



**Submission to the Committee on the UN Convention of the Elimination of
Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) examining Ireland: 66th session Geneva 13th-
15th February 2017**



Participants at the consultation event with MERAN

Cultúr Migrants Centre, received a small grant from the local municipal council in Co. Meath Ireland to undertake and lead out a series of consultation events with women to culminate in submission to CEDAW. We did this in collaboration with the Meath Equality and Anti-Poverty Network (MERAN) of which we are a member. Cultúr is a locally based community work organisation whose mission is to promote the empowerment, participation, self-determination and rights of ethnic minorities who experience or are at risk of poverty, social exclusion and racism. According to the census of 2011 there are approximately 184,135 people living in our county, which has a population made up of approximately 50% women and whose main town is located one hour from the capital city Dublin.

MERANⁱ is a membership based network which acts as a policy forum for community and voluntary organisations in Co. Meath. Its membership is made up of groups and organisations

who have a commitment to and actively work towards a just and fair society. Organisations that join must demonstrate that they have an anti-poverty agenda and that the work they are involved with is concerned with the promotion of equality and rights. We currently have member organisations who work with women across a range of settings, including migrant women, Traveller women, lone parents, women living in disadvantaged areas, women experiencing poverty, women experiencing gender based violence, women with addiction issues and women with disabilities.

This joint submission to the CEDAW committee is based on meetings that we and other MERAN members facilitated with women in women's refuge settings, with female asylum seekers, with migrant women leaders, women with addiction issues and other locally based community women's groups in the county that members work directly with. It is a broad based submission which focuses on some specific issues for specific groups of women and we have in the main reflected on the issues experienced by women who participated at the consultations to ensure their voices are heard.

At this point it is important to state that we would also support and endorse the key priority areas identified by the Women's Human Rights Alliance (WHRA) in their submission to the committee and the questions they have put to the state and the list mentioned here is not exhaustive e.g. of Traveller and Roma women, violence against women, women prisoners, the sustainable development goals, the Magdalene laundries, female genital mutilation, symphysiotomy, maternity care services, Asylum seekers and domestic workers, the rights of women with disabilities, including ratification of UNCRPD.ⁱⁱ

Human Rights from Global to the Local and Back again: Policy Measures

In collating this submission, one of the goals was to raise the consciousness of women in Co. Meath about UNCEDAW as a human rights instrument and tool for realising women's rights. The fact that no supports and resources by state actors have been made available to ensure that grassroots organisations working with women collectively are enabled to engage in this process illustrates, we believe, the government's lack of commitment to ensuring women understand their rights locally and globally. It also illustrates how removed human rights education is from women's issues at a grassroots level in Ireland. Indeed, many women we spoke to only heard about CEDAW for the first time in this process. If Ireland is serious about its obligations under human rights instruments such as CEDAW then it must resource and support this to happen.

The new Public Duty adopted by the state while welcome, requires education, awareness raising and the participation of those who will be affected by it and women are one of those groups. While the state is making efforts in terms of state bodies and public bodies, this does

not go far enough to support those seeking to vindicate and realise their rights and a greater focus on community awareness and women's awareness of their rights is required.

Cultúr/ MERAN respectfully suggests the committee ask the state:

- What work is the Irish government undertaking to ensure women are aware of their rights under CEDAW and more broadly speaking their human rights under UN conventions ratified by the Irish state?
- Can the state describe how it will ensure that the new national women's strategy, social inclusion and community activation programme (SICAP) and the local and community development structures e.g. LCDS will incorporate a human rights framework in terms of women's human rights?



Participants at the MERAN Event

Marginalised Women and the impact of poverty and social exclusion

The impact of the economic recession and a succession of cuts has had a disproportionate effect on particular groups of women in Ireland, namely, older women in receipt of the state pension only, lone parents, unemployed women, low paid female workers e.g. migrant women, Traveller women, rural women living in poverty, women with addiction issues and women with disabilities. Cuts to social welfare and associated supports were compounded by cuts to essential services for many groups of women e.g. women carers. The cumulative effect of these 'emergency' measures are still to be seen and many supports and services cut have not recovered to the levels they were at pre 2007 and the impact of growing poverty in these years is still being keenly felt by the most marginalised women and their families.

Cultúr/MERAN respectfully suggests the committee ask the state:

- Will the state commit to developing a new anti-poverty strategy and does the state have the level of data it requires to plan for a new anti-poverty strategy with a focus on the active participation of women who experience poverty?
- Will the Irish government set ambitious targets to address poverty in its particular dimensions, with gender specific targets for different groups of women e.g. women with disabilities

A new National Women's strategy

Ireland is currently undertaking consultations with women on a new national women's strategy. The approach being used is similar to previous ones with regional consultation meetings which will not build women's participation. No additional resources are being provided to support women to participate in these events and no localised events have been organised or resourced at a local or grass roots level and it will be up to local organisations to pool their limited resources to engage women. In Co. Meath there is no collective women's organisation, while there are lots of women's groups locally which are not funded but not organising collectively while in a neighbouring county there is. This disparity exists but the rationale for why is unclear and results in women not having a cohesive voice.

Cultúr/MERAN respectfully suggests the committee ask the state:

- What evaluation has been carried out to assess the outcomes of the recently completed national women's strategy and what lessons will be carried forward in terms of a human rights approach?
- How will the state ensure that women who the most excluded in Irish society will be supported to participate in the formulation of the strategy-what methodologies and resources will be employed?
- Will additional resources be made available to implement a new strategy?
- Will a new women's community development programme be part of the new strategy to support collective women's organisations in parts of Ireland where they do not exist?

Education

In the course of our meetings with women on CEDAW, a number of barriers were raised in relation to equality of access and participation in education namely: access to affordable childcare, for migrant women language barriers and the lack of English language supports at

a higher academic level for those on low income; for women in asylum the fact they cannot access higher levels of education and the feeling of being 'stuck' in a system and becoming deskilled.

Other general issues identified were confidence and self-esteem issues for women, issues which have been highlighted in other government reports on the Equality for Women Measure Programme^{iiiiiv} and the need for strong career guidance and mentoring for women to address this issue.

Women also raised the limitations facing women in the home who are seeking to access further education and who may not be eligible for state educational supports due to not being in receipt of a social welfare payment. Other areas identified included the limited choices for women who want to move into a new field to further education courses if you already have a qualification, and for low paid workers the fact that many are not eligible for or cannot access courses that meet their needs and cannot afford those that do exist as they are active in the labour market. A general lack of flexible choice that meets the needs of women was cited.

Cultúr/MERAN respectfully suggests the committee ask the state:

- Why has the Irish government not undertaken an independent evaluation of the learning from the European Social Fund Equality for Women Measure programme (EWM) which ran from 2010-15 to assess the potential to mainstream policy lessons for the development and delivery of education and training programmes to women who are socially excluded in Ireland? Could it review this decision given the level of resources expended and the work of the projects?
- Can the state explain what steps it would be willing to take to address issues of eligibility for education and training courses for women working in the home, women who want to retrain and to support access to education and training for low paid female workers regardless of qualification?
- Can the state outline what measures it intends to take to support women in asylum to continue their education and training while awaiting their application for asylum in order to ensure they do not become deskilled?
- Can the state outline what specific special measures it will put in place to support the education and training needs of marginalized women given the fact that the new PEIL programme^v means many of these groups are not eligible for this programme and what evidence will be used to identify these targeted measures?

Employment

As expected, the discussions with women in Meath raised issues in relation to the cost of childcare which acts as a major barrier to women's participation in employment and their empowerment and participation in society overall. Other issues cited included the lack of a work life balance, the burden of caring for children being carried by women in the main and working for minimum wage with women concentrated in low paid work, the lack of support for women working in the home both financially and as a society with limited value put on this role. Women also stated that they believed the gender pay gap in Ireland means women are still treated unequally in the work place and the paucity of pension provision was a concern for women's financial independence in the future as they get older.

Cultúr/MERAN respectfully suggests the committee ask the state:

- Can the state describe how it proposes to develop a more sustainable and affordable child care model that will meets the needs of parents and supports and resources a highly qualified child care work force. Can it discuss the steps it will take to do this?
- Will the state resource the role of women who work in the home adequately and what plans do the state have in this regard?
- How does the Irish Government plan to address the pension's gap for women in the short to medium term?
- What concrete steps does the government intend to take to address the gender pay gap?

Migrant Women and Women living in Asylum



Migrant Women's sessions-2 held, facilitated

by the Migrant Women's Leaders Group leader Priscilla Amankwatia

Migrant women and women living in asylum in Ireland held and led out their own consultation events as part of this submission and in summary. The issues they highlighted included the fact that the movement of people is gendered, often women come first to a new country with their children and they have specific support needs. The value of migration and the work of migrants is not recognised and recent reports by the International Labour Organisation have stated that migrants and women are the two most discriminated groups of workers so migrant workers face sexism and racism.

Women seeking asylum were concerned about the impact of the asylum process on their children saying they and their children were not the same after leaving direct provision and for their children born in Ireland while in direct provision they have no rights. Other issues they identified relating to direct provision included: language barriers, no access to childcare, limited recreational facilities and social outlets for women in direct provision and limited choice of a General Practitioner where a female GP is required, limited low levels of formal Education opportunities and no employment opportunities.

Years of doing nothing makes me feel I am losing my mind, forget things feel isolated.”

Finally, they cited that the lack of an Independent and fair complaints mechanism for direct provision centres is a violation of their rights with no redress in terms of complaints for them.

The gendered nature of migration also means migrant women are at the frontline negotiating on their families' behalf with services. Any new national women's strategy must reflect this reality and racism and discrimination was cited by migrant women as a daily reality. Many of the other issues highlighted by migrant women were similar to other women, namely, childcare supports and supports for women to return to employment and increased access and participation in further education.

Cultúr/MERAN respectfully suggests the committee ask the state:

- What progress is being made on the single procedure application and when will the 6 month waiting time be reached for those applying for protection in Ireland and what progress is being made on reforming the direct provision system?
- Will the state consider allowing asylum seekers in direct provision currently awaiting their application to be processed access to education and training and employment no longer than one year in Ireland?
- What progress is being made to resource asylum seekers and refugees to integrate with and be part of the local communities in which they live, can the state describe how

it is working with civil society groups to ensure this happens and what resources are being provided.

Health

A wide range of issues were discussed at the consultation with women on health including mental health concerns among women and the lack of funding to implement the state's own mental health policy Vision for Change. Issues of depression for women living in direct provision and the barriers faced by women with alcohol and drug issues e.g. Insufficient treatment beds/facilities where they can have access/ care for their children, affordable and accessible transport to access services in rural area of Co. Meath and the negative judgment and treatment by society of women with addiction issues results in women fearful to present for treatment. Finally, the insufficient services within a community setting and in terms of statutory and services to support women with addiction continues to be a live issue. In terms of health services a one size does not fit all, women stated that services need to be able to meet the needs of women presenting to services and the lack of services in a range of areas was identified.

Cultúr/MERAN respectfully suggests the committee ask the state:

- Can the state outline what steps it will take to address the underfunding of Vision for Change and how the particular needs of women will be addressed?
- How will the state ensure a gender dimension in the new drug and alcohol strategy and can it outline how this will practically be demonstrated in how drug and alcohol services are configured, funded and delivered?

Discrimination against women

All of the consultations highlighted discrimination and stereotyping of women as a key concern across all spheres of life e.g. in the private home in terms of gender roles, in education and employment and also in the access of public supports and services, in some cases this was a result of sexism and racism in the case of migrant women but all women outlined issues of discrimination.

Cultúr/MERAN respectfully suggests the committee ask the state:

- Can the state outline what measures it is taking to address traditional forms of discrimination as requested by the committee in 2005 and new forms of discrimination against women?

Violence against Women

The Meath Women's Refuge facilitated a discussion on CEDAW with women who have experienced gender based violence and they raised a number of issues in relation to the state's response to their needs. Issues included: not being believed in the first instance by services including the gardai, getting poor services due to not having a private income; delays in accessing emergency social welfare payments, Courts were not perceived as user friendly; gender based violence service providers should be trained and services should be promoted and advertised more. The fact that gender based violence is still accepted in many relationships was also raised and the future development of services that would be all inclusive of all the woman's needs i.e. a one stop shop with all supports provided to a woman, counselling services for children to be automatic, more available and not dependent on the permission of the abuser.

In terms of the legal system women expressed their opinion that it wasn't friendly, it felt like they had done something wrong. The delays in garda responses to calls where a safety or barring order was in place was also cited. Language issues and the fact that there are at times no translators for the family court is a barrier for migrant women. The need for more training for family law solicitors who may have limited experience in working on this issue and better communication between Legal Aid was also highlighted along with access to barring orders often taking too long e.g. getting a court date and the paper work completed.

Housing was also a huge concern given the fact that we have a housing crisis in Ireland with women putting their names on social housing waiting lists being complicated and made difficult if they own a house with their abusive partner, access to accommodation for single women with no children and for older women who have left their abusive home. This is complicated by the fact that women often have to leave their home and the perpetrator stays in spite of their actions.

We would concur with the women's rights alliance that there is a dearth of information or data on the nature and extent of gender based sexual violence in Ireland which in turn can identify the gaps that exist to inform evidence based approaches and plans to addressing it comprehensively. No audit has been undertaken since the SAVI report in 2002. While demands for refuge and domestic violence supports throughout the recession grew, services were disproportionately cut.

Cultúr/MERAN respectfully suggests the committee ask the state:

- Can the state indicate what progress it has made in implementing the Istanbul Action Plan to date?

- Can the state discuss its funding model for domestic violence support services and the impact of cuts, its future funding model i.e. commissioning?
- Can the state discuss its intentions to develop an evidence base on the prevalence of violence against women in Ireland
- Can the state outline how it proposes to develop a whole of society preventative approach to addressing violence against women beyond the funding of domestic support services?

ALL THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THE REPORT DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE POLICIES AND POSITIONS OF EACH ENDORSING ORGANISATION

Cultúr and the Meath Equality, Rights and Anti-Poverty Network (MERAN) would like to acknowledge the funding provided by Councillor Sinead Burke, public representative for the Navan Municipal District of Meath County Council to facilitate us to make this submission. We also wish to sincerely thank all of the women’s groups who participated in the meetings we held-your voice was strong and your knowledge and vision is proud and courageous. Finally, we would like to thank all of those who supported putting this submission together including Priscilla Amankwatia, Cultúr staff and MERAN members

ⁱ The Meath Equality and Anti-Poverty Network is a membership organisation made up of Cultúr Migrants Centre, Meath Jobmatters, Meath Women’s Refuge, Trim Family Resource Centre, Disability Federation of Ireland, Meath Travellers Workshop, Kells People’s Resource Centre, Meath Community Drug and Alcohol Response, Navan Springboard, Claremont Stadium, Meath Partnership and the Navan School Completion Programme

ⁱⁱ Women’s Human Rights Alliance: Submission to the Pre sessional Working Group of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 23-27 November 2015: List of Issues to Ireland, 9th October 2015

ⁱⁱⁱ Addressing Gender Barriers to the Labour Market, p6 (Irwin & McArdle), Pobal 2012

^{iv} Equality for Women Measure: Whose Measuring the Impact: Cultúr, Community Work Ireland, National Women’s Council and the National Collective of Women’s Based Networks (2015)

^v Programme for Equality and Inclusion in Learning European Social Fund (ESF)