

# Unite Notes: Social Exclusion is a Feminist Issue

## Poverty Island

Over 65 million women in Europe suffer from poverty and social exclusion. On the island of Ireland, the figure is more than one million – or nearly one-in-three women. This is the greatest social crisis facing both Ireland and Europe.

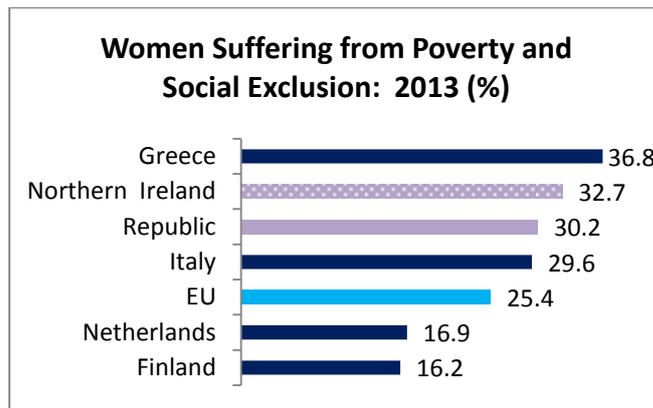
Poverty and social exclusion, which combines both poverty and lack of work indicators, is a key element of the Europe 2020 Agenda which all EU governments have signed. The target is to reduce poverty and social exclusion by 20 million – women and men – by the end of the decade. Even if this minimalist target was met, nearly one-in-five would still be trapped in poverty and social exclusion.

However, the numbers are moving in the wrong direction as EU Governments – especially in Northern Ireland and the Republic - subordinate the needs of society to fiscal orthodoxy and financial capital.



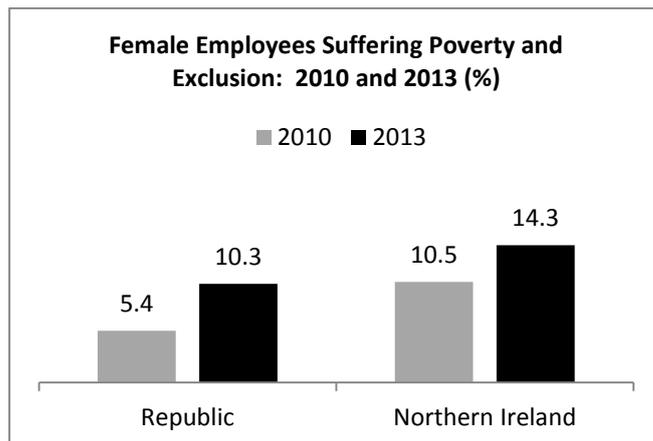
Even if the target was met, nearly three-quarter of a million of women would still be suffering from poverty and exclusion.

Both the Republic and Northern Ireland have some of the highest levels of poverty and social exclusion in the EU-15. This is due to low wages, precarious work, and low social protection support for those not in work.



## In-Work Poverty and Social Exclusion

It is constantly stated that getting a job is the only sustainable route of poverty. However, a substantial number of women in work suffer from poverty and exclusion – and the number is rising.



In the Republic, more than one-in-ten women in work are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In Northern Ireland this number rises to one-in-seven.

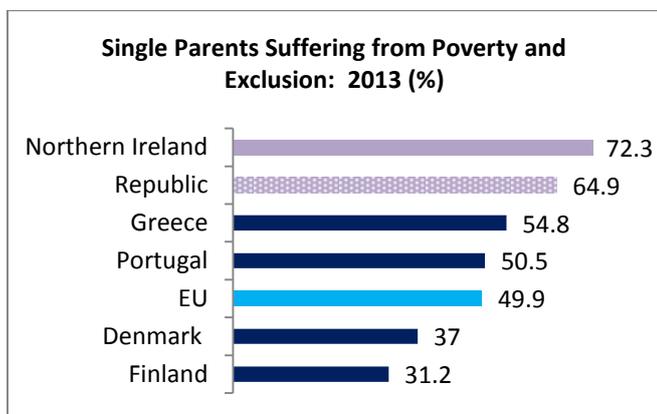
Women without an income from work – unemployed, disabled, carers, retired – are unsurprisingly more at risk. In the Republic, 42 percent of women not employed are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In Northern Ireland the figure is nearly 50 percent.

However, it is single parents who are the most exposed to this social crisis.

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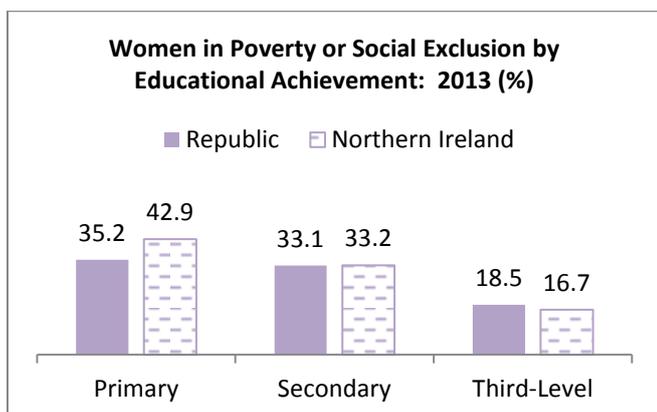
## Lone Parents



Not only do the overwhelming majority of single parents in Ireland – most of whom are women - face high-levels of poverty and social exclusion, they are the most exposed in the EU.

## Educational Achievement

Poverty or social exclusion respects few boundaries – whether work, household type or gender. Nor does education achievement necessarily provide protection.



Unsurprisingly, women with only a primary education face the highest levels of poverty or social exclusion. Those with only a secondary education – one-in-three – are also vulnerable. But the crisis also affects high levels of women with third-level education, even though people are told that education is a passport to prosperity.

## A Programme for Trade Unionists

High levels of deprivation, poverty, lack of employment and low-pay: these are the result of policy choices. We now need a programme to raise the incomes and living standards of women and all working people.

- **Substantially increase social protection payments** and reverse the most grievous cuts to community supports to help those not in work.
- **Increase the National Minimum Wage:** In the *Republic*, the minimum wage has not increased above its 2007 level while the recent proposed increase in *Northern Ireland* doesn't even match the target set by the Tory/Lib Dem government. The long-term goal should be to raise the statutory wage floor to the Living Wage level.
- **Ban zero-hour contracts** as part of a drive to end precarious work – a major contributor to in-work poverty and deprivation.
- **Roll out affordable childcare places** throughout the *Republic* and *Northern Ireland* – providing service at less than half the current market rates.
- **Expand public service employment** in the *Republic of Ireland* and defeat *Northern Ireland* Executive plans for devastating cuts to public sector employment and services – which are a major employer of women.

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These are some of the strategies Unite will be campaigning for – to ensure that the recovery in the *Republic* and *Northern Ireland*, is not only a workers' recovery, but is a woman's recovery.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All data from Eurostat: There is no separate data for Northern Ireland. Therefore, UK levels are used as a baseline. The Nevin Economic Research Institute estimates that poverty in Northern Ireland is approximately 27 percent higher than in the UK as a whole. Therefore, the data for Northern Ireland represents this increase over the UK numbers.

