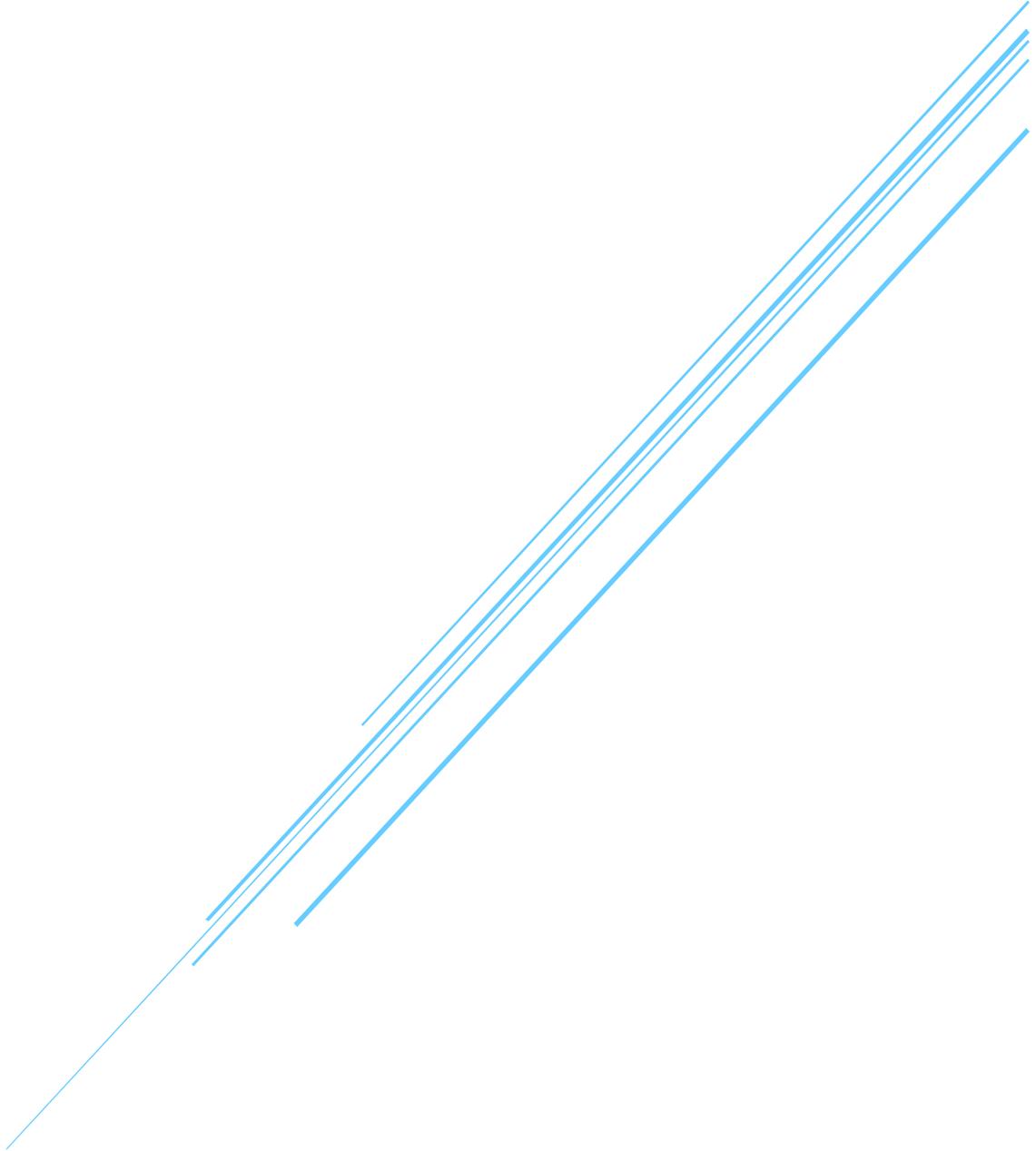


# PROGRAMME OF WORK

ICTU Women's Committee



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## FOREWARD

The ICTU Women's Committee is a long established forum in Congress and one that has always had a strong role to play in identifying issues that are a priority for working women across all sectors and in so doing makes a positive contribution to Congress policy overall.

With this in mind, and following a series of discussions, the Women's Committee decided to prioritise a number of issues as set out in this Programme of Work. We have been guided in our work by Motions from the ICTU BDC 2013 and 2015, the Congress Women's Conference 2014 and ETUC data and analysis.

As you will see we have broken down this work into three key areas – Women Organising for Decent Work which includes collective bargaining, pensions, family leaves, affordable childcare and flexible working; Women in Society which includes women and the working poor, violence against women and ending child poverty; Women in Trade Unions which includes an audit of women in Trade Unions including delegations to union conferences.

In delivering on our Programme of Work the Women's Committee will coordinate with Congress led campaigns such as the Congress Charter for Fair Conditions at Work and the Living Wage campaign.

The Committee would urge all affiliates to engage with this Programme of Work.



Ms Theresa Dwyer  
Chairperson  
ICTU Women's Committee

# ICTU Women's Committee – Work Programme

## Introduction

The Women's Committee has decided to prioritise issues under the following headings as the body of work for the current Committee. These are:

1. Women Organising for Decent Work
2. Women in Society
3. Women in Trade Unions

The Committee will work in pursuing these issues in line with Congress policy and will set objectives that are realistic, achievable and action oriented.

The committee is mindful that actions must contribute to objectives and, where possible, we will work in partnership with other groups, be they Trade Union groups; ICTU Affiliates or groups from wider civil society. It is also intended to consult with IHREC who are not only interested in working with Congress but also have expertise with Equality Proofing.

## Women Organising for Decent Work

### Survey of Women Workers

The Committee will conduct a quantitative and qualitative survey to identify the issues of priority for women workers. It is intended that the survey will be evidence based to develop an understanding and a sound foundation for further decision making and actions.

### Equality Proofing of Collective Agreements, Impact Assessments and Bargaining for Equality on Pay & Conditions

The General Secretary of ICTU will be requested to write to all General Secretaries reminding them that all collective agreements should be equality proofed and that the impact of the provisions of these agreements should be assessed in terms of equality before they are implemented.

We understand that Congress will be holding a "How-Do-I" type training event aimed, in particular, at those involved in collective bargaining. It is considered that those who negotiate on behalf of members need to place an emphasis on equality, as well as accepting that equality proofing and impact assessments are a requirement.

## Family Leave

Parental Leave; Paternity Leave; Maternity Leave and Adoptive Leave: The ability to reconcile work and family life is a key element of decent work. Deficits in these areas have a gender equality impact on women's participation in the labour market and their access to decent work. ICTU has recommended that the Government take the following measures:

1. Introduce a new entitlement to Paid Parental Leave, to be taken at the end of Maternity leave and be available to either parent. The duration of the entitlement could be increased incrementally, with the aim of moving towards 6 months, in addition to the 6 months of Maternity Leave.
2. In addition to making Paid Parental Leave available to either parent, promote the sharing of care roles through reserving at least 1 month of the new Paid Parental Leave for fathers as a "father's quota".
3. Extend the right to request flexible working arrangements to all parents of young children (0-6), regardless of whether returning from Parental Leave or not, with the intention of progressively extending this right to all family carers.
4. Extend the length of time after birth when mothers can take breaks at work to breastfeed beyond the current provision of 6 months (which is of minimal value given that Maternity Leave lasts 6 months) to at least 12 months, at best, 2 years in line with HSE guidelines.

Provisions in relation to flexible working only allow a parent a "right" to request flexible working arrangements. The Committee believes that when workers request flexible working arrangements employers should be obliged to consider not only the work/business needs of their organisation but also the personal responsibilities and obligations of the worker concerned. The Committee believes that we also need to build in a provision whereby employers who refuse flexible working are required to set out the reasons for this refusal. Furthermore, workers should have the right of appeal in circumstances where they are refused.

The Committee believes that it is unlikely that Government or employers will make any provision for paid parental leave etc. Therefore, we need to pursue and explore avenues at EU level for Directives and/or Social Dialogue on the issue of family leaves. The Chairperson of the ICTU Women's Committee is a representative on the ETUC Women's Committee and she will do her part in terms of raising awareness in this regard.

## Affordable, Quality, Universal Childcare

The issue of childcare poses many obstacles to families seeking to reconcile work and family life. Childcare costs in Ireland are among the highest in Europe and this affects parents' ability to work, train or study, as well as forcing families to make difficult financial choices. Deficits in this area tend to have a disproportionate impact on the ability of women to access decent work (and therefore pensions) and so this area, is of high interest to the Committee. In this regard, the Committee is of the view that while dealing with the affordability issues, the importance of high quality childcare provision should not be neglected. The Committee also notes that in its pre-budget submission, Congress identified two issues requiring attention:

1. Congress proposed €75 million to be set aside to partially restore the weekly income of households adversely affected by the changes to the One Parent family Payment and;
2. Funding of €150 million to expand on the public provision of suitable, publicly provided and subsidised childcare.

Budget 2016 only made a provision for €85 million in expenditure on childcare and some of the provisions do not come into effect until September 2016. The Committee is aware of the detrimental effect that the impact of a lack of affordable Childcare bears on gender equality in the workplace and on the labour market.

Congress has conducted a survey on Childcare, the results of which will be published shortly, along with a Congress paper on the issue. This will determine our next steps. The Committee intends to consult with all relevant stakeholders, particularly the NWCi to consider the possibility of pursuing a joint approach. Congress may also need to lobby politically on the matter.

## Women and Society

### Women and the Working Poor

Low pay is endemic in our economy. During the economic crisis, we have witnessed more and more workers pushed into insecure and precarious employment relationships. Zero hour contracts are perhaps the worst example of this phenomenon. Unfortunately, this tends to affect women, youth and migrant workers the most. The Women's Committee will seek to coordinate and promote Union led campaigns such as:

1. The Congress Charter
2. The Living Wage
3. An end to Zero hours contracts

4. Restoration of wage setting mechanisms, such as JLCs
5. Addressing the Gender Pay gap

The Committee needs to agree a set of actions designed to advance the Congress objectives as set out above.

### Violence Against Women

The Women's Committee believes that Congress should continue to support and actively engage with current campaigns which advocate non-violence against women and children:

1. The ManUp campaign
2. The White Ribbon Campaign
3. TORL
4. Supporting the RCNI
5. Domestic Violence Trade Union Guide for Work-place representatives

We intend to meet with the groups to ensure that they are aware of Congress support for their campaigns and will continue to take part in their events. We will also ensure that we are aware of their programmes and disseminate this information to affiliates. We also intend to ask each of the groups involved if there are any additional actions they feel Congress and/or its affiliate Unions could undertake to assist them in their work. Furthermore, the Committee will work with the White Ribbon campaign, which is currently working on a programme to bring into primary level schools.

### Ending Child Poverty

Over the period 2004 to 2012 income poverty and material deprivation among children were significantly higher than among the rest of the Irish population. They were also higher than in most EU15 countries. The Growing Up in Ireland – GUI- national longitudinal surveys provide evidence of sustained increases in economic vulnerability since 2008. Economic vulnerability is defined as being at higher risk of poverty and social exclusion over time, rather than being poor or socially excluded at just one point in time. Children from homes with lone parents and/or low parental education are consistently at risk of poverty.

However, the GUI evidence confirms that the social mix of children economically vulnerable has changed significantly during the recession as more and more families faced low income, joblessness and economic stresses since 2008. 16% of adults defined as living in poverty are employed: they are the working poor.

Today, **one in eight** children in Ireland now live in consistent poverty and nearly two in five experience deprivation – this means these children are going hungry, are without a waterproof coat or live in a poorly heated home. One in six children are facing food poverty.

The research on child poverty since 2008 confirms the view of Congress that the best way to tackle poverty and inequality are to provide inclusive quality public services and ensure decent work and a living wage for all. The political response to growing child poverty must move beyond targeting groups previously characterised by a high dependence on social welfare.

It is noted that in Budget 2016, an additional €3 million will be made available in 2016 towards the School Meals Programme, increasing the funding to €42 million. However the issue is, does this go far enough, considering many schools fundraise locally to provide school meals? It is noteworthy that behavioural issues of children at school is linked to the lack of nutritional foodstuffs. Congress and the Women's Committee should pursue policies which will ensure:

1. Improved literacy levels
2. Longer education participation
3. Supporting the "For Decent Work and a Living Wage" Campaign

As a first step, the Committee has asked the representatives from the teacher Unions (INTO, ASTI, TUI and IFUT) to assist with developing a position paper on this issue. We also intend to consult with relevant civil society groups, as well as the Departments of Health and Social Protection, with a view to developing infographs/factsheets for children and, consequently their parents, on the connection between nutritional foods and how a person looks and feels.

## **Women in Trade Unions**

We believe that the best way for women to organise for gender equality in society and workplaces is through being participation in trade unions. We also believe that trade unions benefit from gender diversity at all levels. We believe that the movement would benefit greatly if the current under-representation of women in leadership positions were addressed.

This requires the development of trade union policies to improve the representation of women and a genuine commitment to a more balanced gender representation in the decision-making structures of unions.

## Mentoring

Working in conjunction with the proposed Worker's College, and with assistance of ETUC, the Committee will work to ensure the development of both a leadership programme for women and a structured mentoring programme with ICTU affiliates.

As a first step, the Committee will ask affiliates for details of such mentoring programmes in their individual Unions. It is envisaged that those who do, would be requested to form a network, with a view to developing a template programme which would assist Unions implementing such programmes in their own organisations. It is acknowledged that mentoring programmes often cover both women and men and our objective will be to ensure a gender smart approach that takes account of any necessary adaptations in leadership styles to reflect what women and men need.

The Committee has also committed to formulate a motion for the next Biennial Conference on the introduction of targets or gender quotas for senior posts in Trade Unions.

## Audit

It was noted that an Audit had been carried out on two previous occasions but that some further work on this could be undertaken. The Committee will work on gathering statistics in regard to gender analysis within Union structures. Statistics on the participation of women at various levels in Unions, will compare the level of participation at the various levels in Unions with the overall women membership in each Union.

These statistics will indicate the degree of change that would be required if women's level of participation at each level were to reflect their membership of each Union. The information that is compiled will be disseminated and these statistics will be maintained and published on a biennial basis. Based on the outcome of the Audit, the Committee will develop a plan of action to address any imbalance.

As a first step, an analysis will be carried out showing the breakdown of males and females of those Unions affiliated to ICTU, over the past 10 years, coupled with an analysis of the gender of both delegates and observers from each union to BDC over the same period.

*Ms Melissa Brennan  
Secretary, ICTU Women's Committee  
12<sup>th</sup> January 2016*