

Comments on Structural Inequalities

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 - The decision to develop a 'gender equality strategy' rather than a strategy aimed at eradicating the structural inequalities that prevent women from achieving an equality of condition with men has meant that issues specific to women that cannot be compared with male issues, are ignored within the framework proposed. A strategy for women should replace the proposed Gender Equality Strategy. We believe that men's issues are of a different nature and require a separate policy. Most policy areas benefit men far more than they do women yet the failure of the strategy to consider the specific needs of women means that such underlying inequalities are ignored. A meaningful strategy must start with a clear understanding of the structural reasons for women's inequality and include the multiple discriminations experienced by women.

Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) - [With regard to gender equality principles] Avoiding the influence of stereotypes in policy development and all decision-making processes.

CiNI believes that this principle could be framed more positively e.g. recognising and addressing the influence of stereotypes in policy development and all decision making processes.

Committee on the Administration of Justice - that this document has failed to grasp the central problem in relation to gender inequality, which is the operation of policies and practices that serve to marginalize and exclude women. ... a Gender Strategy should have recognised that the primary issue in relation to gender inequality is the structural disadvantage faced by women. The document circulated for comment does not offer any such analysis, and is therefore deeply flawed. an approach that put the structural inequalities faced by women centre-stage would clearly benefit both men and women

Community Foundation for Northern Ireland - there needs to be a clear statement from government outlining the inequalities currently existing and the strategy needed to address these. CFNI recommend that a Women's Strategy, as recommended in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and CEDAW is required.

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland - strategy must define the concept of gender inequality, emphasise the distinct economic and social position of women and men and the ways in which their roles are socially constructed.

EHSSB - barriers that exist for women in particular who despite some changes in society still carry the burden of caring responsibilities. Men as carers also need to be taken into account.

Falls Women's Centre/Ionad Mhná Na bhFál - lack of analysis [referring to how structural inequalities play out in the lives of men and women and how in our society these structural inequalities define and limit the different roles of men and women] represents a fundamental flaw within the document and . will do little to tackle the structural inequalities that prevent women from achieving equality of opportunity with men. fails to acknowledge the factors that prevent women from being able to compete on equal terms with men The lack of an analysis of the nature of structural inequality is again apparent in how the document deals with the issue of caring responsibilities and part-time work.

Family Planning Association - comment that the document .. fails to make the connection between the conditions of women's lives and socially constructed imperatives and patterns of discrimination which obstruct women's full participation in key areas of social, economic and political life in NI. In placing this emphasis (more effective gender mainstreaming) on the the strategy rather than a radical attempt to tackle the disadvantage which women particularly suffer, the strategy undermines the potential to make real change with regard to gender injustice.

The Men's Project - ... illustrated in many of the drawings which show males in control and unaware of the need to look for change; the examples used to illustrate particular inequalities which usually refer to women's circumstances; some of the statistics quoted which show men as either being a problem for society or to blame for their own situationwe also recognise that males, too, have equality issues which need to be tackled.

NICVA - . the strategy fails to acknowledge the legacy of historic discrimination .. and the fact that some groups need more protection and access to resources, including women and especially women with disabilities, black and minority ethnic women, and poor women. Gender Impact Assessment Handbook .. page ten . 'Such inequalities clearly exist in our society and are experienced in the main by women'. This reinforces our point that the evidence does not support the strategy's stated aim to tackle inequalities faced by both men and boys, women and girls. This lack of acknowledgement of the structural basis of inequality is surprising in light of the commitment to instruments including CEDAW...

Northern Ireland Housing Executive - The promotion of equality of opportunity in education, training and in the working environment is vital but only if it is assisted by the changes in the prevalent social norms and stereotypes around caring and social expectation.

Northern Ireland Women's Coalition - no real analysis of the position of women in Northern Ireland society.. ... no specific attention given to the necessity to redress the worst excesses of gender inequality as it currently exists. Nor is there any suggestion of strategic means whereby this might be achieved.

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP) - treating women and men identically will not ensure equal outcomes because women and men experience different living situations. There is inadequate discussion of the factors that prevent women from competing equally with men in area of employment and public life. This would include proposals to redress the unequal division of labour within the home..

Older Women's Network NI (OWN) - the underlying conditions that constitute the universe of gender inequalities, while considering the special circumstances of older women.

Social Economy Network - the absence of the policy to specify the relative disadvantage and discrimination experienced by women over and above that of men.... The proposed strategy does not have the capacity to challenge and eradicate the structural causes of women's unequal status. ... the point of the proposed strategy must be to 'gender mainstream'. Gender stereotyping still excludes girls from accessing and performing well at subjects traditionally considered as male. For girls, education and lifelong learning is compromised by gender stereo-typing and structural inequalities.

Training for Women Network - there needs to be more acknowledgement that the experiences of women are different from those of men...assumed societal structures can often be hostile to women.

UNISON - concerned that a failure to undertake a contextual analysis of women's unequal position in Northern Ireland society has undermined the entire Gender Equality Strategy. the Strategy lacks any coherent analysis of structural inequality... What is needed is the complete restructuring of the policies themselves, the institutions that devise them and the male dominated ethos, attitudes and systems that shape them.

Women's Criminal Justice Network - This refers to all aspects of identity and whilst this seems a laudable sentiment it is neither resource nor priority neutral. By this, we mean you cannot prioritise men and women, it is one or other. Similarly you cannot prioritise married or not married, it is one or other. We strongly feel there needs to be a clearer direction to the strategy, with explicit prioritisation of those groups that are most disadvantaged. That is, we feel Gender Matters needs to clarify not simply what it covers but also what it prioritises.

Women Educating for Transformation (WEFT) - there is an implicit assumption that the strategy is addressing injustices suffered by women and men, as if there were similar levels of injustice suffered by both sexes, which need addressing.

Women's Policy Forum - Substantial concern was voiced about the gender-neutral approach being taken by the strategy. There is a real need for a 'women's strategy', not a gender strategy. We are aware of the needs of certain groups of men however these problems are not caused by discrimination or inequality of access, and can be better tackled in health or education strategies. Likewise the specific needs of transgendered people should be addressed separately. The Strategy has no understanding of the structural inequalities faced by women such as the gender pay gap and the lack of real choice when it comes to caring and part-time work. There are no positive action measures in the Strategy such as encouraging access to public and political life.....

Women's Resource and Development Agency and the Rural Women's Networks - Gender Matters lacks the long term vision and commitment needed to bring about real change for women and is at best purely aspirational. ..failing to address the existing social, cultural and economic inequalities... ..a separate women's Strategy..must be implemented. [On women being more likely than men to provide the main care for children and the elderly]..... Gender Matters does not.....query or examine the structures in place which sustain this imbalance. ..a meaningful strategy must start with a clear understanding of the structural reasons for women's inequality and include the multiple discrimination experienced by women.failing to acknowledge that unequal relationships already exist..Gender Matters offers no analysis or provision for redressing the imbalance. Redefining the relationships which currently exist between women and men must be placed at the centre of this new strategy. A gender neutral approach is inadequate and for that reason a separate women's Strategy is needed to deal effectively with this issue.

Women's Support Network - less attention is paid to addressing the structural barriers that prevent women from equal participation. . the only strategy that could make real change was one that focused directly on women... ..women do not believe the proposed strategy, which is based on women receiving equal treatment to men, can achieve equality for women. We call on OFMDFM to reconsider their plan of action and develop a woman-focused strategy,...

Windsor Women's Centre - recommend that the strategy needs to fully recognise that women's human rights cannot be ensured without fully recognising and then addressing the barriers and inbuilt structural inequalities which operate to keep women marginalised and excluded. The strategy does nothing to ensure that women can be or will be included on equal terms within decision making processes in a post conflict society. There is no discernment within the strategy of how events, laws and policies

impact upon men and women differently and little thought is given to including women as active agents of social change.

Wise Men of the East Network - therefore, greater coordination of the experiences of men within the community sector is required. In civic affairs a consensus is required to create a different attitude so each man and woman can live a life of genuine power - power that comes from knowledge that leads to control of our lives. Not myths about male power!!!

YouthAction Northern Ireland - traditional gender stereotypes and attitudes sometimes prevent young people from doing activities, training etc that they would like to do. This form of discrimination can be overlooked very often and not treated seriously. .. consideration needs to be given to the historical disadvantage experienced by women in the economic, social, political and private sphere.document does not take into consideration the different starting points for women and men. Equal treatment of women and men does not produce equal outcomes.

- society in general has not necessarily changed its attitude towards women
- still a prevalent feeling that young men's needs are being met due to the extensive sports based provision...
- lack of male role models for young men ...
- Young men's work can also be perceived as a threat to young women's work particularly around resources and redistribution.

....Throughout the Gender Matters document there is no recognition of young men. The term 'boy' would not represent the young men with whom the agency would engage. The use of the term 'young men' should replace the use of 'boy'. .. A more strategic approach to working with young men must be developed.