

Alliance for Gender Quotas at Local Level Position Paper

50/50 in Local Government: The Way Forward

Executive Summary

Convened by the National Women's Council, the Alliance for Gender Quotas for Local Elections (the Alliance) is a collective of civil society organisations and academics working together to advocate for the provision of statutory gender quotas of 40% for local elections. In this, the Alliance supports the Joint Committee on Gender Equality's recommendation for the introduction of a coherent national gender quota strategy to accompany legislation.¹

The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality called for gender quotas for local (and European) elections to be implemented for the 2024 elections. It was disappointing that the government did not act on this recommendation in advance of the local elections in June. While there was a record number of women running for local election in June 2024, the figure was still just 31% of all candidates.

Men are over-represented in politics and public life. Just 26% of our new Councilors across the state are women. This is a marginal increase on the 2019 local election (24%) but is the same number of women councillors (247 – 26%) as the outgoing councils, given the increase since 2019 with co-options. It is far from the critical mass of 40% needed to have real impact. The Alliance will work with all progressive stakeholders to ensure that we do not see the stagnation in women's representation repeated in the next election cycle.

The Alliance acknowledge the work of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in this area, through their funding of programmes that support women to run for election, and for local authorities to increase diversity in public representation. We argue that introducing statutory gender quotas of 40% will underpin, complement and accelerate the realisation of the Department's ambitions for gender-balanced and diverse council chambers.

The Alliance is calling for:

- The implementation of statutory gender quotas of 40% for local elections.
- Commitment to the introduction of mechanisms to ensure the adequate representation of minority groups including but not limited to: Traveller women, women from migrant backgrounds, disabled women and women from the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Increased funding for political parties, councils, and NGOs, tied to outcomes, to support women's inclusion, as for quotas to be effective, proper resourcing for engagement, capacity building, and training will be needed.

¹ Joint Committee on Gender Equality Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality (2022) [Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality \(oireachtas.ie\)](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/jcge/unfinished-democracy-achieving-gender-equality/) p111

Introduction

The continuing under-representation of women in local government was the catalyst for the National Women's Council to begin exploratory work with civil society activists and academics with a view to establishing an advocacy coalition for gender quotas for local elections in 2024. The Alliance for Gender Quotas was subsequently convened and have prepared this position paper. The members of the Alliance are:

50/50 Group, 50/50NI, Dr Pauline Cullen & Shane Gough (NUI Maynooth), Dr Fiona Buckley (UCC), Women for Election, Independent Living Movement Ireland, Dr Sandra McAvoy, Dr Claire McGing, National Traveller Women's Forum, See Her Elected, AkiDwA, Women's Collective Ireland – Limerick

The goal of the Alliance is to advocate for the provision of statutory gender quotas of 40% for local elections. This is a measure that has both public and civil society support. A Eurobarometer survey found that 72% of people in Ireland think there should be more women in political decision-making roles and 79% are in favour of legal measures to ensure gender equality in politics.²

The Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality published comprehensive recommendations in 2020 covering many key areas for women and women's equality, outlining a clear pathway to achieve gender equality in Ireland for prompt and decisive action. 87.6% of the citizens voted in favour of extending the gender quota for party candidates at general elections to local elections, elections to the Seanad and European Parliament elections by the end of 2022.³

The Joint Committee on Gender Equality who considered the Citizens' Assembly recommended that the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government introduce legislation providing for statutory gender quotas for local, Seanad and European Parliament elections. They further recommend that "the Government introduces a coherent national gender quota strategy to accompany the legislation, with clear targets, actions and resources to ensure that Ireland rapidly accelerates to 50:50 gender balance across the Oireachtas and European Parliament representation for Ireland by 2030; such a strategy to incorporate nested quotas and targeted supports for ethnic minority women, Traveller women and disabled women, to help tackle the lack of diversity in elected office".⁴

Whilst measures to erode the structural barriers that prevent women from entering into public office and to support women as candidates are welcome and vital, these must happen in parallel with quotas to accelerate their effectiveness.

Women's representation is essential to the quality of our democratic processes. The principles of justice and equality dictate that a representative government should constitute a microcosm of the larger society in terms of gender, class, age, minorities and so on.

The underrepresentation of any of these groups weakens democracy as their interests are at risk of being marginalised or ignored.

Traveller and Roma women, working class women, disabled women, migrant women, women of colour, women in rural communities and LGBTQ+ women experience the impact of policy making the most. They face additional barriers in achieving full and equal participation in public and political life. Consequently, the Alliance believe that targets are required to increase the representation of women from marginalised

² European Commission (2017). Eurobarometer on Gender Equality. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2154>

³ <http://citizensassembly.ie/en/about-the-citizens-assembly/report-of-the-citizens-assembly-on-gender-equality.pdf>

⁴ Ibid p111

groups. It is not enough for political parties and government initiatives to introduce quotas with just gender parity in mind. Instead, they need to engage meaningfully with organisations representing a diversity of women, making sure that an articulation of all interests and perspectives informs decision making. Women make up the largest group who are currently underrepresented. Alongside other measures, a proven successful mechanism for increasing representation is the implementation of gender quotas.⁵

Context

National and international data indicate that men are over-represented in political decision-making at all levels. Like national politics, local government on this island has historically been male-dominated. Women face extra barriers to entering and staying in politics. A recent report commissioned by the NWC and written by Dr. Pauline Cullen and Dr. Claire McGing found that women councillors have a lower retention rate than men.⁶ According to the researchers, some of the deterrents for women to keep the position include online and offline abuse, low remuneration, and lack of affordable childcare and family support. Additionally, a recent report by the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life found that fear of abuse can impact members of the Oireachtas' engagement in certain policy issues due to fear of being attacked or sexually assaulted.⁷ The most recent local elections in Ireland showed that women still have a long way to go to reach the critical mass needed to have any influence in Irish politics.

The recent local election in Ireland showed a stagnation in women councillors with just 26% of women councillors elected. There is still a significant rural/urban divide in female representation with figures skewed by councils in the Dublin region approaching or achieving gender parity. This stands in stark contrast to rural councils such as Donegal (3 women out of 37, 8%); Mayo (3 women out of 30, 10%); Longford and Carlow (2 woman out of 18, 11%). The 2023 local elections in Northern Ireland returned 31.5% female councillors.

Currently 27% of council CEOs are women, meaning that male perspectives dominate at both the executive and representative membership levels of councils. Research links low levels of women's representation in decision-making and poor outcomes for women's interests.⁸ For example, a central consequence of women's underrepresentation in local politics is that men and women in local office may value different policies, create policy in unique ways, and produce alternative policy outcomes. Gender differences emerge, as Holman (2015)⁹ discusses, because of gendered socialisation patterns. Women are socialised to care more for others leading to differences in policy preferences. When more women are elected, more progressive policy follows. Women legislators and voters alike support welfare, health and social service spending at higher rates than do men and we can point to historic patterns of women's activism in these areas.

Local government provides essential services such as housing, roads, libraries, planning, environment, and economic development as well as being a key part of the functioning of our democratic system.

⁵ United Nations, Economic and Social Council (2021). Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2021/3)

https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/65/UNWOMEN_CS65%20Brochure%20EN.pdf

⁶ https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Women_Beyond_the_Dail_2024.pdf

⁷ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBusiness/other/2024-05-15_task-force-on-safe-participation-in-political-life_en.pdf

⁸ Holman, M. (2017). Women in Local Government: What We Know and Where We Go from Here. *State and Local Government Review*, 49(4), 285–296

⁹ Holman D.(2015) Exploring the relationship between social class, mental illness stigma and mental health literacy using British national survey data. *Health (London)*. 2015 Jul;19(4):413-29. doi: 10.1177/1363459314554316.

With its proximity to women's lives, local government is uniquely positioned to strengthen women's participation in decision making and improve the representation of their interests. Increasing the representation of women in local government challenges organisational cultures and increases perceptions of inclusion and representativeness for constituents.

Understanding how to increase women's representation in local government can in turn improve public awareness and support of local government. Voter choice in Ireland is severely restricted by the lack of women candidates on local elections ballot papers. Women have a right to be represented in their local communities and influence decisions that are being made without them.

Lack of equal and diverse representation in Local Government is a democratic deficit that demands targeted action to overcome. The *Programme for Government – Our Shared Future* (PfG) 2020 identified a need for greater diversity and gender equality in local government, in particular that a more sustained effort is required to increase the representation of women in local government.

The 2020 PfG committed the Government to “continue to support proactively measures to increase the participation of women and wider diversity in local government, through awareness and capacity building, candidate training, research and other incentive schemes and programmes”.¹⁰ This commitment is ongoing with investment from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage towards groups such as SeeHerElected, Women for Election and the National Women's Council.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission recommended that the Electoral (Amendment) Political Funding Act 2012 be amended to apply to local government elections.¹¹ Most recently in their report to the UN Human Rights Committee, they recommended that *‘the State extend gender quotas to local, Seanad, and European Parliament elections, to ensure at least 40% of election candidates are women, and that additional positive action measures, such as reserved Parliamentary seats and a quota system to support the political participation of under-represented groups, are introduced’*.¹²

The EU Strategy for Gender Equality has specifically called for improvements in the balance between women and men at all levels of politics. The Commission calls on all member states to “develop and implement strategies to increase the number of women in decision making positions in politics and policy-making”.¹³

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2017 report recommended “that the State party increase the use of temporary special measures, including statutory quotas, in all areas covered by the Convention in which women are underrepresented, such as in local government elections”.¹⁴

The Women's Parliamentary Caucus in their constitution say “as part of a more gender equal society, the vision of the Women's Caucus is an Ireland where there is equal representation of women and men in the Oireachtas and on city and county councils.”¹⁵ The Women's Regional Caucus' current programme of work aims to support and enable women to get involved in, and stay in, local politics.

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>

¹¹ https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/03/IHREC-Submission-to-the-Citizens-Assembly-on-Gender-Equality-March-2020_fin.pdf

¹² <https://www.ihrec.ie/state-must-ensure-that-an-garda-siochana-define-and-prohibit-racial-profiling/>

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/gender-equality-strategy-2020-2025_en.pdf

¹⁴ https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fIRL%2fCO%2f6-7&Lang=en

¹⁵ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/communications/other/2018/2018-07-12_constitution-of-the-irish-women-s-parliamentary-caucus_en.pdf

Local Elections

There has been a steady increase in the number of women putting themselves forward for local elections in Ireland, a trend we hope to see increase.

Election year	% of candidates who are women
1999	16%
2004	19%
2009	19%
2014	21.6%
2019	28%
2024	31%

Women made up 31% of the candidates in the 2024 Local elections. This was up from 28.4% in 2019. The two largest political parties failed to run 30% female candidates in 2019 and 2024. Women candidates accounted for 38% of candidates in the urban electoral areas and 29% of the total number of candidates in the more rural constituencies.¹⁶ 2 local electoral areas out of 166 had no women candidates. Only 11 Local Authorities out of 31 have reached a critical mass of 30% women elected or more in the 2024 local elections; nine of these councils are in Dublin or counties in its 'commuter belt'. There are 33 local electoral areas with no women elected to represent them.

Incumbency is a clear and distinct advantage in winning a seat in elections. In the most recent local elections 84% of outgoing councillors stood for re-election and 86% were re-elected, leaving just 28% of seats available for non-incumbent candidates.

681 seats were contested by women in the 2024 local elections out of 2,153 candidates.¹⁷ Women for Election were calling for 1,000 women to be supported to run in 2024, and have supported hundreds of women to run. See Her Elected have a specific rural focus and the publication of the See Her Elected Guide to Running in the 2024 Local Elections provided detailed practical information for women. The Immigrant Council of Ireland run ongoing trainings for candidates of a migrant background. Since 2019 Women's Collective Ireland - Limerick have been working to increase and strengthen women's representation and participation in Local Government through courses,

¹⁶ For the purposes of this analysis, urban councils are categorised as the four local authorities in Dublin, Cork City Council and Galway City Council. All other councils are categorised as rural, but it is important to note that they may have a strong urban component (e.g. Limerick City and County Council).

¹⁷ 677 women contested the local elections. A small number ran in more than one local electoral area, and in total women contested 681 seats in the elections.

publications,¹⁸ events, networking and workshops and were also instrumental in the establishment of the Limerick Women's Caucus in 2019, which was the first of its kind at a local level in the country. The National Traveller Women's Forum works towards increasing the political participation and representation of Traveller women at local and national level, and runs workshops and events for those interested in running.

Year	% women candidates	% elected women
2009	17.2% (314)	17.1% (151)
2014	21.6% (440)	20.6% (196)
2019	28.4% (562)	23.8% (225)
2024	31.4% (681)	26% (247)

At the current rate of change, it will take until 2049, five more local electoral cycles, before the overall figure for women elected will reach 40%.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, 31.5 % of local councillors are women, while 27% of council CEOs are women. Evidence from national and international research indicates that larger constituency seats tend to be more favourable for women than three-seat constituencies.¹⁹ This trend might explain why, despite the absence of gender quotas in Northern Ireland where constituencies are larger, there is still a relatively higher representation of women in local government than in the south.

Year	% elected women
1999	14%
2005	21%
2011	23.5%

¹⁸<https://womenscollective.ie/latest-news/wci-limerick-new-report-addressing-sexism-in-politics-creating-safe-inclusive-and-accessible-political-spaces-for-everyday-women/>

¹⁹<https://www.womenforelection.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/wfe-why-so-few-women-in-the-dail-claire-mcging-april-2024.pdf>

2014 ²⁰	25%
2020	26%

Following the 2022 NI Assembly elections, 32 women were elected, compared to 27 in 2017, meaning women now make up 35.5% of those elected (Equality Commission 2022). This was seismic considering that historically Northern Ireland has had the lowest proportion of women’s representation among all UK devolved institutions.

The Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) in 2014 found the committee unanimous on the need to increase the participation of women in politics, but divided on the methods to use. Candidate quotas such as the 30% in force in the Dáil elections were ruled out. However, there have been a number of initiatives that have proceeded.

The Speaker’s Reference Group on a Gender Sensitive Assembly and a women’s parliamentary caucus were established as an outcome of the AERC review, and the focus has continued with women in public life being a topic for the North-South Parliamentary Association, a forum for MLAs and TDs from the Dáil to discuss issues of cross-border interest.

Ireland has signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985. In so doing, Ireland committed itself to achieving equality between men and women in Ireland, including in the areas of political and public life, health, education and employment. In accordance with CEDAW recommendations, The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Review (2021) called on for government commitment to advance the participation of women, and individuals from minority ethnic groups, in political life and advance the active and meaningful participation of women in peace building and post conflict reconstruction. Quotas have proved successful in increasing the proportion of female election candidates to the Dáil, but in the absence of agreement on quotas for women in Northern Ireland, a start has been made to look at the environment of the Northern Ireland Assembly to establish where it can be more welcoming to women.

Political Quotas

Quotas are one mechanism that can bring about urgently needed action to address the ongoing over-representation of men in local government across this island.

Quotas are about giving voters more choice on the ballot, not less. We know that they work at the national level, and as such, they now have broad political support.

As women make up over 50% of the population, the Alliance assert that this level of parity must be reflected at the tables of power where important decisions affecting their lives are being made. A critical mass of 40% is needed to have impact, change outcomes for women and create a positive chain reaction.²¹

Legislative quotas cannot address all of the societal contributors to gender inequality in politics, rather, they offer an essential mechanism to bring about concrete and substantive increases in women’s

²⁰ First election under new 11 councils as set out in the Local Government (Boundaries) Act (NI) 2008

²¹ Cullen, P, McGing, C (2019) “Women Beyond the Dáil: More Women in Local Government” Summary Document

representation in political life. Legislative quotas act then as a catalyst alongside other measures that accelerate women's access to political office.

Gender quotas are an essential mechanism to guarantee that more women are on the ballot paper and available for voters to consider, alongside other measures to tackle gender and diversity imbalances. The desired outcome is more women elected and quotas are important pressure points in encouraging political parties to reshape their approaches to selection processes, which are known barriers to women being elected, to ensure that more women are selected to run in winnable seats.

The Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 introduced gender quotas into the Irish electoral system. The Act provides that parties who do not put forward 30% women candidates in a general election, will have their state funding cut by half. The gender quota threshold has increased to 40% for general elections held from 27 February 2023 onwards.

The 30% gender quota proved to be successful in the 2016 Dáil elections, with the number of women elected rising from 16% in 2011 to 22% in 2016.²² The positive effect of legislative gender quotas for general elections is clear – since the law's adoption, women's representation in Dáil Éireann has increased by 48%.²³ 22.5% of candidates elected in 2020 were women, indicating that while quotas are effective, they must be in tandem with further measures. Well-designed punitive monetary sanctions were highly effective in encouraging parties to comply fully.²⁴

Fundamental change must come from political parties. Many political parties have voluntary gender quotas of up to 50% of all candidates selected. This requires significant political and administrative will to deliver and considerable investment in outreach to and encouragement of women. In the most recent local elections, a number of parties, large and small, had welcome voluntary quotas of 40% or more of candidates and delivered on these commitments. In order to ensure that equal opportunities for women exist in all parties, we need to see quotas replicated, with strong commitments rooted in substantive laws, and sanctions where necessary.

No comparable quota legislation has been introduced in the north, rather a start has been made to look at the environment of the Northern Ireland Assembly to establish where it can be more welcoming to women. In addition, the newly-established women's caucus can serve to offer mutual support to women who may feel in a minority. Some parties in the north implement voluntary gender quotas which is welcome. We have seen a positive increase in the number of women MLAs elected to the Assembly in 2022, where 35.5% elected were women.

International Context

51 countries in the world have some sort of legislative quota for local government. 44% of countries in the European region have a legislated sub-national gender quota.²⁵

The introduction of gender quotas in local elections has seen success internationally. In a recent study of 41 countries, 14 introduced mandatory quotas at the local level. These countries have more women elected at the local level (32% versus 28% in countries with no quotas) but, more importantly, have

²²<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/03/16/the-2016-irish-election-demonstrated-how-gender-quotas-can-shift-the-balance-on-female-representation/>

²³ Dr Fiona Buckley Submission to JOC on Gender Equality

²⁴ McGing Claire (2018) Electoral Quotas and Women's Rights

²⁵ <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/database>

witnessed greater progression on average (+9% compared to +4%).²⁶ The following are examples of positive action measures in the EU²⁷:

- Greece required one third of candidates to be women and if parties fail to put forward this number, the party will not be allowed to contest the elections nationally.
- Italy has a quota in place for local regions – requiring parties to run at least 50% women in 12 out of 20 regions.
- Poland requires 35% women candidates from parties.
- Croatia operates financial incentives in order to make the political parties nominate more women.
- In Belgium, the law mandates equal representation of women and men on electoral lists for all election levels since 2002. At the municipal elections of 2018, these obligations were reinforced in the Brussels-Capital Region and the Walloon region, where lists had to be composed not only of the same number of women and men, but women and men candidates had to be placed alternately on the entire list.²⁸
- Slovenia – Legislated gender quotas for local elections with legal sanctions for non-compliance in the form of the rejection of the party list.²⁹

How Do Quotas Work?

Legislated candidate quotas legally require political parties to field proportional numbers of women and men as candidates for election to parliament or local government. Quotas can be set at a specified percentage for either gender, or in terms of a minimum or maximum share of all candidates. To ensure compliance, a mechanism is also required which is usually sanctions for non-compliance or incentives to ensure quotas are met. These apply to all parties and are most effective when coupled with sanctions for non-compliance. However, consideration must be given to the number of independent councillors in Ireland. In 2019, 20% of all councillors in the Republic of Ireland were independent of which only 36 out of 194 (19%) were female. After the 2024 local elections, female independent councillors accounted for 16%, with 29 out of 186 independent councillors.³⁰ It is important to note that legislative quotas will not impact the independent cohort.

Whilst voluntary mechanisms such as incentives, networks and mentoring have made some progress, the pace of change is too slow. The Electoral Commission (An Coimisiún Toghcháin) is a body capable of overseeing the implementation and monitoring of quotas. Hand in hand with the discourse around quotas, is the correct mechanism for their implementation with sanctions and incentives?

²⁶ CCME Women in Politics Local and European Trends (2020)

²⁷ <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-overview>

²⁸ file:///C:/Users/liliannaf/Downloads/ds-au-18-001-en-n_08548BC3-A9FA-431F-D2B0D3C5C8440C03_50074.pdf

²⁹ http://collections.internetmemory.org/haeu/20171122154227/http://ec.europa.eu/justice/genderequality/files/exchange_of_good_practice_si/summary_report_si_2016_final_en.pdf

³⁰ Women candidates accounted for 34.8% of candidates in the urban electoral areas.

Options: Sanctions or Incentives?

Use of Incentives

Here are some of the options that could be considered as a mechanism to support gender quotas for local elections in Ireland.

Action	Outcome/Advantage
Amend the Electoral Act 1997, Art 17 Sec 3, to require the government to increase funding to parties based on the percentage of female candidates.	This funding would be linked to a party vote threshold to ensure that smaller parties weren't disproportionately incentivised while at the same time large parties would need the incentive to be attractive. ³¹
Returning election costs if women local election candidates meet a certain percentage of the quota- like in Dáil and EU elections (25% of quota).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) removes obstacles to running as an independent offering state funding to women to run as independents to counterbalance the social networks and division of care work that naturally lend an advantage to men running as independents). b) Incentivizes parties to resource and run women candidates in seats they can actually win.
<p>An amendment of the s.18 of the Electoral Act 1997, could require that parties spend a certain proportion of their State funding on encouraging womens participation in public life.</p> <p>Political parties currently must annually declare how much they've spent on "the promotion of participation by women and young persons in political activity" to the Standards in Political Office (SIPO) (it tends to be a very low proportion of overall funding)³², but are not obliged to spend anything under this heading.</p>	Would encourage more focus on training/mentoring/supporting women and may also, more organically, support women's local representation.

³¹ Women for Election submission to the JOC on Gender Equality

³² <https://www.sipo.ie/reports-and-publications/state-financing/expenditure-of-exchequer/index.xml>.

Sanctions

Action	Outcome
Excluding political parties from competing in elections should they fail to submit the legal proportion of women and men as candidates	<p>Political parties must be registered in order for their party names to be added to ballot papers in elections.³³</p> <p>Tying candidate selection to party registration would underline that their purpose is to remedy the hindrances that women face when they decide to enter the world of politics</p> <p>Qualifying criteria for registration of political parties should include a requirement to run a balanced ticket at the preceding election and this could be reported on a European election constituency basis.³⁴</p>
<p>Sanctions based on financial penalties</p> <p>Financial penalty mechanism</p>	<p>Within the 31 local authorities there are 166 local electoral areas - each a separate election.</p> <p>Considerable technical work needed to establish if the financial penalty proportionate to their annual funding was to be aggregated across the electoral areas or was to apply individually to each of the Electoral Areas.</p> <p>If there is an average, women could be packed into certain areas to meet quotas leaving some constituencies underrepresented.</p>

Quotas and the Irish Electoral System

A quota system that is not compatible with the electoral system in place will remain purely symbolic.³⁵ In general, it is easier to construct a quota system that is compatible with a PR electoral system, since it is possible to introduce a greater number of candidates on party lists and since parties consciously try to balance their lists in order to win seats.

Ireland and Malta are the only EU member states that operate a PR STV electoral system. With PRSTV and multi-member constituencies, parties have a powerful electoral incentive to present a balanced team of candidates in order to maximise the number of higher preferences that would go to their candidates. This

³³ Electoral Reform Act 2022 (Section 43)

³⁴ https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWC_Submission_to_General_Scheme_of_electoral_reform_bill.pdf

³⁵ Matland, Richard E., 'Enhancing Women's Political Participation: Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems', in Azza Karam (ed.), *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, Stockholm: International IDEA, 1998, pp. 65–90.

goes some way to helping promote the advancement of women and ethnic-minority candidates, who are often overlooked in favour of a 'safer' looking candidate under 'first past the post'.³⁶

Quotas must not only stipulate that more women be selected but must also ensure that parties are running them in 'winnable' seats in order to close the gap between women's candidacy and women getting elected. However, arguably under the STV system, there are no safe seats.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalised individuals or groups.

The nature of PRSTV and institutionalised local political practices can work against women, especially those from a minority background who may lack the local profile and local networks that prove advantageous in the often parochial nature of local politics. This is especially true in rural constituencies where the local credentials and family connections of candidates can sometimes outweigh the issues they choose to run on.

For legislative quotas to ensure increases in women in county and city councils, not only must they be well-designed and effectively implemented, they must also speak directly to intersectional considerations. Parties can take further measures to support and protect women and minority women. This includes strengthened policies and procedures on sexual harassment, access to welfare officers, and having Equality, Diversity and Inclusion officers within political parties.

For this reason, the Alliance deem it necessary for political parties to have built-in support for minority candidates in candidate selection processes by way of targets to ensure the rich diversity of women in local electoral areas is represented on tickets.

In the absence of voluntary action by parties, the Alliance support the Committee on Gender Equality recommendation for a comprehensive gender quota strategy encompassing the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in political representation.

One step that could be considered immediately is on reporting of funding. Currently political parties must outline how much of their state funding they spend on youth participation and participation by women. An additional category could be added to their reporting obligations regarding spend on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

Distinct measures are required to increase minority representation and this alliance supports advocacy by expert sector civil society organisations specialising in achieving equality for minority groups.

Disabled women are a diverse group who experience varying degrees of discrimination and face many systemic barriers to the exercise of their political rights and empowerment because of their gender and disability. Consideration also needs to be given to those with non-apparent disabilities. These barriers can be of legal, physical, and attitudinal nature, and include an inadequate access to education, health care, employment, and justice (Evans & Reher 2022).³⁷

³⁶ [Advantages & Disadvantages Of The Single Transferable Vote \(uk-engage.org\)](https://www.uk-engage.org/advantages-disadvantages-of-the-single-transferable-vote)

³⁷ Evans, Elizabeth and Reher, Stefanie. 2022. Disability and Political Representation: Analysing the Obstacles to Elected Office in the UK. *International Political Science Review*, 43(5), pp. 697-712.

Data on the political participation of disabled women is scarce. However, it is safe to say that disabled women are not included in any meaningful way in the decision-making processes, policy making and political structures of government at national, regional, or local level. We do not have an identified disabled women representative in the Oireachtas, only one disabled women councillor in the outgoing local government and one member of the European Parliament.

Without direct intervention – including quotas, targets, greater flexible practices, the collection of intersectional data and improved reporting – progress for disabled women will remain slow. This is an example of where political parties can demonstrate that any EDI policies are not empty rhetoric as political parties are the gatekeepers to women's political participation.³⁸

Disabled women should be supported to engage in participatory democracy, and this is a matter for civil society organisations, political parties, and government. Positive action measures are required to ensure disabled women are on State boards, at senior levels of the Civil Service, in national delegations abroad, in local elections, and their participation in regional and local public decision-making forums.

In their recent policy document, 'Enabling participation: supporting the involvement of disabled people in political parties',³⁹ the Independent Living Movement Ireland called for a specific fund to be established to 'level the playing field' for disabled people to fight political campaigns where they face additional costs due to impairment related barriers that non-disabled people do not need to consider. This has proven to work in other jurisdictions to encourage the participation of disabled people in elections. For example, an Enable Fund for Elected Office was established in the UK between 2018 and 2020 and funding was provided by the Government Equalities Office.⁴⁰

Women, in all our diversity, must be represented at all levels of decision making. Those affected by decisions must be involved in the making of those decisions. Minority ethnic women are virtually invisible in many structures. International evidence shows that minoritised women (women who experience intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalisation) are particularly underrepresented in political institutions.⁴¹

Racism is a key barrier to increasing the diversity and representativeness of our political leaders. NWC's 2019 study 'Women Beyond the Dáil' reported the racism that occurs in local political discourse where, for example, rhetoric used to resist allocation of Traveller accommodation uses stereotypes that demean Traveller experiences. This informs Traveller women's perceptions about local office and discourages their participation or running for election.

The lack of support for minority ethnic women, who often also carry the burden of care work, makes running for office particularly challenging. Migrant and ethnic minority women candidates lack support systems that include extended family networks for canvassing or for childcare, and the financial resources required. Less than 1% of local election candidates in recent elections were from an identifiable migrant background (3 in 2014, 9 in 2019 and over 100 in 2024). 3 of the 5 candidates in the 2019 local election who openly identified as Travellers, were women. The lack of demand to recruit minority ethnic women

³⁸ Guidelines on Promoting the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities <https://www.osce.org/odihr/414344>

³⁹ <https://ilmi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Enabling-Participation-ILMI-Position-Paper.pdf>

⁴⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-elected-office-fund>

⁴¹ Hughes, M (2011), 'Intersectionality, Quotas and Minority Women's Political Representation Worldwide', *The American Political Science Review*, 105(3), 604-620; Cullen, C and Gough, S (2022) *Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics* (NTWF and AkiDwA) available at https://www.ntwf.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/15754_NTWF_Report_V8.pdf

interacts with the structural constraints that exacerbate the challenges facing all women in accessing political office.⁴²

Research conducted with the National Traveller Women's Forum and AkiDwA clearly articulated that minority women interested in political candidacy reported that 'they didn't fit' or experienced rules and political culture as exclusionary.

Increasing minoritised women's inclusion in local electoral politics requires confronting sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination. Combating underrepresentation of minoritised women demands specific and targeted measures.

The Report of the Forum on Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament⁴³ made the following recommendations:

- That political parties to set targets for ethnic minority women within political parties' gender quotas.
- That political parties set targets for ethnic minority representation. If there is no progress following the next electoral cycle, legislation on ethnic minority targets to be developed in consultation with affected groups and devised in a way which does not in its ultimate design exclude groups.

We will continue to call for maximum efforts by Government, local authorities, public bodies, and political parties to create an inclusive and supportive environment for all women to access opportunities and will support these efforts wherever possible.

Ensuring Diversity in Representation

In the 2019-2024 election cycle, there were 8 migrant women councillors, including 3 women of colour across the country out of a total of more than 949 councillors. 11 migrant women have been elected in the 2024 local elections. Currently there are no Traveller or Roma women councillors. While three Traveller women contested the local elections in 2019, no Traveller women contested the 2024 local elections.

At the national level, Ireland has never elected a woman of colour or a Traveller woman to either House of the Oireachtas. Salome Mbugua was the first woman of colour to contest the Seanad elections in 2020.⁴⁴ Nan Joyce was the first Traveller woman ever to run in the general election in 1982, although she was unsuccessful. Senator Eileen Flynn was the first Traveller woman to serve in either House, following her nomination by An Taoiseach in 2020.

Populations Stats

Census 2022⁴⁵ shows an overall increase in the population of non-white and/or non-Irish residents. In 2016, 82.2% of residents were white Irish whereas in 2022, this had dropped to 77%. Thus, 23% of the population now identify as either non-white, non-Irish, or both, or of Traveller or Roma ethnicity.

The largest increase is among the Indian population which increased from 20,969 to 56,642. The numbers of Irish Travellers increased by 6% to 32,949 since 2016 while 16,059 identified as Roma in 2022 (there was

⁴² https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWCI_Research_Report_WEB.pdf

⁴³ https://data.oireachtas.ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBusiness/other/2021-11-02_report-of-the-forum-on-a-family-friendly-and-inclusive-parliament_en.pdf

⁴⁴ Gallagher, M, Marsh, M, & Reidy, T (eds) 2021, *How Ireland Voted 2020 : The End of an Era*, Springer International Publishing AG, Cham, p 280.

⁴⁵ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/migrationanddiversity/>

no Roma category in the 2016 Census). Over 300,000 people failed to indicate their ethnicity. The Census results are clear that Ireland's population continues to become more diverse. Our political institutions need to reflect this.

Positive Action-Parties and Informal Institutional Rules

Political party attitudes and the salience of minority issues within them, as well as informal institutional rules, can act as deterrents for minority groups to participate in formal electoral politics.⁴⁶ The national gender quota has not improved the participation of minoritised women as either candidates or as elected politicians. It was acknowledged in 2018 by then Minister of State for Equality, Immigration and Integration, David Stanton, that participation of migrants in politics was “nowhere near as representative as it should be”.⁴⁷ Research in Ireland has established that political parties are focused on satisfying the terms of the existing national level gender quota, with diversification of candidates and membership receiving less attention.⁴⁸ However, this appears to be shifting with parties making efforts to diversify through renewed commitments to intra-party organisations and equality and diversity officers (facilitated in part by government initiatives to improve diversity in politics). However, Traveller and Roma women are often “hiding in plain sight” with respect to political parties seeking candidates or members.⁴⁹

Cooptation

While at the national level, a by-election is required to fill a seat that becomes vacant between elections, at the local level, the process of replacing a councillor is more informal. Councillors, or in many cases parties, choose, via the cooptation process, who will fill a seat that becomes vacant. Since the 2019 local elections, more women than men have been appointed through the cooptation process which has resulted in an overall increase in the proportion of women in local government across the country.⁵⁰ One woman of colour was appointed to a vacant seat who went on to become mayor of the council. Thus, this process has been used to increase the proportion of women in local politics and can, and should, be used to increase the numbers of minoritised women in local politics by parties and independents choosing a minoritised woman to fill vacant seats. Cooptation should not be relied upon to increase diversity in politics as it is unreliable and unpredictable given that a seat only becomes available when a sitting councillor vacates their seat. Local constituency dynamics may also play a role in who fills vacant seats.

Ethnic Minority Quotas

Some form of ethnic minority, or diversity quota system is used in over 35 countries worldwide.⁵¹ The implementation of ethnic quotas varies depending on the context, “there are virtually no two implementations ... that are completely alike”.⁵² While the introduction of ethnic minority quotas can provide substantive representational benefits to ethnic minority groups, the way in which an ethnic quota

⁴⁶ Cullen, C and Gough, S (2022) Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics (NTWF and AkiDwA) available at https://www.ntwf.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/15754_NTWF_Report_V8.pdf

⁴⁷ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/level-of-migrant-participation-in-public-life-and-politics-not-representative-says-minister-1.3439436>

⁴⁸ Cullen, C and Gough, S (2022) Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics (NTWF and AkiDwA) available at https://www.ntwf.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/15754_NTWF_Report_V8.pdf

⁴⁹ Cullen, C and Gough, S (2022) Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics (NTWF and AkiDwA) available at https://www.ntwf.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/15754_NTWF_Report_V8.pdf

⁵⁰ <https://adriankavanaghelections.org/2019/09/02/city-and-county-council-members-co-options-and-changes-since-the-2019-local-elections/>

⁵¹ Tan, N, and Preece, C (2021), ‘Ethnic Quotas, Political Representation and Equity in Asia Pacific’, Representation, DOI: 10.1080/00344893.2021.1989712

⁵² Vukelic, K (2012), ‘Designing Electoral Mechanisms for Group Representation’, MA Thesis, Central European University [available at http://www.etd.ceu.hu/2012/vukelic_kristijan.pdf]

is designed can have profound implications for the substantive representation of ethnic minoritised women.⁵³

The interaction between Gender and Ethnic Minority Quotas

In countries which have both a gender and an ethnic minority quota, the way in which the quotas interact with each other has implications for ethnic minoritised women. Standalone quotas, whether they are gender or ethnic minority quotas, are usually not effective tools to increase the number of minority women in politics.⁵⁴ There are some outliers in this but scholars have found that in countries where minoritised women have benefitted from either a gender or ethnic minority quota, this is because of political parties' vote seeking behaviour rather than a structural change in the political system that reflects a commitment to diversity.⁵⁵ The prospects for minoritised women becomes contingent then on the strategies of parties rather than a structural shift in politics or changes in the rules or procedures. Where tandem quotas are in place (both gender and ethnic minority quotas operating independently of each other), gender quotas tend to favour majority women whereas ethnic minority quotas tend to favour minority men.⁵⁶ Ethnic quotas that are not gendered send a signal that "men are more appropriate representatives of ethnic minorities"⁵⁷ and gender quotas that do not have an ethnic element send a signal that majority women are more appropriate representatives of women.

Nested Quotas

When gender and ethnic minority quotas are implemented, inclusively and intersectionally, they can change perceptions and shape behaviours. Ethnic minority and gender quotas that are "nested" provide ethnic minoritised women with higher levels of electoral success.⁵⁸ In some jurisdictions, gender and ethnic quotas may be described as "partially nested/partially independent".⁵⁹ This is due to the low number of seats reserved for ethnic minority candidates which, although subject to gender quota rules, in effect result in the election of as low as one ethnic minority candidate, who is usually male, thus nullifying the effect of the gender quota. Therefore, district magnitude is an important determinant of the success of nested quotas.

District Magnitude

District magnitude has implications for women in politics generally. The smaller the district, the less likely it becomes for women to win elections. This applies also to minoritised women competing for an ethnic minority seat. Increasing the size of the districts or constituencies so that more seats are allocated to minorities provides better opportunities to minoritised women (where there is also a gender quota in place). An example of this is New Zealand where single member districts were replaced with mixed-

⁵³ Bird, K (2014), 'Ethnic Quotas and Ethnic Representation Worldwide', *International Political Science Review*, 35(1), 12-26

⁵⁴ Hughes, M (2011), 'Intersectionality, Quotas and Minority Women's Political Representation Worldwide', *The American Political Science Review*, 105(3), 604-620

⁵⁵ Mügge, Liza M., (2016) 'Intersectionality, Recruitment and Selection: Ethnic Minority Candidates in Dutch Parties', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 69(3), 512-530; Mügge, Liza M., van der Pas, D., van de Wardt, M (2019) 'Representing their own? Ethnic Minority Women in the Dutch Parliament', *West European Politics*, 42(4), 705-727

⁵⁶ Bird, K (2016), 'Intersections of Exclusion: The Institutional Dynamics of Combined Gender and Ethnic Quota Systems', *Politics, Groups and Identities*, 4(2), 284-306; Krook, M and O'Brien, D (2010), 'The Politics of Group Representation: Quotas for Women and Minorities Worldwide', *Comparative Politics*, 42(3), 253-272

⁵⁷ Bird, K (2016), 'Intersections of Exclusion: The Institutional Dynamics of Combined Gender and Ethnic Quota Systems', *Politics, Groups and Identities*, 4(2), 284-306, 294.

⁵⁸ Bird, K (2016), 'Intersections of Exclusion: The Institutional Dynamics of Combined Gender and Ethnic Quota Systems', *Politics, Groups and Identities*, 4(2), 284-306; Hughes, M (2011), 'Intersectionality, Quotas and Minority Women's Political Representation Worldwide', *The American Political Science Review*, 105(3), 604-620

⁵⁹ Bird, K (2016), 'Intersections of Exclusion: The Institutional Dynamics of Combined Gender and Ethnic Quota Systems', *Politics, Groups and Identities*, 4(2), 284-306, 291.

member proportionality in 1996. This resulted in higher numbers of Maori elected to the legislature. This in turn created an environment in which a new party could be formed, the Maori Party which has managed to capture seats previously held by the Labour Party. The increase in overall representation of Maoris has led to a higher proportion of Maori women elected despite the absence of a gender quota.⁶⁰ Where the reserved seats are higher and also subject to a gender quota, minority women should fare better.

While research on ethnic minority quotas is limited, it is increasingly becoming clear that international best practice suggests that quotas are most effective when they are nested and “intersectionally embedded”.⁶¹ This requires careful consideration of the ethnic minority groups that are included, how they are identified, and the way in which ethnic and gender quotas interact with each other. This process should involve multiple stakeholders from minority advocacy organisations. Ideally, gender quotas should require a minimum number of minoritised women and ethnic minority quotas should require gender parity.

Distinct Remedies for Traveller Women

Ethnic minority women are not a homogenous group and require distinct positive action measures to ensure that they have meaningful access to political office. While nested quotas may be beneficial for some ethnic minority and migrant women, a more substantive system of guaranteed representation may be necessary for Traveller and Roma women. The literature on minority representation tends to “conflate” the experiences of indigenous groups with those of other ethnic minorities.⁶² It is important to distinguish these experiences, particularly in light of the historical and continuing marginalization and discrimination of Traveller and Roma in Ireland.⁶³ While ethnic minorities (excluding Travellers) and migrants are often seeking inclusion within the existing political system and structures, Traveller and Roma claims for representation are grounded in their experiences of discrimination, racism and marginalisation by society and State. The socio-economic marginalisation that Travellers and Roma people experience in Ireland, much like Roma communities across Europe,⁶⁴ is deeply engrained in society and in the political system.⁶⁵ Understanding that the claims made by Traveller and Roma people, and those made by other ethnic minority and migrant groups, are different, is important in designing mechanisms to address the various claims. An effective form of political empowerment should address historical discrimination and institutional racism against Travellers by ensuring that Travellers and Traveller culture is both recognised and protected.⁶⁶

In addition, Traveller and Roma people are at a significant numerical disadvantage, and their geographically dispersed populations makes it difficult in the current electoral system to envisage a critical mass of their population being elected. In other contexts, in order to address historical marginalisation, special electoral districts have been created for particular groups to ensure that they have representation at every level. While such a system of representation may create legal and social challenges in Ireland, the creation of a nationwide special electoral district for national representation, and county wide special electoral districts for local representation, should be researched by the Electoral Commission for Traveller and Roma people.

⁶⁰ Bird, K (2016), ‘Intersections of Exclusion: The Institutional Dynamics of Combined Gender and Ethnic Quota Systems’, *Politics, Groups and Identities*, 4(2), 284-306

⁶¹ https://wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/DiversityQuotas.WenWales.Final_.pdf

⁶² Williams, M, and Schertzer, R (2019), ‘Is Indigeneity like Ethnicity? Theorizing and Assessing Models of Indigenous Political Representation’, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 52, 677-696

⁶³ <https://rm.coe.int/native/16808b36ef>

⁶⁴ <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/roma-survey-findings>

⁶⁵ Zevnik, A and Russell, R (2020), ‘Political Representation and Empowerment of Roma in Slovenia: A Case for National Reserved Representation’, *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 84, 51-71; Zevnik, A and Russell, R (2021), ‘The Problem of Asymmetric Representation: The Marginalisation, Racialisation, and Deservedness of Roma in Slovenia’, *Politics*, DOI: 10.1177/0263395721996550

⁶⁶ Williams, M, and Schertzer, R (2019), ‘Is Indigeneity like Ethnicity? Theorizing and Assessing Models of Indigenous Political Representation’, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 52, 677-696

It is important to note that gender quotas are not a silver bullet.⁶⁷ While some scholars argue that gender quotas are capable of improving the representation of minoritised women, this has not proved to be the case in Ireland. Research on the Netherlands and Belgium found that while ethnic minority women were better represented than ethnic minority men in both cases, “gender quotas played a lesser role in this than the more general concern for diversity on electoral lists, the institutionalisation of gender/ethnicity within political parties and the strategic choices of party leaders” (Celis et al, 2014). Gender quotas alone have not improved the representation of minoritised women at the national level in Ireland, which suggests that gender quotas at the local level should be accompanied by other measures to improve the inclusion of minoritised women. These include financial incentives for parties to select more diverse candidates to so-called “winnable” seats. But also a shift in party attitudes towards institutionalizing an intersectional approach to candidate selection and senior leadership positions, as well as a focus on intercultural or diversity groups within the party. Specific positive action measures for minoritised women have been recommended by several international bodies, as well as by official domestic reports including the Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality, and by research commissioned by the NTFW and AkiDwA.⁶⁸ The latter research has recently been endorsed by the Irish Government in its periodic State Report to the Framework Convention on National Minorities (FCNM).⁶⁹

Gender quotas alone have not improved the representation of minoritised women at the national level in Ireland, which suggests that gender quotas at the local level should be accompanied by other measures to improve the inclusion of minoritised women.

The Arguments

Q: Why do we need more women in politics?

A: The 2022 Central Statistics Office data shows women make up 50.62% of the population, but have never been more than 26% of our councillors, this is as low as 6% in some areas.

Our public representatives exist to represent the people, but we have only ever had a system which is anything but representative. This is an issue of democracy; the current situation is a democracy which is incomplete and unfinished.

Quotas are one mechanism that can bring about urgently needed action to address the ongoing underrepresentation of women in local government.

Q: Political representation should be about merit. Shouldn't the best candidate for the job win, regardless of gender?

Special measures to increase gender balance would serve to compensate for barriers facing women and help to create a more level playing field, which increase the numbers of women standing in elections. In fact, research studying the impact of a gender quota on selection, finding that a stricter quota raised competence, especially among men.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Tan, N, and Preece, C (2021), ‘Ethnic Quotas, Political Representation and Equity in Asia Pacific’, Representation, DOI: 10.1080/00344893.2021.1989712

⁶⁸ Cullen, C and Gough, S (2022) Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics (NTWF and AkiDwA) available at https://www.ntwf.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/15754_NTWF_Report_V8.pdf

⁶⁹ <https://rm.coe.int/ireland-s-fifth-periodic-report-under-the-fcnm/1680abedda>, p 65.

⁷⁰ Besley, Timothy, Olle Folke, Torsten Persson, and Johanna Rickne. 2017. "Gender Quotas and the Crisis of the Mediocre Man: Theory and Evidence from Sweden." American Economic Review, 107 (8): 2204-42. DOI: 10.1257/aer.20160080

There are very many talented, capable women who would like to stand for election, but systems, including party selection systems operate against them standing in winnable seats. Women have not had a fair chance at being selected.

Political representation should be about merit and introduction of gender quotas is a major contribution to ensuring the merit of all elected representatives.

Q: Isn't it undemocratic to introduce special measures for one group?

A: Quotas contribute to the democratisation of politics and also make the nomination or selection process more transparent. Women candidates, like men, would still have to earn the votes of the electorate.

Having gender balance measures wouldn't 'hand' seats to women. Voters would still have complete freedom to choose who they vote for and in what order.

In fact, introducing these measures would increase voter choice, by offering a more diverse range of candidates to choose from.

Q. We have introduced Voluntary quotas, so we don't need quotas?

Voluntary quotas have been introduced by some parties. When matched with political will and fully implemented they are significant measures in addressing gender imbalance among candidates. However, they are not implemented by all parties and are therefore inadequate in the overall impact on the numbers of women elected. The difficulties of achieving substantive progress without corresponding strong measures is clearly exemplified by the decades it took to reach the voluntary target of 40% representation of women on our state boards introduced in 1996.

On state boards, change without a quota has been snail-like in pace. Women now represent 41.5% of directors but it has taken 25 years to meet this target of 40%. Even with that there is still disparity of representation between boards. A voluntary target-led approach has not produced the results necessary to justify the continuation of soft-approaches. What we have learned is that if change is to be achieved in our lifetime, then we need strong commitments rooted in substantive laws and sanctions where necessary and change in women's political representation is no different.

Conclusion

Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.⁷¹

Fair representation in local and national government is central to democracy and as it stands, there are too few elected candidates who are women to claim an adequate reflection of Irish society.

Ensuring gender equality is beneficial for all of society, research shows that women are reshaping the nature of politics and international relations in a manner that is bringing in issues and problems previously perceived as 'non-priorities,' such as gender-based violence and reproductive health.

⁷¹ McCann, Joy. "Electoral quotas for women: an international overview." (2013). Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, 15 September 1995, accessed 20 June 2013.

As elected officials, on average, women work harder than men to represent their constituencies, which is linked to a stronger sense among voters that government is responsive to their needs.⁷² Increased representation of women in elected office plays an important role in counteracting corruption and focusing resources on the quality and consistency of public service delivery.

As policy makers, women are prioritising issue areas that benefit the most vulnerable in society through healthcare, welfare and education. As such, more women leaders seem to make for more equal and caring societies.⁷³

The Citizens Assembly have shown that there is public demand for equality and women's representation, coupled with a legislative compulsion to achieve equal representation in local and national government demonstrates a clear impetus for the Government to introduce gender quotas for local government.

The introduction of gender quotas have the indirect repercussions of fostering support for more women in politics through an informational and a normative effect. Quotas raise awareness about the underrepresentation of women in politics (informational effect) independent from achieving increases in women's representation. Once adopted, they also send a clear signal that a persistent imbalance is a social problem that exists and must be redressed (normative effect).⁷⁴

Gender quotas are a first step to achieving equal representation, but further action must be taken to achieve a cultural shift to remove barriers such as traditional gender-based stereotypes, misogyny and sexual harassment, lack of family friendly resources and access to financial resources.

Recommendations

We are calling on the Government to address men's over-representation across politics and public life, to secure many more women in positions of influence and increase diversity in public representation without delay. Legislative gender quotas to be supported by additional initiatives proven to accelerate and sustain women's equal representation

- The implementation of statutory gender quotas of 40% for local elections.
- Develop an intersectional strategy to eradicate barriers to participation in public life and to increase diversity in local government which is inclusive of ethnic minority candidates, candidates with disabilities and Traveller women.
- Examine mechanisms to increase and ensure diversity in representation including nested quotas, tandem quotas, BAME/all women shortlists and reserved seats.⁷⁵
- To increase accountability, progress should be monitored by the Electoral Commission, as well as advocacy groups and representative civic society organisations. This monitoring should include the publication of detailed gender and equality disaggregated data on changes in women's representation in local electoral politics.
- Given the numerical disadvantage of Traveller and Roma communities, the exploration by the Electoral Commission of the creation of a nationwide special electoral district for national representation, and county wide special electoral districts for local representation, for Traveller and Roma people.

⁷² Cowper-Coles, Minna (2020) Women political leaders: the impact of gender on democracy, The Global Institute for Women's Leadership, WFD, Kings College London

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Fernández, J., & Valiente, C. (2021). Gender quotas and public demand for increasing women's representation in politics: An analysis of 28 European countries. *European Political Science Review*, 13(3), 351-370. doi:10.1017/S1755773921000126

⁷⁵ Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)

- In order for quotas to be effective at the local level, resourcing tied to outcomes will be needed within political parties, in a sustained manner in Councils and for relevant NGO's to provide increased engagement, capacity building, and training across the diversity of women.

We are calling on all political parties to:

- Include a requirement in the State funding scheme for political parties to diversify their membership and candidate lists and more Equality, Diversity and Inclusion reporting on state investment with a commitment from parties to use full funding allocated for this purpose.
- Collaborate with migrant women and Traveller and Roma women led groups to address barriers that prevent diverse groups of women standing as candidates and participating in party politics.
- Provide financial aid to female candidates from low-income backgrounds throughout political campaigns to alleviate the financial burden of running for election.
- Audit the diversity of party members, activists, candidates, staff, and elected representatives at all levels, creating a benchmark against which to monitor change.
- Financial incentives for parties to select more diverse candidates.
- Pledge that they will only nominate women to councillor seats that become vacant and that, where possible, this should be a minoritised woman.
- Include local gender quotas as a Programme for Govt commitment in their political manifestos before the next general elections.

Additional Reading and Resources

Buckley, F and Keenan, L. (2021) 'More Women: Changing the face of politics. Women's Experience of running for Election in Ireland' Women for Election (Available at: <https://www.womenforelection.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/WFE-More-Women-Changing-the-Face-of-Politics-small.pdf>)

Ceciarini, S (2019) 'The Observatory of the European Charter for Equality of women and men in local life, Women in Politics: Local and European Trends', The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (Available at: https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_Study_Women_in_politics_EN.pdf)

Cullen, P and Gough, S (2022) 'Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics in Ireland ', National Traveller Women's Forum & Akidwa (Irish Research Council, Maynooth University and Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth), (Available at: https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/filefield_paths/15754_NTWF_Report_V8.pdf)

I know politics (2018) 'Women's Participation in Local Government' (Available at: <https://iknowpolitics.org/en/discuss/e-discussions/womens-participation-local-government>)

International IDEA, The Global Database of Gender Quotas. (Available at: <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas-database#:~:text=The%20Global%20Database>)

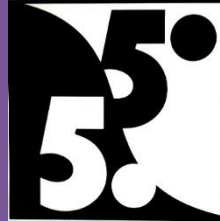
Ireland's SDG Data Hub, Female Representation in Politics in Ireland, (Available at: <https://irelandsdg.geohive.ie/apps/31d5ff80ee1d4cb79fd51de49a2278a5/explore>)

Ireland's SDG Data Hub, Sustainable Development Goal 5(Available at: <https://irelandsdg.geohive.ie/pages/goal5>)

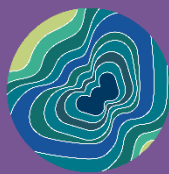
Lima, V (2020) 'The Experience of Migrant Candidates in the 2019 Local Election', The Immigrant Council of Ireland (Available at: <https://immigrantcouncil.ie/sites/default/files/2020-05/Strength%20in%20Diversity%20FULL%20REPORT%20FINAL%20060520.pdf>)

Lima, V; Buczkowska, T. and Ray Chaudhury (2022) 'Running in Local Elections in Ireland: A Toolkit for Candidates from a Migrant Background', Immigrant Council of Ireland, Irish Research Council and the School of Law & Government of Dublin City University. (Available at: <https://immigrantcouncil.ie/news/running-local-elections-ireland-toolkit-candidates-migrant-background#:~:text=Running%20in%20local>)

See Her Elected(2021) 'A Guide to Running in the 2024 Local Elections', (Available at: <https://www.seeherelected.ie/booklet-a-guide-to-running-in-the-2024-local-elections/>)



National Women's Council



Women's
Collective
Ireland
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