

Consultation Response: Follow-up strategy for the Roadmap for equality between women and men, 8 October 2009

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the proposed follow-up strategy for the Roadmap for equality between women and men. *Children in Scotland* is an umbrella organisation whose membership includes over 400 statutory, voluntary and professional organisations across Scotland. Our primary purpose is to support the improvement of the lives and life chances of children and young people. Children in Scotland is leading a 3-year project funded by the Scottish Government (2008-11), called: *Making the Gender Equality Duty Real for Children, Young People and their Fathers*. The project's aim is to support Scotland's public service providers to fulfil their legal obligations under gender equality legislation, and to move the gender equality agenda forward positively. We place particular emphasis upon supporting fathers and men to play an active, positive role in children's care and development, as this is an important area that has tended to be neglected by the gender equality agenda. In our response (below), we have focussed on questions 2 and 3 of the consultation paper, regarding the future challenges and the main policy priorities for gender equality.

Firstly, the 6 broad priority areas defined in the Roadmap remain relevant. However, these are broad categories open to interpretation. If the Roadmap is to effectively guide policy across the European Union, it will therefore be important to explicitly identify key, specific actions relating to the priority areas outlined below.

- 1) Tackling stereotypes relating to masculinity/femininity broadly, and appropriate roles and behaviour for women and men, girls and boys.** This will require positive action to challenge culturally entrenched views and beliefs in key areas such as: education, career choices, caring roles, family-friendly working and health. Tackling these stereotypes will also be important in addressing violence (inside and outside the home) and in supporting victims of violence. This type of positive action would underpin each of the current 6 priority areas.
- 2) Support family-friendly working practices for both men and women as parents.** In particular, this can be achieved through legal provisions relating to shared parental and paternity (as well as maternity) leave. Placing too much emphasis on maternity leave in isolation tends to reinforce gendered 'breadwinner'/carer roles and stereotypes. Likewise, flexible working provision is also an important aspect of family-friendly working and of achieving life—work balance. Although in theory opportunities for flexible working may exist equally for men and women, in practice, gender-divided workplace culture ensures that take-up for childcare purposes is still mainly by mothers.

- 3) **Reduce occupational gender segregation.** This should include female-dominated sectors such as children's care and education as well as the obvious male-dominated sectors. In order to make lasting change in this area, it will also be important to take positive action to address the causes (institutional as well as cultural) of gendered career and education choices of children and young people.
- 4) **Support fathers (both biological and de facto) to be actively and positively engaged in their children's care and development.** This support can take many forms, but broadly, there are substantial opportunities for positive action to better support and engage/include fathers across a range of services provided to parents and children in early years, health, education, social work and community development sectors. We are currently mapping such local-level initiatives across Scotland, and are finding them to be relatively low cost, with potentially substantial benefits to the children and families involved, as well as to wider society.

Finally, our priority areas 2, 3 and 4 above are all areas in which both qualitative and quantitative gender targets can easily be identified. For instance, these could include a percentage increase (up to 50%) in the number of men employed in early years care and education professions or the numbers of men taking up flexible working and parental leave opportunities. Likewise, the engagement of fathers (as well as mothers) with key services such as antenatal, as well as parenting education and support services can also be measured and appropriate targets set. It would however, be most effective to complement quantitative targets with reporting of both quantitative and qualitative indicators of progress, particularly in relation to the engagement of fathers with specific services.

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