gendered campaign. Parallel campaigns against precarity (We're not Leaving) and the national internship programme JobBridge (Scambridge) are rarely gendered. The 2017 initial amendments to the 1997 Working Time Act to regulate use of zero hour contracts have provoked a significant backlash from employers but are likely to be enacted in 2018.

## National strategies and action plans for gender equality

**A**s discussed earlier the National Women's Strategy 2007-2016 was organized around three themes dealing with access to employment, health and social services and participation in political and public life however was considered to be relatively superficial and to have suffered from a lack of implementation and monitoring (IHREC 2017). The new National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG) was outlined earlier. The public discourse about the national strategy for women and girls was relatively low key and under the radar, with key issues focused on action planning, targets and implementation.

### 7.1 Analysis of the resulting and underlying societal changes

Social progress on gender equality is uneven while fundamentals of the underlying gender regime remain intact. Progressive legislation (political candidate gender quotas, marriage equality and Traveller ethnicity recognition) have been introduced alongside persistent vetoes on reproductive rights and until recently access to abortion and poor legislative reform on violence against women and sexual crime.

Where progress has been made it has been revenue neutral and consistent with the underlying logic of neoliberalism. Lynch et al. (2016, p. 254) describe the gendered and intersectional impact of economic inequality in Ireland that has been exacerbated by austerity. Poverty operates relationally in terms of disrespect for lifestyle and choices, lack of voice and under-resourcing of love and care work. Gendered and feminist assessments of austerity have only weakly influenced public discourse or policymaking, with women's perspectives largely excluded

from public debate about the crisis (NWCI 2012). Feminists lack access to the power resource politics of capital professional interests, Murphy (2014a) outlines masculinist language used in the implementation of the Trioka MOU and high profile academic assessments of austerity have not applied explicit feminist gender lenses (Roche et al. 2016; Hef-fernan et al. 2017). This power imbalance enables crisis management in the form of 'devaluing of caring labour such as nursing and midwifery as part of a larger debate around care work' (Spillane 2015, p. 158) and for government to further undervalue care work by cutting vital supports. An analysis of CEDAW shadow reports reveals the degree to which control of women's bodies is still a source of tension in relation to historical (Magdalene laundries, symphysiotomy, mother and baby homes) and more contemporaneously on legal acts further criminalising abortion, purchase of sex (Spillane 2015) and new institutionalised forms of housing for homeless families (Hearne and Murphy 2017).

In the public consciousness, gender equality is articulated in debates on the gender pay gap, but specifically for high paid occupations and following EU imperatives, improving the representation of women in senior decision-making roles. Such argumentation relies on an instrumental formulation of the business case for gender equality or requires it to be legitimated as producing or contributing to economic growth (Cullen and Murphy 2017).

In a socio-cultural assessment 'Negra (2014, p. 10) argues that austerity in Ireland is a project that nullified the interests of gender equity. In her deconstruction of Irish cultural products and media in this period she details a return to traditional gender roles in popular Irish culture illustrated by the 'adjusting man and the abiding mammy'. Cullen and Murphy (2016) in turn highlight the use of essentialist language and maternalism in defensive campaigns against cuts in supports for lone parents and families.

While women are absorbing higher levels of care work, there is little evidence of a large scale withdrawal of women from the labour market back into the private and domestic sphere. As such the impact of austerity on gender roles is mixed. While we see no withdrawal of women to the unpaid labour market we do see an intensification of precarious work patterns and underemployment for some women



(Loftus and Murphy 2016). Amongst young women there is a strong movement to challenge gender stereotypes and a vibrant LGBTQI sector which despite austerity cuts has created a strong public discourse, often via social media, about gender roles and images, body and sexuality policies, and the rights of self-determination. This is evident in key cultural contributions such as the Abortion Papers (Quilty and Kennedy et al. 2016), safe city posters in Dublin City, feminist theatre and performance and Slut Walks in various towns (O’Keefe 2016).

Self-determination is also evident in campaigns for sovereignty, as a reaction to the Trioka and EU Fiscal Treaty in 2012, albeit little of this public discourse is gendered. Feminists and women’s organisations engaged with the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, a founding moment of the Irish state (Murphy 2016; NWCI 2017). Byrne (2016) called for a ‘Coalition of the Belligerent’ to usher in the transformative values of the 1916 Rising. Following the UK Brexit referendum prochoice campaigners argue the loss of the common travel area between the UK and the Republic of Ireland under Brexit may lead to later abortions (Minihan 2017), and human rights activists point to impact on fundamental rights in the peace negotiation brokered in Northern Ireland known as the Good Friday Agreement.

## 7.2 Analysis of conflicts and resistance to these changes (intersectional analysis) - Ideology as a constraint on solidarity

Overall women’s groups have responded less politically and more by adapting to ensure delivery of remaining services. In this sense ‘survival’ is prioritised. Gendered mobilizations tend to be characterised by instrumentalism, essentialism, maternalism and form of populism (albeit the European experience of populism is not evident in electoral politics). A common theme of reaction generational divides, alongside schisms representing class, race, sexuality, ideology. Feminist groups have struggled to counter narratives and practices of state; there has been state capture of organisations, co-optation and ‘containment’. We see no overt political strategies challenging the macro-discourse practice of austerity; in particular there has been weak feminist political economy capacity.

An overall sense emerges that feminist ideological and move-

ment responses to austerity are fragmented, with divisions but some overlap between radical and liberal feminist positions. Any assessment of resistance and conflict must be contextualized in the degree to which feminist and women's infrastructure has been subject to various budget cuts which have diminished civil society's capacity to be socially transformative. Women's interest groups and service delivery groups have been hit disproportionately in this regard (Harvey 2014). The main representative interest group, the NWCI, experienced a 35 % cut in one budget. Other women's organisations experienced cuts of up to 40 % compared to wider cuts in government expenditure of 7 % over the same period. ICTU (2013) found employment levels in the sector would fall from 53,098 to 36,638 by 2015, predominated by women's jobs.

Lynch et al. (2016, p. 263) draw attention to the strong anti-intellectualism and ideology of charity that permeates Irish political culture. The crisis was to some degree used as shock doctrine tactic (Klein 2014), as opportunities were seized to remove actors, interests and institutions that could challenge such ideology (Coulter and Nagle 2016). The ideology of neo liberalism is aggressive in its promotion of individualism which curtails solidarity; this lack of solidarity is also evident with civil society where organisational survival may trump collective action (Harvey 2014). While there are acts of resistance directed against the gendered invocations and assignment of responsibilities their potential to destabilize the austerity regimes is limited. These forms of resistance have variable levels of connection with often isolated left struggles in the social field and around body politics.

Harvey (ibid.) asserts that the Irish state has been 'actively suppressing the independent, critical voice of social justice advocates', while inhibiting others; this has happened particularly in the community sector and was evident since 2002 and before recession. As well as suffering severe cuts, Byrne (2016) notes the conditional nature of funding, which means women's organisations can feel exposed should they criticise state policies. A competitive tendering system for community development projects has increased competition between organizations seeking to retain staff and services (Harvey 2014; Heffernan 2017). A small number of feminist groups closed projects rather than accept disempowering terms and conditions (Cullen and Murphy 2016).

Power was centralised while EU-related spaces for gender mainstreaming and consultation narrowed. NWCI (2017) note women's rights parliamentary committees have been subsumed into the broader 'equality' stream with no specific mandate around women's equality attaching to any parliamentary committee. Despite gender candidate quotas overall progress is slow in increasing female political representation and there is little momentum in increasing cabinet representation and, with exceptions, no significant pipeline emerging to facilitate new female candidates who would prove to be critical actors for feminist policy.

Despite all this Geraghty (2017) captures a rich record of women's agency in public protest over the crisis with women dominating many local, national and sectoral protests. Hourigan (2017) recounts how resistance has built up over time from single issue protest, to muted reaction, to popular mobilisation, deepening confrontation and political realignment. Spillane (2015) recounts how women in public sector teaching and nursing unions, in spite of poor trade union leadership, led resistance to public sector wage cuts and negative changes in flexible working conditions. Murphy (2014a) outlines creative innovation in campaigns by the lone parent representative group OPEN and the campaign group Single Parents Acting for the Rights of our Kids (S.P.A.R.K), as well as effective use of social media and online campaigns. Other approaches by feminist campaigners have focused on demands for increased transparency in policymaking. The Equality Budgeting Campaign, with its origins in the Irish Feminist Network, sought mandatory equality audits and impact assessments and found wide support from NGOs and trade unions as well as left political parties and independent TDs (Fischer 2014). Budget 2018 is expected to advance a form of gender proofing (Murphy 2017b). Women were also vocal in the successful marriage equality referendum and lead powerful pro-choice campaigns.

Nonetheless Bissett (2015) argues that there has been a process of de-politicisation in Irish political and civil society and that the way forward is in re-creating resistance from the ground up, through activist experimentation in anti-austerity contexts including (Occupy Dame Street, Claiming our Future, Citizens First, Unlock Nama, Anglo

Not Our Debt and Ballyhea Says No). Other grassroots mobilisations have been connected to smaller more militant left parties with coalitions organised to resist new charges including household charges and property tax. The largest and most successful water charges campaign included both ground up and left political party mobilisations. Most of these campaigns are not gendered although but include significant levels of female participation and protest. While there has been no systematic study of women's experience of these spaces of resistance, anecdotal conversations suggest mixed experiences for women as leaders, activists and participants.

Despite the crisis and in part of function of it, reproductive rights activism has been reignited. New feminist groups, some tied to college campuses have emerged to campaign for reproductive rights, such groups (including Irish Feminist Network and Cork Feminista) cite the crisis as a turning point for their mobilisation and suggest a resurgence in feminism (Cullen 2015). A broader coalition Campaign for Repeal the 8th, with NWCI as a focal point, has mobilised for a 2018 referendum for more progressive legislative access to abortion. Spillane (2015, p. 166) describes how this underresourced and volunteer-run pro-choice movement faces a significant challenge against the professional, well-funded and full-time anti-choice lobby made up primarily of Youth Defence and the Life Institute. There are ideological and tactical divisions across this burgeoning aspect of the feminist movement, with broad pro-choice campaigns differing with regard to both demand and strategies, ranging from relatively conservative incremental approaches to more radical demands. Cross generational tensions are also evident (Cullen and Fischer 2014). Tensions remain in connecting left struggles in the social field to body politics, particularly when feminists insist on their own articulation of issues.

Analysis of resistance shows how left political agency, even within gendered mobilization, can exclude or silence women and may consciously de-emphasise feminist frameworks or promote forms of strategic essentialism. Cullen and Murphy's (2016) analysis of instances of feminist organization and gendered resistance shows feminist actors in pragmatic alliances that emerged between Irish civil society organizations, trade unions and feminist groups resisting in defensive

campaigns against gendered cuts to social benefits and programmes. Maternalist claims, or the use of concerned motherhood, allowed women to organize as women but risked deepening the populist claims of the discourse and promoting traditional social relations. However, from another perspective ‘activist mothering’ can be seen a form of politicization that ties motherhood with a politics of resistance. The use of strong maternalist messages in campaigns indicate a tactical essentialist construction of women’s agency rather than a specific feminist framework. Leaders of feminist and campaigns on women’s interests are conscious about the tensions in using essentialist frames. Some groups consciously limited the range of alliances they worked with in order to maintain an explicitly gendered focus (Cullen and Murphy 2016).

On the ground, feminist practices exist in a diverse array of local and community groups, activists, practices and ideologies. Activists practice ‘movement activism’, where groups and individuals coalesce into campaigns at particular moments for important issues (De Wan 2010; Cullen 2014). Some examples of resistance and campaigns were discussed in the legislative section, with ‘Stop the Red Light’ and ‘Repeal the 8th’ campaigns offered as examples of feminist organising, but there are tensions evident in such broad campaigns. Feminist engagement with hard-left political parties has been mixed, women’s groups pulled back from anti-austerity cuts campaigns as they felt women’s issues could not be made visible (Cullen and Murphy 2016). Women’s participation in the Right to Change campaign, a coalition of anti-austerity activists and trade unions, suffered a similar fate.

The contemporary experience of the Repeal the Eight pro-choice campaign also highlights the difficulty of mobilising in the context of working with political left groups with clear agendas and strategies of their own. Nonetheless the more recent pre referendum Together for Yes campaign suggests relatively liberal groups like the National Women’s Council of Ireland can and do collaborate strategically around time limited issues with more left oriented Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> campaign and the more activist Abortion Rights Campaign. On the other hand the experience also shows the limits of such cooperation with ongoing tensions between for example ROSA – Reproductive rights, against Oppression,

Sexism & Austerity, the Socialist feminist campaign – and Abortion Rights Campaign and the real difficulty some feminist groups have working together.

## Analysis and recommendations for left actors

**W**e see some opportunity in crisis as new tensions and dynamics emerge across state, market and society offering the possible puncturing of hegemonies. We see for example: less trust in state institutions and more political experimentation and more people questioning the basics of international capitalism, especially the younger generation experiencing lost futures. There is also significant damage to the culture of patriarchy through the exposure of institutional abuse scandals and revelations of mainstream misogynist practices in cultural and political arenas. However alongside these ruptures we see new challenges in the contraction of spaces available to contest and politicise gendered inequalities. Power is more centralised and at both domestic and international level as processes of de-democratisation limit political and social channels to question state policy. State and market approaches aimed at advancing 'diversity' also work to de-politicise equality issues generally and gender equality specifically. At the same time international financialised capital is more evasive and harder to hold accountable in an era of big data and speculative forms of land and property investment that have contributed to rising land and house prices. We also note the re-inscription of new forms of cultural and bio-political patriarchy in the shape of new forms of controls over women's bodies and sexuality, for example through internet-based pornography.

Nonetheless several points of manoeuvre can be identified:

- Potential single issue but transversal policy campaigns that generate solidarity including with ethnic minority women

(pensions, homelessness, precarity, low pay, care, equality and gender proofing, social investment).

- Developing the potential and presence of women in other forms of left mobilization and linking these to gendered/feminist mobilizations.
- Enabling gendering of the agenda and analysis of left political economy alternatives through work with think-tanks and trade unions and by developing an economic analysis of bio-politics.
- Managing tensions (generational/ideological) around state-focussed engagement, for example, the tactics of campaigns in relation to the abortion referendum and legislation.
- Using overt political institutional strategies (the work of femocrats, national and EU politicians, women's party political caucus, deepening and broadening of gender candidate quotas).
- Actualising solidarity and shifting sympathetic allies to action-oriented partners in mobilization, possibly by focusing on feminised occupations.
- Creating combined analytical frameworks and forms of collective action in economic, cultural, bio-political terms.

### Left actors (parties, civil society actors)

Irish political, civil society organizations and feminist actors operate in the context of Irish political culture and architecture. As such social partnership has left a legacy of interdependence between the state and civil society. This overlaps with the reality that Irish civil society has become more muted over the last decade as the state took a more proactive role in co-opting and inhibiting (Kirby and Murphy 2011). Austerity has sharpened dependence and vulnerabilities across civil society and the controlling state has contributed to an ever-thinning public sphere. Coulter and Nagle (2015, p. 12) demonstrate how Ireland, in common with much of Europe, promoted austerity both as ideology and practice, designed to establish and police the constricted field of political possibility in Ireland. Murphy (2014b) recounts how strong



elite alliances worked to maintain a low tax centred economic model at the core of Ireland's economic recovery. Populism (in right and left cleavages across Europe) has been part of this narrowing of the capacity of politics to respond to societal fears and concerns, yet to date Ireland has not experienced a significant populist moment. The impact of social media on public discourse is mixed, containing debate to the virtual realm yet also opening up alternative channels to communicate.

While many state equality institutions have disappeared remaining institutions<sup>1</sup> have a potential role to play as strategic allies and need to be challenged by feminist actors to live up to their feminist potential. Many NGOs may not be perceived or perceive themselves as left actors but do work from a strong equality or social justice ethos and can be potential allies particularly in intersectional campaigns about migration, sexuality, family status, class ethnicity and disability related issues. Not all such NGOs or networks will have developed a gender analysis hence the strategic nature of such alliances may often be one of critical friend. Feminist groups, to avoid an insular perspective, should network into as many of such spaces as practical.

Likewise a range of international institutions, actors and interests have been and remain potential left allies.<sup>2</sup> European-based politicians are also possible allies, particularly those MEPs working in left-leaning groups in the European Parliament (Cullen forthcoming). Looking wider there are also alliances for example with the Global Reproductive Rights Centre and the New York-based Centre for Economic and Social Rights which can provide ideas, funding and technical supports for campaigns. Finally there is the international development community which includes both domestic-based branches of international organisations (Amnesty, Oxfam, Christian Aid, etc.) which have made valuable input internationally and domestically into feminist issues including women's poverty, tax justice, climate justice and sustainable development goal-based campaigns.

The trade union movement is a crucial actor. After intense gen-

1 Or new institutions such as the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, an amalgamation of the old Equality Authority and the former Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

2 Including think-tanks like Rosa Luxembourg, FEPS and NEF, interest groups like EWL, ETUC, Social Platform and EAPN, and networks like Equinet and Ennhi.

der struggles in the 1970s, by the mid-1990s gender interests were partially accommodated in mainstream union activity even while some unions maintained patriarchal attitudes. Recession has debilitated trade unions and shifted the class and gender composition of members with new members more likely to be female, married, older and homeowners (Roche et al. 2011). However a 2013 ICTU (2013) audit shows little progress in addressing significant gender gaps in key leadership positions and interviews reveal little trade union commitment to gender equality in trade union structures. Irish trade unionism remains an industrial relations issue considered from a singularly masculine perspective. Recent efforts illustrate how trade unions can work as spaces for gendered mobilizations, unionized care sectors worked with feminist organisations to campaign on the terms and conditions of home care workers (Cullen and Murphy 2016), albeit trade unions saw these as sectoral rather than gendered campaigns.

Left political society is also a crucial actor. The legacy of the 1920s civil war led to the under-formation of the Irish political left (Murphy 2012), which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century includes a number of left traditions occupying parliament. After the most recent 2016 general election reformist parties of the social democratic left include a now emasculated Labour Party (seven seats) and a new Social Democratic Party (three seats). Sinn Fein, a nationalist republican party, continued its incremental growth in the Republic positioned as a centre-left party with 23 seats. Parties of a more ruptural tradition, formed a radical political party Solidarity-PBP and won six seats. A mixture of left and single-issue independents won some of the 18 independent seats. Some are credible feminist allies, for example Clare Daly TD on reproductive rights and Minister Katherine Zappone TD on reproductive rights, childcare and gender proofing. Overall, despite some new attempts at co-operation (Hourigan 2017), we see a highly fractured left party space which is relatively weak and consumed with internal tensions, divisions and competition.

## Feminist alternative approaches to economic, financial, social policy, gender justice

**S**pillane (2015, p. 167) describes austerity as a calculated and systematic assault on the least well-off and often female dominated in Irish society or those with the least capacity to resist. Bissett (2015) reflects on the weakness of protest and argues for new or reinvigorated radical frame of resistance. It is likely feminist actors need to revisit strategies for change to ensure a clear understanding of austerity as both a gender, class and racialized project with intersectional impact both in terms of those who experience multiple discriminations and in how economic inequality is linked to political status and care inequalities (Lynch 2016). In this sense feminists must engage with questions of whose crisis they are mobilising on. The reality is that for poor and ethnic minority women austerity marks simply a new chapter in a longer-term experience of discrimination and disadvantage. Such an understanding must also include how social and body politics are also intertwined like how austerity impacts on women coping with domestic and sexual violence. In this context, women face additional risks as cuts in direct services and the extra pressure on those same services associated with the lack of exit is exacerbated by a social housing crisis and rising levels of family homelessness. Social and body politics are clearly expressed in gendered terms in new institutional forms such as family hubs, the latest manifestation of a paternalistic and patriarchal state that seeks to both control and blame women for the state's failings (Hearne and Murphy 2017).

Unlike the British feminist experience (Pearson and Elson 2015),

to date a 'Plan F', an alternative Irish feminist political economy, has not emerged and alternatives that have emerged (such as Plan B or Right to Change) have arguably been insufficiently gendered and lacking a feminist analysis. Nonetheless a series of recommendations can be made which together can form a feminist alternative comprising approaches to economic, financial, social policy and gender justice (Fraser 2013; Murphy and Kirby 2007). An intersectional and intergenerational starting point is key to focus on policy responses that would reverse the retrogression of rights experienced over the crisis. For example reversing austerity cuts in lone parent's income supports, in Traveller women's education supports and in older women's pension rights. A second target for campaigning activity would be to attain minimum core standards in economic and social rights, this could focus on the right to work and minimum income for women asylum seekers in direct provision, on legislation to limit time in emergency homeless accommodation and more resources to fight violence against women, all issues which address core rights violations. A third area for action is on campaigns for investment in social services. After almost a decade of social disinvestment the focus should be on social investment in care, including early care, school age care and elder care, all of which underpin women's labour market participation, as well as housing. A subset of this is for investment in the type of services that can address the ongoing issue of dependence on institutional forms of care and support that deny autonomy and capability. These include institutional care for people with disabilities, for homeless female-headed families, for asylum seekers and for young people in state care.

Women's economic participation is an obvious point for mobilization and one where intersectionality matters with migrant and young women particularly vulnerable to precarious working lives. Three policy areas offer an immediate focus. The tax and welfare systems are gendered and maintain features of male breadwinner systems more reminiscent of the 1950s than 2020s. Individualization of tax and welfare systems is necessary for economic independence, financial autonomy and in the long-term pension equality. Activation is also gendered and changes are required to enable equal access to education training and employment services. Finally the labour mar-

ket itself is gendered with significant levels of occupational segregation of women into low paid service employment sectors. Living wage and minimum hours legislation would have immediate gendered outcomes. September 2017 proposals to make the Qualified Adult portion of the social welfare payment conditional on labour market activation (DEASP 2017) offers an immediate organizing point for feminists and left allies.

From a political perspective campaigns can focus on strengthening capacity to include gender proofing policy, data disaggregation and special foci on intersectionality, could offer opportunities for alliances with democrats and state feminist actors. Measures are needed to rebuild the feminist infrastructure and enhance women's political participation, representation and ability to develop a feminist analysis of key policies. These include campaigns for women on boards, an extension of the candidate quota to the local level and a 50:50 government cabinet. Other political reform campaigns might centre on legal and constitutional reform. Following the successful May 25, 2018 referendum to repeal the prohibition on abortion, other referendums are needed to update Article 40 which ring-fences women's domestic role and to advance economic and social rights especially the right to housing, both possible points of action during 2018.



## *Left actors, potential platform of demands and cooperation for alliances*

**F**eminist mobilization can be generated by working with strategic left alliances (Right to Change Movement, Repeal the Eight, campaigns for public sector investment in left think tanks and public sector unions). Given the generational injustices over the decade of austerity (emigration, unemployment, welfare cuts, housing crisis all impact specifically on younger people) special attention should be focused on mobilizing young women in student unions and workplaces. Feminist mobilisation can also be enhanced through international engagement, networking and mobilisation.

To date resistance to austerity has been mixed in intensity and largely based on sectoral mobilisations (Hourigan 2017), for example in relation to cuts for lone parents or for cuts in funding local women's groups. Intergenerational solidarity is relatively weak and although NWCI have focused research and campaigns on young women (Generation Y), the wider socioeconomic issues of young people, precarity and housing have yet to become focus points for wider mobilisation. Feminist actors have found it difficult to maintain a feminist analysis/voice/presence in larger left mobilisations leading to difficulties in forging and maintaining broad alliances such as in relation to reproductive rights. Tactical questions remain particularly for trade unions and for state-oriented feminist activists as well as NGOs as to how they position themselves in relation to reformist or more transformative policy agendas or campaigns.

Fraser (2013) draws our attention to the need for a conceptual framework that offers a way to interpret the crisis in ways that unite

and allow new emancipatory ways to build a new narrative and create new political solidarities. She argues for 'a triple movement' that links across the three-headed crisis of 'capitalism, social reproduction and the environment'. Such an approach could inspire a new politics that could mobilise across a wide range of actors, enable people to see what unites them rather than what divides them, and create new alliances to reshape power relations. This requires a capacity for both communicative values led discourse and also capacity for a coordinative discourse cementing tactical alliances (Schmidt 2008).



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# **AUSTERITY, GENDER INEQUALITY AND FEMINISM AFTER THE CRISIS**

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**H**ow do savings policies affect gender roles in the family? Who takes responsibility for raising and caring for both young and old when the state ceases to provide support? Where do women go when there are no crisis centres available for victims of domestic violence? Who will look after unwanted children if abortion is ruled illegal?

Since the 2007 financial crisis many countries have been enacting harsh austerity measures. In Southern Europe and Ireland, this austerity was largely dictated by the EU and the IMF. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, it was the pressure to succeed placed on the EU new member states and their desire to gain rapid integration into the European economic market which compelled respective governments to accept tight budgets.

Accession candidates such as Serbia and neighbouring states like Ukraine subjugated themselves in anticipatory obedience to the EU and its demands, in order to avoid endangering progress towards membership and further rapprochement.

Whatever the individual case may be – the mantra of saving money for the sake of balanced budgets, improved competitiveness, and debt avoidance has devastating consequences on women's working and living conditions as well as gender relations more generally.

Under the title "Austerity, Gender Inequality and Feminism after the Crisis" the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung" commissioned national studies on the effects of austerity on women.

The authors depict a topography of what effects the European austerity diktat has had on gender relations, and formulate demands for a left-wing feminist politics rooted in social justice and gender equality.

This Paper is part of a compilation of studies from different European countries. You can find all of them here:

[www.rosalux.de/austerity](http://www.rosalux.de/austerity).