

NWC Submission to the Electoral Commission Public consultation on the addresses of candidates on ballot papers

29th January 2025



nwc
National Women's Council

Submission to the Electoral Commission - Public consultation on the addresses of candidates on ballot papers

The National Women's Council is the leading national representative organisation for women and women's groups in Ireland, founded in 1973. With nearly 200 member groups and a large and growing community of individual supporters, NWC are committed to promoting equality, diversity, and human rights for women in Ireland.

The NWC prioritises increasing women's leadership across all sectors of society, including political leadership. As a feminist organisation, NWC seeks to advance women's and girls' leadership and representation at decision-making levels, driving better policy outcomes for women, families and society.

Despite women comprising 52% of the Irish population, they are significantly underrepresented in government. Currently, only 26% of local councillors in Ireland are women, well below the EU27 average of 35%. At the national level, women hold just 25% of seats in the Dáil, placing Ireland with the lowest proportion of female parliamentarians in western Europe¹. International research has shown a positive relationship between parliaments that are closer to being gender balanced with legislation and policies that are more inclusive, balanced and beneficial for women². As such, gender imbalance undermines democracy, limiting diverse perspectives in policy making and weakening the quality of representation.

The barriers to women's representation are well documented and commonly referred to as the 5 C's. NWC's 2019 report, *Women Beyond the Dáil: More Women in Local Government*³, and the follow up study *Women Beyond the Dáil: Access, Representation, and Retention in Irish Local Government 2024*⁴, highlight persistent obstacles. These include gendered biases in candidate selection, exclusionary cultures within political parties and political institutions more broadly, the disproportionate caregiving responsibilities of women, sexist attitudes, and harassment faced by women in public life that create significant barriers to women to enter or remain in politics.

A key finding in our research is the alarming rise in gendered violence, harassment, and abuse, both online and in-person, faced by women elected representatives. This violence targets women in an attempt to silence them as political actors. This is highlighted in the toolkit we developed in 2022, "*Toolkit on Social Media Policies for Political Parties*"⁵. The research underpinning this toolkit demonstrates how such abuse is not only a personal attack but a

¹Inter-Parliamentary Union (2024). *Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments*. Available [here](#). [accessed on 28th January 2025]. In Fletcher (2024) *Irish Parliament has lowest gender diversity in western Europe*. Bloomberg. Available [here](#).

²EWL (2023). *Taking Stock of Women's Representation in Politics across Europe*. Available [here](#).

³NWC (2019). *Women Beyond the Dáil: More Women in Local Government*. Available [here](#).

⁴NWC (2024). *Women Beyond the Dáil: Access, Representation, and Retention in Irish Local Government 2024*. Available [here](#).

⁵NWC (2022). *Toolkit on Social Media Policies for Political Parties*. Available [here](#).

deliberate tactic designed to undermine women's political participation, weaken democratic representation, and discourage diverse leadership. Women from minority backgrounds face even greater hostility, as they are disproportionately targeted by intersecting forms of abuse, including racism, homophobia, and misogyny. Our findings further reveal that escalating violence and hostility towards public representatives is driving women out of politics and discourage others from entering the field, further entrenching gender inequality in political representation.

Working with women candidates running for both local and national elections we know that many women feel an unease about publicly disclosing their home addresses. Women we work with have raised concerns that this practice may expose them to violence and harassment. The 2024 report of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life⁶ also highlights that abuse in political life is prevalent, problematic and targeted disproportionately at women and minority groups. The Taskforce report highlighted some 16 actionable recommendations to address the abuse and harassment faced by individuals in political roles. This included the removal of the requirement to publish the home addresses of election candidates.

NWC has long advocated for ending the public disclosure of election candidates' home addresses. This practice serves no meaningful purpose in fostering transparency, as constituents can still contact their representatives, once elected, through official channels such as email or phone. Requiring home addresses to be published creates an additional, unnecessary and potentially dangerous barrier to women's participation in politics. The mandatory publication of home addresses not only deters women from entering politics but also exposes them to heightened risks of intimidation, harassment, and violence which reinforces the structural barriers that limit our political participation.

In light of this reality as well as the experience of women and minority candidates, NWC asserts that the practice of publishing home addresses is outdated, unnecessary, and potentially harmful. Through this submission, we urge the Electoral Commission to review the extensive research and evidence on this issue and take decisive action to eliminate this requirement, making it optional for candidates to disclose their home address. Local authorities can implement alternative mechanisms to verify candidates' residency during the nomination process without compromising their privacy and safety.

NWC believes ending this practice is a step toward fostering a more inclusive, safe and healthy political landscape, encouraging more women and people from minority communities to enter political leadership roles, and ultimately strengthening democratic representation and equality in Ireland.

⁶ Oireachtas (2024). *Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life*. Available [here](#).

Further reading

NWC (2024). A Feminist Vision of Care and Equality. Available [here](#).

NWC (2023). NWC Submission to the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life. Available [here](#).

NWC (2023). Input in relation to the online safety codes for video-sharing platform services. Available [here](#).

NWC (2022). A Toolkit for Local Authorities on Supporting Family-Friendly Local Government. Available [here](#).

NWC (2021). NWC Submission on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament. Available [here](#).

NWC (2021). Women doing politics differently. Available [here](#).

NWC (2020). Women Beyond the Dáil: More Women in Local Government - Summary Document. Available [here](#)

NWC (2019). Online harassment, Harmful Communication and Related Offences - NWC Submission 2019. Available [here](#).