



Women's  
Collective  
Ireland

**2026 Pre Budget Submission**

**by**

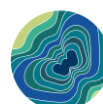
**Women's Collective Ireland**

This proposal is being submitted to Minister Norma Foley – Minister of Children, Disability & Equality, Carol Baxter – Assistant Secretary, Equality, Rights and Participation Division, and Jane Anne Duffy – Principal Officer, Equality and Gender Equality, seeking investment of funding to Women's Collective Ireland (WCI).

## About Women's Collective Ireland

Women's Collective Ireland (WCI) is a national women's community development organisation and receives core funding from the Department of Children, Disability and Equality. There are 17 Women's Collective Ireland Projects located across Ireland. We have 55 mainly part-time place-based staff, most of whom work on the ground in WCI Women's Projects throughout Ireland.

The goal of Women's Collective Ireland is to advance marginalised women's equality through women's community development. Women's Collective Ireland represents and works directly with grassroots women to build women's skills, knowledge, confidence and self-esteem through feminist community education. As the only organisation in the country doing the work we do directly with women, WCI work using community development and feminist principles. Women's Collective Ireland is a pro-choice and inclusive organisation; we work with members of the LGBTQ+ community including non-binary people and trans women. Our work is focused on the creation of an inclusive and equitable society for all.



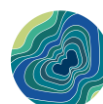
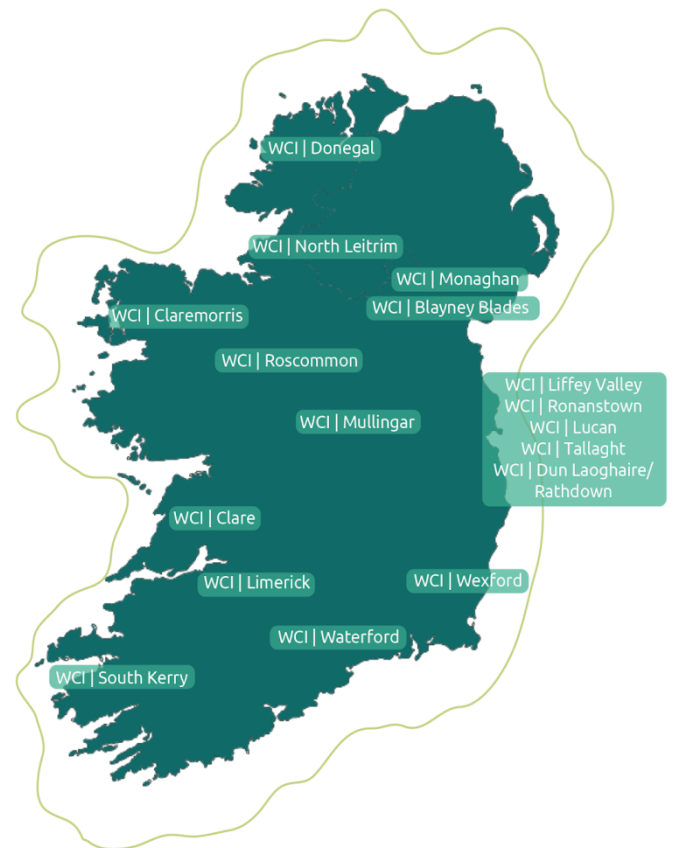
# WCI Women Inspiring Women – Stronger Together

**OUR VISION:** An Ireland where women in all our diversity are flourishing.

**OUR MISSION:** To support grassroots women through collective and practical actions to achieve their full human rights and true equality.

A feminist organisation, that works FOR WOMEN, WITH WOMEN, is ROOTED in the community with COLLECTIVE spaces for women. Our work is grounded in the lives and experiences of the grassroots women we meet and work with.

Women’s Collective Ireland work directly with women on the ground from disadvantaged communities to build women’s confidence and self-esteem through Feminist Community Education.



## WCI Women's Community Education

WCI utilises women's community education as a vital tool in tackling educational disadvantage for women as it provides a model of education, from first steps to third level, which encompasses the needs of women. It starts with the lived experience of the participants and validates their experiences and knowledge. Embedded in WCI work are the prioritisation of the needs and experiences of marginalised women living in Ireland. 17 WCI Women's Projects provide a focal point for local women and are supporting women to access high quality education, training and employment opportunities. WCI are working within our Strategic Plan 2022–2026 goals and objectives which reflect our work and vision for 'An Ireland where women in all our diversity are flourishing'. With "our collective energy" we have developed a reach of over 36,000 women across Ireland. We do this in the knowledge that we have an important role to play in Irish society, amplifying grassroots women's voices.

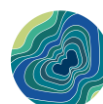
# ENGAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

The following Engagement Highlights Report offers a detailed summary of how many women WCI engaged with during the 2024 period, and the mediums in which were used to do so.

### 2024 Figures:



Overall # of Engagements with Women:  **135,119**



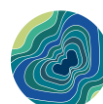
At national level, WCI sits on numerous committees and working groups such as Aontas, Community Work Ireland, National Women’s Council, Irish Observatory on Violence against Women, the Women’s Community Sector Working Group, Crann Childcare Support Agency, the Community Platform, the Irish Network against Racism (INAR), the Alliance for Gender Quotas and the Ukraine Civil Society Forum.

## Programme Funding

As WCI is core funded for staff and some overheads only, local projects lever in programme funding from a variety of sources to outreach and deliver their programme of work to support disadvantaged women’s inclusion in education, training, cultural and community life and overcome barriers. In the 17 Projects, this has resulted in the additional employment of approximately 200 people, mainly women from within our communities, managed, supported and coordinated by WCI staff.

In relation to national programme delivery, national staff source funding to deliver WCI targeted, needs-based community education programmes through each of the 17 WCI Women’s Projects. In recent years, WCI has successfully sourced funding from the ESF Fund, DSF Reconciliation Fund, IHREC and DCEDIY. WCI recognise how searching, applying for and managing such funding streams impacts our work locally as it takes staff hours and resources. Moreover, it means our work sometimes has to be funding led as opposed to women led. Investment in programme funding, which could be allotted to programme delivery at local level would open up a new world of possibility for each WCI project and the local women they work with. When WCI have the funding to deliver national community education programmes to support our work with women at local level, we offer value for money and positively impact the lives of women (see Appendix A for examples of previous funding and its impact).

The impact of WCI’s local and national work continues to evolve and be of undeniable support to the tens of thousands of grassroots women who seek our services. WCI have always, and continue to, welcome the profound responsibility in addressing the diverse needs of marginalised women, as we pride ourselves in supporting such needs. As a national organisation, we recognise the importance of women’s community development in empowering marginalised women, as they navigate barriers to education, healthcare, and social equity. These barriers, while present in the everyday lives of all women, are even more-so challenging to marginalised women who face discrimination due to their race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and more. WCI projects believe that investing in women’s empowerment and community development has lasting impacts on the social and economic fabric of society, in sustaining and building community cohesion and inclusion, and the achievement of equality.



## Key Areas for Investment

WCI welcomes commitments made under the Programme for Government in relation to gender equality and socio-economic equality and very much appreciates Government's commitment to funding our organisation. The primary purpose of WCI's prebudget submission is to highlight to the Government the key areas WCI identify which require investment to advance grassroots women's development including situations where existing WCI services or supports are inadequately funded. We thank the government for the support this year and seek support for our future work. We are seeking your consideration under **two key areas** to ensure sustainability and development of WCI work in the context that marginalised and under-resourced communities need change the most and investment in grassroots women will bring about that change.

### Women's Collective Ireland is calling for:

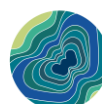
1. Investment in Staff & Organisation Development.
2. Investment in a multiannual programme funding package for grassroots women.

## Area 1 – Investment in Staff & Organisational Development

WCI Board's focus is to ensure that investment in staffing continues to be the main ask of the 2026 submission, particularly in relation to further developing and growing resources to enable pay parity across the sector and in line with pay parity research and reports<sup>1</sup>. WCI Board is committed to achieving pay parity for WCI staff as fair compensation is a matter of equity, fairness, and social justice, especially given the invaluable work our team does for women and communities across Ireland. The push for pay parity aligns with broader efforts to address gender pay gaps and promote transparency in pay practices. By advocating for pay parity, WCI is not only supporting its staff but also contributing to a more equitable and just society.

WCI staff are our most valued asset and provide highly skilled, unique interventions not provided elsewhere. WCI Project staff work with women from disadvantaged communities at a grassroots level that enable those who would not otherwise, participate in all aspects of society. The WCI Board recognise the importance of pay parity in attracting and retaining staff. They are acutely aware of how difficult this can be in this climate and how any vacant positions in the organisation can impact women in our communities. The WCI Board have serious concerns about current limited financial and human resources and the implications for the sustainability of the

<sup>1</sup> In line with the Wheel's Pay and Benefits in the Community and Voluntary Sector Report (2024) [https://www.wheel.ie/pay-and-benefits-community-and-voluntary-sector\\_2024](https://www.wheel.ie/pay-and-benefits-community-and-voluntary-sector_2024) (comparison examples p36, p43)



organisation and, particularly, our work on the ground. WCI made submissions to the IHREC Fourth Periodic Report 2024 and welcome the Commission's Recommendation: *"Core, multi-annual, ring fenced, and autonomous funding is made available to civil society organisations, which ensures decent work and adequate wages for staff and builds capacity to meet increasing need for advocacy and services"*.<sup>2</sup>

### **WCI ARE SEEKING YOUR SUPPORT BY VALUING WOMEN AND WOMEN'S WORK THROUGH:** Investment in WCI for sustainability.

- Investment of funding would enable the WCI Board to further implement good governance procedures and processes in relation to bringing pay parity for staff in line with other organisations in the sector and would enable WCI Board to apply annual incremental increases for staff and explore bringing staff pay scales in line with public sector pay scales.
- WCI Board also aim to recognise staff experience and qualifications as many of our workers have bachelor's degrees, and master's, some with 15 years plus experience.

### **WCI PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT:**

Organisational development is key to advancement and success of our vibrant organisation. The WCI Board are committed to valuing and investing in staff to support them in their intensive, frontline work with women. Government investment would enable the Board to provide targeted training and professional development for staff, recognising and valuing their role in building capacity and supporting participation of disadvantaged women.

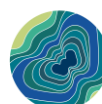
Investment in meaningful professional employee development leading to a more robust internal team of resilient women role models working in our communities which WCI believe is required to thrive in today's environment. We recognise that this plays a big part in organisation's growth and expansion, and this would also significantly help us to recruit and retain employees.

## **Area 2 - Investment in a multiannual programme funding package for grassroots women.**

The prioritisation of the needs and experiences of marginalised women living in Ireland are embedded in WCI local action plans of work. WCI creates safe and welcoming spaces for women to be themselves and for women to grow and learn, connect with others, combat isolation, improve mental health, learn new skills, increase confidence and often progress to continued or higher education and employment. We recognise that adequate supports must be contained within

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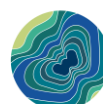
<sup>2</sup> [IHREC Fourth Periodic Report](#) on Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (p18)



community education programmes to ensure access for the most marginalised of women. We also recognise the need for a greater focus on integrating diverse women based on areas of commonality rather than nationality or legal status. Investment will support greater community integration and counteract the rise of the far right. It is the experience of WCI that providing access to education, training, and employment, can change not only a woman's life but impacts on her family and community and can help address intergenerational unemployment and poverty. Supports and services provided by the WCI Projects include targeted outreach strategies, particularly in rural areas where many women are geographically isolated and disadvantaged.

As WCI projects are core funded for staff and some overheads we urgently need investment in programme funding for women as this is central to WCI supporting grassroots women's advancement in society. Programme funding to support this work is currently sourced and leveraged in by local WCI projects. To mitigate against this informal ad-hoc procedure, WCI are seeking a commitment to an equitable, sustainable, multiannual programme funding package that empowers women's community projects to address the needs of grassroots women and the local communities. The success of the WCI Women and Leadership Programme has demonstrated the need for needs-based targeted national programmes delivered locally. Based on WCI strategic objectives and identified need, we are seeking investment to support WCI to develop further a suite of needs-based programmes to enable participation and inclusion.

WCI 17 projects prioritise women's health and wellbeing by providing positive health and wellbeing services through community education and development praxis. WCI recognises the importance of intercultural and intersectional approaches via tailored and targeted support. WCI believe that positive health and wellbeing services facilitate participation and engagement supporting individuals in their journey to better health and wellbeing ensuring both personal and community advancement through active citizenship and collective action. WCI's perspective is that learning and making connections are fundamental parts to positive mental health and wellbeing. We believe that supporting the health and wellbeing of women is vital in bringing about change and enriching women's lives, families and communities. In response to needs analysis survey in one of our 17 Projects that 197 women responded: 100% of women identified the importance of having a space for health and wellbeing programmes and workshops. 67% were experiencing negative mental health and requiring community support (WCI Liffey Valley 2023). The work we do in WCI has a positive impact on the women we work with locally and nationally. In 2024, students from the CWELL Diploma Programme at the University of Limerick conducted research on the impact WCI Limerick had on local women. You can read that report [here](#).



## WCI ARE SEEKING YOUR SUPPORT BY VALUING WOMEN'S HEALTH & WELLBEING

Through Investment enabling us to provide a WCI tailored holistic approach WCI empowering activities for the health and wellbeing of women.

- WCI are seeking programme funding to develop and publish our work promoting Women's Health and Wellbeing by designing a WCI Women's Health, Wellbeing and Self-Care Toolkit Manual with step-by-step programme activities including physical, mental and emotional wellbeing resource information for grassroots women.
- Funding to deliver the WCI Women's Health, Wellbeing & Selfcare Programme in 17 Projects.
- Investment in Women's Grassroots Programme Funding to enable WCI to develop tailored suite of needs-based programmes to enable participation and inclusion.

While the majority of the objectives in the National Strategy for Women in Girls are reflected in the previous items, there remain the following NSWG's specific objectives relating to WCI strategic priorities and activities that need funding support:

### Objective One: Advance women's socio-economic status

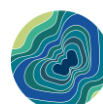
- Fund WCI targeted programme rollout for women distanced from the labour market, including WCI Grassroots Women's 'New Directions Programme 'Encompassing Pathways' towards empowerment, education and employment.

### Objective Four: Advance women in leadership

- Continue to support core funding for WCI Women in Leadership Programme and related programmes.

## WCI's Ambition to Expand WCI to New Geographic Areas

WCI have an ambition under WCI Strategic plan to identify and research opportunities for expansion into new areas not served by a women's community development project. Once WCI priority Areas One and Two are adequately funded, WCI would be in a position to explore and provide detailed evidence of the need for investment to enable equate funding for expansion of our work to new geographic areas and support more women experiencing disadvantage. WCI are more than happy to provide evidence of the need and costings should the Department require further information. Evidentially, when women are supported, it impacts positively on their children, families, and communities. It can halt multigenerational unemployment, low educational attainment and increase participation in both community and society. WCI need continued investment in core funding to enable us to continue our work advancing disadvantaged women's equality. While it is evident that gender inequalities impact on all women, women experiencing disadvantage are impacted disproportionately.



## Conclusion

WCI have an important role to play in furthering government commitments to women's equality and a new National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG). WCI represents the voices of disadvantaged women in developing and monitoring the NSWG. In 2024/2025; following consultation with and by local WCI Projects, WCI submitted a written submission to the Department on the development of the NSWG including a survey with input from the women we work with. WCI also took part in the Department's consultations to further inform the development of the next NSWG. Our WCI work with grassroots women aligns with the Strategy's objectives; to advance socio-economic equality for women and girls; to promote their physical and mental well-being; to increase their visibility in society and equal and active citizenship; to promote women's participation in leadership; to combat gender-based violence; and to embed gender equality in decision-making. WCI recommended the development of clear actions and indicators and the allocation of appropriate resources. We welcome the recommendation from the evaluation of the NSWG for future national equality strategies that: *"Resources should be allocated to support the capacity of seldom heard and marginalised groups to participate fully in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national equality strategies"* (CES evaluation 2023). We look forward to working with Minister Norma Foley and her officials on implementing and monitoring the new National Strategy for Women and Girls.

WCI participative and ongoing consultation with women helps us to target programmes and supports for women and represent their voice on issues affecting women's lives. Earlier this year WCI fed into IHREC's Civil Society Forum on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Our ongoing research will help support a WCI collective voice; identifying the needs, issues and challenges now experienced by women; feed into work planning; and help WCI to influence new strategies being developed in response to issues identified. Women's Collective Ireland recognises women's diverse needs, and we will work to address these specific needs in the different communities we work and live in.

Women's Collective Ireland will take appropriate and effective action to improve grassroots women's participation in our communities and society. WCI support marginalised women within Ireland, so that we may achieve our vision in creating an Ireland where women in all our diversity can flourish and that women who access our services can reach true equity. As an organisation, we recognise that women's community development is more than a pathway to individual growth; when nurtured, it is a pathway to societal transformation. WCI look forward to working with you and your officials to ensure the sustainability of our valuable work carried out with disadvantaged women throughout the country.



## Appendix 1

**2022:** The EU funded PEIL programme 'WCI STEPS' delivered through 10 WCI Projects and over **500 women participated**. Supporting women into education, training and employment. WCI hosted a successful evaluation learning seminar for participants and funders. WCI STEPS for Women: 38% increased their employment opportunities and 66% on to further education. (WCI Publication report 2022).

**2022/23** WCI Community Grassroots Women Bonding & Bridging Weaving All Ireland Connections pilot programme. We connected grassroots women from six communities (3 North & 3 South) across the Island, to better understand each other and build relationships by engaging in meaningful conversations on issues that affect their lives and their communities. WCI **designed** a Toolkit for First Steps & Opening Conversations manual for WCI Projects.

**2023/2024:** WCI are grateful to the DCEDIY for the support and recognition of our work with grassroots women. WCI designed and delivered the Women in Local Leadership (WILL) in our 17 Projects. WCI Projects are crucial in supporting the participation of women from diverse backgrounds, and in particular women most distant from decision making processes, into political and public life, and supporting women to take on leadership roles. **313 women participated**.

**2024** we launched our WCI Grassroots Women's Manifesto. Women named the issues that affect them with a view to sharing this with politicians. This included legal rights, political participation, gender-based violence, poverty, lack of access to quality education and healthcare, burden of paid and unpaid work, reproductive health, human rights and climate justice.

**2024:** WCI hosted an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Seminar for 60 WCI Board and staff. The event covered the following D & I subject matters: Ableism, Equality & Sexism, Racism, Ageism Homophobia and Transphobia, Unpacking our Unconscious Bias. We share our learning at local level in our grassroots women's projects.

**2025:** 60 WCI Board and Staff took part in our training seminar strengthening WCI Community leaders' knowledge on Climate Justice, Environmental Justice, and Just Transition. We share this learning at local level in our grassroots women's projects.

