

## Comments on Multiple Identities

Comments by organisations, groups and individuals listed alphabetically under each of the headings identified as the main issues raised in the responses to the consultation.

**Ad-hoc Women's Policy Group** - consider that the concentration on some Section 75 categories ignores many other aspects of our multiple identities, making it impossible to develop a strategy to achieve equality for women. The Group believes that the refusal to include age, disability, sexual orientation or ethnic minority background ignores the advice given in pre-consultation meetings with members of the women's sector. They add that the Gender Equality Plan fails to identify actions, which will seek to recognise and take into account multiple identity and that it is not possible to construct a viable strategy by slicing off aspects of women's multiple identities into other, separate, initiatives. The Group recommends a fully integrated approach to addressing the needs of women that must include older women, lesbian and bi-sexual women, black and minority ethnic women including Traveller women and disabled women. Furthermore, they consider that strategies linked to domestic violence must include older women and women from minority ethnic groups. They feel that there must be woman-specific programmes to deal with gender-based violence and adequate resources provided to Women's Aid.

**Belfast City Council** - recommends a re-wording of the vision statement to incorporate gender multiple realities, as the current statement is rather lengthy and disjointed.

**Belfast Jewish Community Centre** - point out that gender inequality is closely linked with other forms of discrimination including age, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual orientation etc.

**British Psychological Society** - comment that it is vital that mention is made of overlapping initiatives out with gender and especially with regard to Section 75 and the forthcoming Single Equality Bill. The Society feels that this is implicit at various points in the document including in the stated vision that encompasses aspects of difference including marital status and dependency. They point out that age is not mentioned as prominently but a great many issues relating to gender are in fact age-related and it would be useful to see age featuring more prominently throughout the document.

**Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI)** - highlight that there are also very specific issues for multiple identity groups. CiNI believes that the strategy should recognise multiple identities of women and men - for example, father, mother, carer et cetera - and take into account the different impacts that they have on the situations and experiences of women and men. They add that this principle must also include and be representative of girls and boys and all aspects of multiple identities.

CiNI also add that "taking into account the impact of where they live" should be removed from the document. While there are clearly specific rural and urban issues, they do not believe that this issue should be singled out at this point, as it again detracts from the focus on gender and excludes other equally important aspects of multiple identities.

**Committee on the Administration of Justice** - state that it is notable that the current 'vision' includes some of the 9 categories listed cited in Section 75 namely marital status, parents and carers, but not others, e.g. race, disability, or religion. The Committee feel that, for most women, it will be a combination of their gender and/or ethnicity/religion/age etc that will result in their lack of equality. They are also concerned about an over-compartmentalization of the thinking about equality within government and that this compartmentalisation of staff, and the plethora of strategies, has

apparently led the Gender Unit to believe that issues to do with race or disability would be better addressed in other fora. This approach is seen as totally ignoring the reality that the experience of female Catholics and Protestants, old and young etc are all quite distinct and a Gender Strategy worthy of the title must address these many different needs. CAJ also feel that women from an ethnic minority background will be an after-thought in both the gender and the race strategies, and as a consequence are likely to fall between stools.

**Community Foundation for Northern Ireland** - considers that gender inequality is multifaceted and is compounded by factors such as age, social/economic status, disability, sexual orientation and race.

**Council for Catholic Maintained Schools** - has reservations concerning the need for a separate strategy in relation to one equality category feeling that such a strategy should be conceptualised within a wider vision that takes account of multiple identities. The Council state that there is a need within the document to focus on the impact of multiple identities recommending that strategic objectives should take account of the impact of those multiple identities. The Council feels that the Strategy's impact on other equality groups has not been clearly addressed. Additionally the interfaces with the race equality strategy and action on disability need to be clarified. The Council feels that the Principles would be better expressed within a wider vision that takes account of multiple identities and is not confined to gender and recommends that recognition of all aspects of multiple identity be taken into account.

**Disability Action** - is disappointed that the strategy will specifically include inequality on the grounds of gender, marital or relationship status having dependants or caring responsibilities and the needs of transgendered people and by inference therefore excluding issues of disability, race, sexuality and age. Disability Action refutes the thrust of the last sentence of paragraph 1.15 of the document ("It is through this joining-up of our strategies and action plans that we will work together to tackle multiple discrimination and disadvantage") recommending that all strategies and areas of policy development should be included in this Gender Equality Strategy. They explain that excluding a range of related inequalities renders this weak and ineffective.

Disability Action continues by saying the Gender Equality Strategy cannot build upon the work of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 if it does not consider all 9 grounds and that there is concern about the weakness of this Equality Screening and would make the following points.

- The strategy excludes issues of race, age sexuality and disability.
- Account has only been taken of gender research and not across all 9 grounds.

Disability Action is disappointed at the weakness of the draft strategy in particular the focus on only 3 of the 9 equality grounds potentially excludes the most vulnerable and marginalized women (e.g. migrant and disabled women) from protection under the Strategy.

**Down Lisburn Trust** - is of the opinion that multidimensional issues related to gender equality e.g. disability, race, age and sexual orientation are not given sufficient weight in this document as inequality is often multi-faceted. The Trust recommends that this needs to be more strongly reflected in both the framework and the proposed Action Plan.

**EHSSB** - consider that multiple identities are crucial in any strategy. They add that gender issues are placed at the intersection of several categories that describe identity and that issues of sexual orientation and disability are also key categories to be considered. In terms of the "vision" in the strategy, the Board feel it may be more inclusive if it also takes account of the other multiple identities such as age, race, disability and sexual orientation. To take the issue of multiple identities into account, the Board suggests this will necessitate effective consultation with groups but also individuals across Northern Ireland. They add that screening requires further consideration of monitoring information.

**Equality Commission for Northern Ireland** - state that the strategy does not cover issues of race, disability, political opinion, religious belief, sexual orientation and age and are concerned that this will result in a strategy that evades the fact that gender intersects with other forms of discrimination and disadvantage. The Commission reaffirm the importance of fully recognising the importance of multiple identities. The Commission therefore strongly recommends that the focus of the strategy covers black and ethnic minority women, including Traveller women, older women, lesbian and bi-sexual women and disabled women and also women of different religious beliefs and political opinions. The Commission adds that it is insufficient if these multiple disadvantages are not tackled through the strategy addressing gender inequalities in terms of, for example, the PSI Group on Travellers making little reference to women and only then in the context of motherhood and health.

**Falls Women's Centre/Ionad Mhná Na bhFál** - state that the document can only represent a failure to understand how gender inequality combines with other forms of discrimination, including race, class, sexual orientation, religion, disability and age to form complex and multi-layered obstacles to equality.

**NASUWT** - welcomes the vision outlined however, believes that the vision falls short in its scope. The Union feels that the vision should explicitly recognise the implications of diversity, by taking account of ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, age and the ways in which these factors intersect. They add that a contemporary gender equality strategy should recognise the complex inter-linkages between the various equalities strands and reaffirm that it is incumbent on the Government to make explicit and direct reference to the dimensions of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability and age in relation to the pursuit of the gender equality strategy.

**Northern Ireland Housing Executive** - feels that the strategy does cover several aspects of identity, as asked in question 2, although add that multi identity is wider than just the primary links identified e.g. there is no mention of parenting rights.

**NICTU** - would wish to see this Strategy reflects the multiple identities of women and men and that the intersection between gender inequality and other forms of inequality is effectively addressed in this document. Commenting on the vision, NIC ICTU comment that this needs also to embrace recognition of the range of multiple identities that may contribute to our experiences of inequalities. Referring to each of the three broad areas of intervention noted here [economic life, socio-cultural life and civic life], Congress stresses again the need to consider the impact of the multiple identities of women and men. They recommend therefore that a gender equality strategy recognises the interplay between gender inequality and inequalities arising from our other identities e.g. sexual orientation, age, disability, ethnicity etc.

**NICVA** - comment that the proposals do not reflect reality of women's lives and betray a misunderstanding of equality and section 75. They add that leaving out race, sexual orientation, political opinion, religion, disability and age, has the potential to ignore the

needs of the most marginalised women and girls, including migrant workers, Traveller girls and women, asylum seekers, institutionalised and disabled women.

**QUB** - feels that the strategy does cover several aspects of identity, as asked in question 2 adding that, insofar as gender issues are not seen as "stand alone" issues and are cross referenced across the remainder of the S75 categories, then the draft strategy will be comprehensive .

**Save the Children** - ... however, we do not feel that the strategy has taken sufficient account of the intersection of gender with race, age, religion or disability to name but some of the S75 categories. Our recent research highlights issues specifically where age, gender, race and religion intersect and the impact of this on young women and young men's lives.

**Social Economy Network** - feels that representation should accurately reflect the multiple identities of women and men as characterised by the equality constituencies detailed in section 75. They add that it is relevant that 'Gender Matters' spells out the equality dimensions specified under section 75 as being what is meant by multiple identities.

**Soroptimist International of Northern Ireland** - feels that the gender strategy needs to cover all aspects of our identity.

**South and East Belfast Trust** - referring to the three main strategic areas of intervention for gender equalities, agree that gender inequality is indeed a complex interaction of social and economic factors and merits the recognition given in chapter 5 of the consultation document. The Trust refers to the opening paragraph recognising the inequalities associated with race and disability and stressing the importance to all areas including these three and essential they - and the other areas identified - are treated with equity within the strategy.

**Training for Women Network** - feel there is an opportunity in the document to highlight how the multiple identities of women create multiple disadvantage and multiple inequalities, but that this is not forthcoming.

**UNISON** - consider that the Strategy fails to recognise that women have different and multiple identities and face multiple discriminations due to factors such race, disability, sexual orientation, age and as carers and stress that the Gender Strategy must recognise this integrated analysis of multiple discriminations.

**University of Ulster** - comment that, overall, the concept of multiple identities is not highlighted or integrated throughout the document, particularly in relation to key action areas.

**Women's Policy Forum** - do not see any reference in the strategy to the many multiple identities of women e.g. age, sexuality, ethnicity etc. The Forum consider that the needs of the most vulnerable women such as travellers or migrant workers are not being met and that there are worries that the gender-neutral approach of the Strategy could damage work being done on violence against women adding that another issue missing from the Strategy is that of reproductive rights.

**Women's Resource and Development Agency and the Rural Women's Networks** - consider that choosing to cut and paste some but not all of the categories set out in Section 75 seriously limits the scope of Gender Matters. The Agency continues that Gender Matters fails to recognise that gender, when combined with issues such as ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, political and/or religious beliefs, can lead to

further inequality for women. They stress that all categories of discrimination capable of adversely affecting women must be identified and recommend a fully integrated approach which reflects the multiple identities of women which we believe can only be addressed through a separate women's strategy.

**Women's Support Network** - believe that the exclusion of women's multiple identities is a mistaken strategy.