



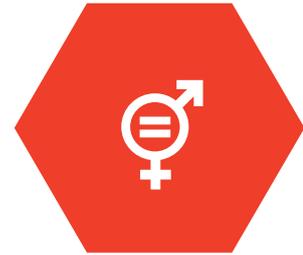
Goal

5



Gender  
Equality

# Goal 5



## Gender Equality

Ireland must aspire to be one of the best places to work and raise families. This can only be achieved if Government takes steps to ensure equal opportunities for the genders.

Family friendly workplaces, a fairer division of caring responsibilities, affordable and accessible childcare, together with reduced occupational segregation will narrow the gender pay gap and make the goal of gender equality achievable.

While there has been a sharp and sustained increase in women's labour force participation and employment, labour market participation remains significantly lower for women than for men and continues to be lower than the EU average despite Irish women being among the most educated in Europe.

While significant progress has been made in addressing the affordability of childcare through the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme in November 2019, this investment needs to be sustained and increased over the next several years. This investment must also be partnered with a flexible workforce strategy that supports working families.

The next Government must work closely with employers to ensure that caring responsibilities are supported by the state and that there is greater equality in who carries out caring responsibilities in society. The availability of shared parental leave and flexible working arrangements has been shown to strongly mitigate the effect of caring responsibilities on women's employment outcomes, while also supporting the needs of all working parents.

The objective of growing the number of female entrepreneurs in the economy has gained significant traction in recent years, where it has been acknowledged that the promotion of women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship can be a driver of innovation, growth and jobs. Yet, it is also recognised that far fewer women run their own businesses often due to barriers that women face in starting and growing businesses. These barriers can be addressed through initiatives that address needs of female entrepreneurs.

## Accommodating Family Friendly Workplaces

- Conduct a review of Paternity Benefit to better understand any obstacles for take-up
- Support parenting equality, where parental leave is reformed so that it can be shared among parents
- Currently, adoptive leave is only entitled to mothers, except in the case where a male is the sole adopter. As family structures are evolving, more inclusive policies must follow suit. Both female and male adoptive parents must be entitled to the same as those who avail of maternity and paternity leave
- Expand the existing entitlements to breastfeeding breaks in the workplace from 26 weeks to 2 years across all sectors, with the inclusion of a transition or phasing-in period ahead of the introduction

## Access to Affordable Quality Childcare

- Increased and sustained investment in childcare services and early education infrastructure so that quality childcare is affordable and accessible to working parents
- Continued investment in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme
- Expand mentoring programmes like “Better Start” that aims to improve the quality of childcare and early childhood education
- The Action Plan on School Age Children, put in place to improve the provision of breakfast club/after school childcare in all parts of the country, is due for review in this year. We call on the next Government to maximise the use of schools and existing community facilities which have suitable environments available for school-age childcare where demand exists and ensure that the targets set out in this action plan are being met through regularised reporting

- The Programme of a Partnership Government 2016 committed to deliver a value-for-money cost analysis of childcare, which was not delivered. The next Programme for Government should ensure that data on the exact cost of delivery of childcare provision is published as soon as possible to ensure that further investment contributes to making childcare more affordable for parents

## Advancing Women in the Workplace

- Develop practical tools and resources to assist employers to narrow the gender pay gap within their organisations
- Reduce occupational segregation by developing specific initiatives that support greater engagement with STEM and support female entrepreneurship.
- Provide additional supports to increase provision of management and leadership training to help female-led companies in scaling their business, especially for mid-level managers
- Expand the services offered by Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) to offer starter office space and longer periods of mentoring, thereby allowing the LEOs the opportunity to increase tailored support for female entrepreneurs
- Increase female participation in Irish trade missions to enable female entrepreneurs to access and expand into new international markets