**Questionnaire on ‘Women’s Human Rights**

**in the Changing World of Work’**

**Ireland’s Response**

**August 2019**

**Core questions**

* What are the main trends influencing women’s human rights in the world of work in your national context and their impact:
* on the types of and quantity work available to women, and the quality and conditions of work (including access to social protection and equal pay)?
* for women’s safety (including violence and sexual harassment) at work?
* on women’s rights to organize and claim rights?
* What are the promising practices emerging from your country to ensure the realization of women’s rights to work and women’s rights at work, in the context of technological and demographic change, as well as continuing globalization and the shift towards sustainability? (laws; economic, labour market and social policies; programmes).

**Female Participation in Ireland: The Current Situation.**

Overall employment increased by 81,000 or 3.7% in the year to the first quarter of 2019, bringing total employment to a record level of 2.30m persons. This shows that the Government’s strategies, such as the *Action Plan for Jobs* and *Pathways to Work* have been very successful in creating jobs and reducing unemployment.

The annual increase includes an increase in female employment (+50,400 persons or +5%), compared to an increase in male employment of 30,800 persons or +2.5%. Indeed, female participation rates in Ireland are similar to female participation rates across the EU.

Unemployment was higher for males than for females throughout the recession, although the gap has narrowed somewhat during the recovery. In July 2019, the seasonally adjusted rate for men was 4.7% against 4.3% for women (down from a female unemployment rate of 5.7% in July 2018)

Latest data available from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) Labour Force Survey for the first quarter of 2019 indicates that the overall female labour force participation rate in Ireland is 56.1% compared to a male participation rate of 68.1%. Of the 1.06 million women who are currently employed in Ireland, approx. 30% work part-time compared to just 11% of men.

Participation is in line with the EU average for men of prime working age (25-64), but slightly below average for women. However, it is important to note that when viewed over a longer time period, the participation rate for prime working age women is increasing and has moved up by close to ten percentage points since 2002 (EU-28, close to eight percentage points).

Prime working age women (25-64) who are outside the measured labour force are, by and large, carers or, in the older age groups, retired and/or unable to work because of disability. Less than one in ten, at any given time, indicates that they would be interested in working. However, this limited interest appears to translate relatively quickly into concrete action, with about 5% of inactive women re-joining the labour force each quarter.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), is continuing to focus on providing supports to lone parents – the majority of whom are female – to ensure that lone parents have access to quality activation services in order to enter employment.

The best way to tackle poverty among lone parents is through decent, secure and fairly-paid work, and the 2017 report by the International Economic Consultants Indecon echoed this view. The report also concluded that assisting lone parents to enhance skills also needs to be seen as a key objective as low paid employment will not, on its own, ensure a reduction in the risk of poverty.

DEASP offers a wide range of financial supports to lone parents that allow them to participate in a variety of educational and employment programmes. These supports are available through DEASP, and the Department of Education and Skills (DES). For example, lone parents on social welfare supports who wish to participate in education can retain these payments and also avail of the SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) grant from the DE and this grant is not assessed as means. This option is not available to other jobseekers.

**Future Jobs Ireland 2019**

*Future Jobs Ireland 2019* has been launched by Government to deliver the required policy reforms to enhance productivity, increase participation, create quality and sustainable jobs, and build a resilient and competitive economy capable of adapting to a changing world of work.

One of the five key pillars which *Future Jobs Ireland* focuses on is “Increasing Participation in the Labour Force”. A particular focus is placed on increasing female labour force participation and among the key targets which the strategy commits to is increasing the labour force participation rate amongst prime working age women aged 25-59 years from 75% in 2018 to 78% by 2025.

*Future Jobs Ireland* will increase participation in the labour force through five core ambitions in 2019:

1. Encourage participation in the labour force through high quality Early-Learning and Care: The cost and availability of high-quality Early Learning and Care arrangements is one of the barriers to parents, and particularly mothers, being part of the labour force. To complement the implementation of the Affordable Childcare Scheme, additional ways to reduce costs, enhance supply and improve quality will be introduced. These include developing a strategic capital investment plan to ensure that the demand for high-quality early learning and care places is met, as well as promoting the uptake of accelerated capital allowances to incentivise employers to provide Early Learning and Care facilities for the use of their employees, by providing an accelerated deduction for the capital investment costs incurred.
2. Foster participation in the labour force through flexible working solutions: Flexible working encompasses a wide range of practices including part-time, remote working, compressed hours, home-working and job sharing. A labour market which offers flexible working solutions can be beneficial for employers, workers and society. In 2019, paid parental leave will commence providing each parent with two weeks paid leave from work in the first year of their child’s life. This will be further extended over the coming years. Unpaid parental leave is also being extended for children up to the age of 12. A national consultation on the extension of flexible working options to all employees is also due to commence.
3. Improve incentives to participate in the labour force: To incentivise and, ultimately increase, the number of people working, *Future Jobs Ireland* *2019* will review, and reform as required, the rules and operation of existing welfare schemes. In addition barriers to participation in the labour market are to be reviewed and income tax arrangements for second earners that optimise the financial incentives to work are under consideration.
4. Encourage adult dependents and beneficiaries of other full-time welfare payments to engage in activation, enter and/or stay in the workforce: In the context of emerging labour and skills shortages, it is vital that the Public Employment Service engages with more non-jobseeker welfare beneficiaries as well as optimising the operation of non-jobseeker schemes to promote higher levels of participation in the labour force. In 2019, the Department’s Intreo service will develop a return to work service to provide tailored advice and information to returnees on skills requirements, training options, and available supports (i.e. early learning and care, in-work welfare supports).
5. Undertake promotional campaigns to encourage greater levels of participation in the labour force: Through *Future Jobs Ireland 2019*, a proactive approach to communication and engagement will be taken to help improve the awareness of the employment and training opportunities among inactive cohorts and also encourage employers to recruit from among these groups. Additionally, DEASP will develop promotions for female participation as part of Jobs Week 2019 and its regional Jobs Fairs.

Future Jobs Ireland is a multi-annual framework. Its ambitions and deliverables are stepping stones to achieving medium term objectives.

**Programmes currently on offer to Female Returners**

Through its Intreo offices DEASP currently provides self-service facilities with information and guidance on employment and training supports. Intreo also operates a walk-in service to provide returners the opportunity to meet an activation case officer, on a voluntary basis, to examine what training and education supports are available to facilitate their re-entry/entry to the labour force.

Programmes targeted specifically at female ‘returners’ in Ireland are provided through DES and SOLAS and are outlined below:

**Springboard+:**

This programme offers free places on education courses leading to awards at certificate, degree and post graduate level. The majority of courses are part-time for a maximum of 12 months and are open to all eligible applicants regardless of employment status.

**ReBOOT:**

The Women ReBOOT programme tackles two major challenges for the technology sector: sourcing the talent and skills needed for greater industry growth as our economy approaches full employment and also helping resolve the gender imbalance with the technology sector. Fully funded by Skillnet Ireland, and delivered in partnership with Technology Ireland Software Skillnet, Women ReBOOT has succeeded in tapping into the rich pool of talented women that have left the technology sector.

Supported by forty technology employers, the programme delivers upskilling and career management supports, combined with the guarantee of a work placement. Running at a conversion rate to employment of 85 per cent and with over 100 women having completed the programme to date, ReBOOT is a great example of how an enterprise led approach, combined with the right agency assistance, can solve complex skills challenges.

**Fastback to IT (FIT):**

An industry led-initiative which partners with SOLAS to promote an inclusive Smart Economy.

FIT actively encourage the participation of women seeking to enter the labour market in the IT sector, where they have been traditionally underrepresented. FIT’s focus is to “up-skill the workforce through promoting access to appropriate training and lifelong learning; expand the workforce through the activation of groups such as the unemployed, people with disabilities, lone parents, travellers, ex-offenders, women and older people as well as the implementation of an appropriate skills based migration policy.

FIT’s 2018 Skills Audit 41 highlights the gender imbalance in the ICT industry and noted that addressing this can only be achieved by education and training providers doing more to attract women onto ICT programmes. FIT’s report promotes ongoing collaboration between FIT, SOLAS and Further education and training (FET) providers to ensure a balanced representation of women in ICT roles.

**Specific questions**

*Technology*

* How is technological change impacting on women’s experiences of work in your national context? (e.g. increasing access to ICTs, robotics, machine learning, automation)
	+ What are some of the good practices for supporting women to benefit equally from technological advances? *(laws, economic and social policies, institutional measures, regulation, actions by employers)*

*‘Gig’ and ‘On Demand’ Economy*

* How is the rise of more flexible forms of labour, including the ‘gig’ and ‘on demand’ economy impacting on women’s experiences of work in your national context?
* What are the implications for job security for increased flexibility and women’s caring responsibilities, and for harassment and violence?
* Which groups of women are most likely to be impacted by this type of work?
* What are some of the good practices for ensuring access to social protection for women in informal and ‘on demand’ work? *(laws, economic and social policies, institutional measures, regulation, actions by employers)*
* What are the good practices for women’s collective organising in the context of more flexible forms of labour?

*Demographic change*

* How is demographic change in your national context impacting on women’s experience of work?
* What are the implications of an ageing population and of the ‘youth bulge’?
* What economic and social policies are needed to ensure that the growth in the care sector creates decent work opportunities for women? What are some emerging promising practices? *(laws, economic and social policies, institutional measures, regulation, actions by employers).*

*Transition to sustainability*

* What measures are necessary to ensure that women benefit equally from the transition to sustainability in your national context? What are some of the promising practices to ensure that green jobs do not replicate existing gender inequalities in other sectors (e.g. occupational segregation, gender pay gap)?

***Technology***

In December 2018 the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) published, ‘**Digital Transformation: Assessing the Impact of Digitalisation on Ireland’s Workforce**’. It determined that one in three jobs in Ireland are at a high risk of disruption as a result of the increased adoption of digital technologies. It estimated that whilst the majority of sectors would be employing more people in 2023 than they did in 2018, that this disruption would result in a slow in economic growth. The impact of this would be the hypothetical loss of 46,000 jobs when compared to growth predictions for jobs without accounting for the adoption of digital technologies. The report identified the sectors and regions most at risk of disruption. However the report did not examine the disruption from a gender perspective.

The results of this research helped to inform the development of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation’s new *Future Jobs Ireland* strategy, which was launched in early March 2019. A key Pillar of this strategy is to increase labour market participation. Each Pillar of the strategy outlines Ambitions and Deliverables with leaders and timeframes. A number of these are focussed on female participation through the use of targeted promotional campaigns and encouraging women to return to the labour force.

One good example of this is the commitment to ‘assist women returning to work in the technology sector after a career break through Skillnet Ireland’s Women Reboot programme offering group seminars to improve recruitment skills; technology training and industry insight; one-on-one coaching and in-company work placements’. As mentioned above, the **Women ReBoot** programme tackles two major challenges for the technology sector: sourcing the talent and skills needed for the sector and also helping to resolve the gender imbalance within the sector. Fully funded by Skillnet Ireland, and delivered in partnership with Technology Ireland Software Skillent, Women ReBoot has succeeded in tapping into the rich pool of talented women that have left the technology sector. This is delivered through a mix of coaching, online learning, networking skills and work placements in leading tech companies. The programme is supported by forty technology employers and delivers upskilling and career management supports, combined with the guarantee of a work placement. There is a 85 percent conversion rate to employment and over 100 women have completed the progamme to date. It is a good example of how an enterprise led approach, combined with the right agency assistance can solve complex skills challenges.

In late March 2019, the EGFSN published a report entitled ‘**Forecasting the Future Demand for High-Level ICT Skills in Ireland, 2017-2022**’. The objective of the report was to forecast the demand for high level ICT skillsets across all sectors of the economy in Ireland over a five year time period. The analysis carried out in the study highlighted how the skills needs of the ICT market are rapidly evolving, posing new challenges not only to education and training systems, but to the whole socioeconomic system. It was found that attracting more women to ICT careers means, not only recruiting more women to STEM courses, but also providing working conditions that reconcile work and family life. One of the key findings of the report was that it was vital to attract more women into ICT careers. Stakeholders suggested that stronger and more focussed efforts could be made to do this including:

* Addressing awareness-raising initiatives about ICT jobs, particularly with female students
* Identifying and promoting female role models in the ICT profession
* Paying special attention to gender issues when trying to ‘rebrand’ the ICT profession
* Promoting female only initiatives such as hackathons
* Making sure that all-girl post-primary schools offer the full range of honours Leaving Certificate subjects in maths and the major science areas, so that girls are not discouraged from pursuing those subjects

This EGFSN study served as the evidence base underpinning a new ICT Skills Action Plan by the Department of Education and Skills. This was entitled ‘**Technology Skills 2022**’ and sets out priority actions to meet Ireland’s needs for graduates skilled in computing and electrical engineering to support and drive economic performance into the future. This document outlines the necessity for the continuance of Skillnet Ireland to deliver targeted ICT technical and management programmes to industry with specific reference to the need for the Women ReBoot programme to continue.

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) also aims to play a strong role in addressing gender imbalance in science by committing to increase the representation of women among SFI award holders to 30% by 2020 and to improve the representation and progression of women in all aspects of STEM careers in Ireland. Through its Starting Investigator Research Grant (SIRG) programme, SFI has piloted an initiative to encourage increased applications from female researchers. This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of SIRG applications from and SIRG awards to women.

***‘Gig’ and ‘On Demand’ Economy***

Ireland’s comprehensive body of employment rights legislation protects all employees who are legally employed on an employer-employee basis, regardless of gender or what title is given to them. Once it is clear that a person is working under a contract of employment (written or verbal), on a full-time or part-time basis, that person has the same protection under employment law as other employees, including entitlement to the national minimum wage.

The Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018 was part of a co-ordinated response by Ireland to address the problems caused by the increased casualisation of work and to strengthen the regulation of precarious work. This will help younger workers starting off in the labour market by improving security and predictability of hours of work for those on insecure contracts and those working variable hours.

A study commissioned by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in advance of drafting this legislation showed that;

* women are nearly three times more likely than men to work 1-8 hours;
* three times more likely than men to work 9-18 hours and
* over twice as likely to work 19-35 hours per week.
* It also showed that women are more likely to work zero hours, “if and when hours” and low hours because of their caring responsibilities and the lack of affordable, accessible childcare.

The 2018 Act introduces a new right for employees whose contract of employment does not reflect the reality of the hours they habitually work. Such employees will be entitled to request to be placed in a band of hours that better reflects the hours they have worked over a 12 month reference period.

Furthermore, the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015 outlaw discrimination in a wide range of employment and employment-related areas. These include recruitment and promotion; equal pay; working conditions; training or experience; dismissal and harassment including sexual harassment. The legislation defines discrimination as treating one person in a less favourable way than another person based on any of nine grounds. Gender is one of those nine grounds.