



**5 C's Scorecard:
assessing progress
in the wake of the 2009
*Women's Participation
in Politics* report**

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FOREWORD

Currently Ireland is ranked 101st in the world for gender parity in Parliament. In Europe, we are within the bottom six countries. At local levels, 76% of our councillors are men, and at national government level, 23% of our TDs are women.



This is the most women we have ever had elected to government. The need to examine the reasons for such low levels of female representation was met when the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights published a report in 2009 which analysed Women's Participation in Politics. The findings of this report were crucial in understanding what barriers existed for women in putting themselves forward to run for election. Now fourteen years on, with the hopes of achieving 50/50 by 2030, it is critical that we address what has been done to improve the situation for women entering political life and examine the barriers that are still present.

Across all five of the barriers, we are delighted to see some improvement. The introduction of gender quotas has allowed women a greater chance of selection to run and we are hoping this too will be introduced at local and Seanad levels. The Oireachtas Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament set out a great set of recommendations and in the area of confidence progress has been made in implementing training and mentoring programmes and women's networks within political parties. However, there is a lot of work that still needs to be done to ensure equal opportunities for women in political life, which this report thoroughly analyses.

We are thrilled to be working with so many inspiring women who are motivated to run for election in Irish politics. We are proactively ensuring that women of all diversities are given resources to enable them to run and advocating for change in order to breakdown these barriers.

There is a lot of evidence to show what can work to achieve 50/50. Over the past 100 years, the pace of change has been glacial. With the progress made over the past 15 years we have arrived at a pivotal time where a lot more change is needed. Support programmes need to be scaled up significantly, reforms and political leadership need to accelerate and a very strong message needs to be delivered across all of our society that a lot more women are needed in Irish politics and the time for this radical change is now.

Thank you to our Funders, The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. My sincerest thanks to the board and the Women for Election team without whom this work would not be possible. A special thank you to our researchers Dr Lisa Keenan and Dr Fiona Buckley for their excellent work in the field and incredible research and analysis throughout the report. Furthermore, thank you to Deputy Ivana Bacik for her input into the original design of the review as the rapporteur of the original 5 C's report.

This research gives a valuable insight into what further needs to be done to ensure that women can enter and succeed in political life. To ensure a fair and equal democracy, we encourage these barriers to continue to be broken down. The time for change is now, the time for #MoreWomen in Irish Politics is now.

Caitríona Gleeson
CEO, Women for Election

FOREWORD

A modern landmark in charting women's political progress is the 2009 Oireachtas report *Women's Participation in Politics* (the Bacik Report).

For the first time, elected representatives examined the gendered biases in Irish political culture and practice inhibiting women's full and equal participation in political life. They made 18 specific and detailed recommendations to address this issue under five key headings known as the 5 C's – Childcare, Cash, Confidence, Culture, and Candidate Selection.

This Scorecard is the first comprehensive monitoring of progress in delivering on the 5 C's recommendations. Under each heading it maps the extent of progress in addressing the structural and institutional impediments to gender equality in Irish political life. Using a grade score ranging from A to D, it shows where the successes have been, and where there is more to do. It also provides an informative commentary in each section, indicating possible avenues of further development.

The introduction of a candidate gender quota, under the Candidate Selection Procedures heading, is deemed to be the most fully implemented recommendation. As an institutional measure, it has been highly successful in opening the door for women's increased political opportunities. Women now comprise 30% of candidates at general elections, compared to 15% at the 2011 election prior to the introduction of candidate gender quota legislation.

Recommendations from 2009 to empower women to consider running for political office – Confidence – have also been given a positive grade. The Scorecard charts the growth of women's networks and caucuses in political life, and the role of the State in funding these initiatives. What is striking is how much is being done to train, mentor, and prepare women for electoral politics on miniscule funding from the public purse.

The commentary highlights the need for these confidence-building measures to be formalised and provided with substantive multi-annual funding to really move the dial on women's political representation. This point is also raised under the heading of Cash, where party resources allocated to women's empowerment comprised less than four percent of their public funding.

The evidence presented under the Scorecard headings Childcare and Culture shows that the quota measure is not buttressed by actions to ameliorate cultural constraints on achieving gender equality. Addressing gendered stereotypes through civic education, promotion of positive role models and public information campaigns have fallen far short of that recommended in the 2009 report. Piecemeal and ad-hoc progress has been made on family friendly parliamentary arrangements in the absence of institutional interventions – a constitutional amendment to enable remote/online voting, and maternity/paternity leave for politicians.

The Scorecard authors, Dr Fiona Buckley and Dr Lisa Keenan, and the commissioning body Women for Election, have brought the issue of women's political representation a significant step further in this document. In the lead into the 2024 local elections, the evaluation provides a call to action to political parties, government, and society if Ireland is to achieve a gender-equal democracy.

Professor Yvonne Galligan,
FAcSS

INTRODUCTION

This year marks the closing of the Decade of Centenaries, a series of commemorations covering a period of dramatic social and political upheaval in Ireland. Women for Election has developed a range of projects to assess the progress that has been made with respect to women's political representation in Ireland. This work also highlights what is required to enable real political equality.

Despite the important role that women played in the struggle for independence, it is the case that few women have been involved in frontline national politics. The share of women in Dáil Éireann remained in single digits until 1992, when it then began to hover between 12 and 15 percent for more than two decades. Six decades separated the appointment of the first woman to cabinet, Constance Markievicz in 1919, and that of the second, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn in 1979.

It is in the context of this low level of women's representation, that in October 2009 the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Equality Defence and Women's Rights published a report examining *Women's Participation in Politics*.

As set out in the foreword of the report by the Committee's chairman, Brendan Kenneally (TD), the core aim of the work was to "examine the challenges facing women who wish to pursue a career in politics" at any level. Former female politicians gave evidence about their experiences, and Prof Yvonne Galligan submitted evidence on the basis of her extensive academic work in the field. Deputy Ivana Bacik, then a Senator, acted as rapporteur.



The report made the case for why increasing women's presence in Irish politics is a desirable outcome in and of itself. It also reviewed the empirical evidence, with respect to a range of measures that have been implemented in comparable countries, to address the issue of women's political underrepresentation. However, its most significant contribution lies in its identification of the five key challenges facing women with respect to their entry into political life. These so-called 5 C's are the following: Childcare, Cash, Confidence, Culture, and Candidate Selection procedures.



These challenges are experienced by women globally and can inhibit their entry into politics. Briefly, women are more likely to be responsible for childcare than are men; they also tend to be under-resourced financially; and to be less likely to put themselves forward to run. In addition, as much of the research prior to the publication of the report argued, political culture tends to be a masculine one, with men outnumbering women in parliaments. Finally, the mechanisms by which candidates are selected, tend to be secretive and to disadvantage women. Taken together, these 5 C's can act as an important barrier to women's entry into political life in Ireland.

Beyond identifying the core areas where women face challenges, the report also goes further in outlining a range of recommendations that the Committee argued should be implemented in order to tackle women's underrepresentation in Irish politics. Nearly a decade and a half after the *Women's Participation in Politics* report was published, we assess the progress that has been made in effecting its recommendations below. The picture that emerges is one of progress, but a progress that has been uneven. What is notable too is that even were these recommendations to be fully implemented, they would not completely remove the key barriers that the report identifies. We also highlight an additional challenge that could not have been foreseen in 2009 but nevertheless requires urgent attention: the challenge of online abuse.

A substantial progress on the implementation of recommendations

C limited progress on the implementation of recommendations

B good progress on the implementation of recommendations

D very limited progress on the implementation of recommendations

5 C's PROGRESS REPORT CARD

SCORE

C

1. CHILDCARE

“women are more likely to have this responsibility”

REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. Political party meeting times and venues should be reviewed and adjusted to accommodate the caring responsibility of party members;
2. Childcare supports should be provided for parents in politics, Oireachtas crèche maintained;
3. Although statutory maternity leave is not available to women members of the Oireachtas since they are not employees, women TDs or Senators who give birth in office should be entitled to automatic pairing arrangements;
4. The rules and sitting times of the Oireachtas, and of local Councils, changed to make them more “family-friendly”;
5. Increased use should be made of videoconference facilities to ensure that those with caring responsibilities may participate in Committees, for example, from home.

PROGRESS

While political parties in Ireland haven't implemented blanket policies around fixed meeting times or set venues that are deliberately chosen to accommodate caring responsibilities of members, there has been increased recognition since the 5 C's report was first published that such changes are necessary in order to attract more women. In the period since the report was published, there has been a shift away from pubs representing a standard venue for such meetings.

In March 2021, the first meeting on the Houses of the Oireachtas Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament took place. The Forum produced a report¹ that was presented to the Ceann Comhairle in November of that year. It made a series of recommendations that aim to make the Oireachtas more inclusive and family-friendly, as well as improving diversity within the parliamentary community. The findings of the report indicate that the recommendations addressing this 'childcare' barrier to women's participation have yet to be fully implemented.

¹ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBusiness/other/2021-11-02_report-of-the-forum-on-a-family-friendly-and-inclusive-parliament_en.pdf

The Oireachtas crèche has been maintained, with space available to accommodate 29 children of pre-school age. In addition to members of the Oireachtas, political and office staff are eligible to avail of the facility. The Forum recommended that a review of the service be carried out by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service to assess that the facility is meeting the needs of the parliamentary community.

Pairing arrangements for women members of the Oireachtas have been adopted but the right to these arrangements is not automatic. Most arrangements are on an informal basis and cover short absences. Local councillors too have no automatic entitlement to such arrangements.

Further, the sitting times of the Oireachtas require more reform before they can be declared 'family-friendly'. While Dáil reforms in 2016 saw the introduction of a voting block on Wednesday evenings to allow TDs more certainty around when votes will be held, and more flexibility around their presence in the Dáil, no such reform was implemented in the Seanad. In addition, as the Forum's report found, sitting times in the Dáil have increased by more than eight hours per week since 2002. Further, the Covid-19 pandemic led to an increase in the frequency with which the Dáil sat after midnight (eight times in 2020, compared with an average of once per year, for the previous fourteen years).

With respect to videoconferencing, this mode of working was adopted by public representatives to continue their work during the emergency phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) produced a report² in November 2021 which surveyed members about their attitudes towards the use of videoconferencing. 77 percent of councillors who responded said that they wanted to retain the hybrid model of working, while 81 percent stated that using the hybrid environment allowed them a better work-life balance.

Early on in the pandemic, the Ceann Comhairle sought legal advice regarding the Dáil sitting virtually throughout the pandemic. The advice he received was that it would not be constitutional to hold such sessions and so the Dáil moved to the Convention Centre to facilitate social distancing. In response to the legal advice on this issue, a Private Members' Bill, the Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Remote Parliamentary Voting) Bill 2020, was introduced by Jennifer Carroll MacNeill (TD) of Fine Gael. If passed, this bill would allow for a referendum to be held to amend Article 15.11, which requires Oireachtas members to be in Leinster House in order to vote. In February 2022, this bill passed the Second Stage in the Dáil, with government support. Both the Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality (June 2021) and the Report of the Joint Committee on Gender Equality (December 2022), supported calls for a constitutional referendum on remote voting and made recommendations promoting flexible working arrangements.

² <http://ailg.ie/77-per-cent-of-councillors-want-a-hybrid-model-for-local-authority-work-retained/>

COMMENTARY

The comprehensive report by the Oireachtas Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament sets out 51 recommendations to encourage, support and facilitate a diverse, inclusive and family-friendly parliament. It demonstrates that there is still a long way to go to ensure parliament is reflective of society at large and inclusive of the diverse array of experiences and knowledge to inform policymaking. While it is true that some progress has been made, there is still a long way to go.

The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the possibilities of technology like videoconferencing which has the potential to enable women to participate more fully in political life, while still carrying out their childcare responsibilities. However, as restrictions were lifted and life returned to something that more closely resembles pre-pandemic arrangements, the challenge is to try to maintain some of the beneficial aspects of the changes that had to be made. This is true for the local councils, as well as those political party meetings that had to move online. Arrangements in the Oireachtas need to be examined as a matter of urgency. It has been demonstrated that in other countries it is possible to successfully move the business of parliament online, either fully or partially. In the Irish case, in order to move forward with a hybrid model of working for members of the Oireachtas, amending Article 15 of the Constitution is required. A December 2022 report by the Joint Committee on Gender Equality, *Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality*³, reiterates the importance of employing these lessons from the pandemic, surrounding the potential for technology, to facilitate flexible working arrangements for elected officials with caring responsibilities.

While entitlement to maternity leave was not envisaged by the 5 C's report, it is clear that this is an important issue that must be addressed in order to facilitate women's entry into politics. Women for Election advocated for maternity leave for politicians in their respective submissions and presentations to the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality (2020), Oireachtas Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament (2021), and the Joint Committee on Gender Equality (2022). When Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee (TD), announced her first pregnancy in December 2020, and her intention to observe a period of leave, this shone a spotlight on the lack of maternity, paternity and parental leave entitlements in political life. To address the lack of formal maternity leave, the government devised a six-month arrangement which saw Minister McEntee remain in government as a minister without portfolio, and her ministerial responsibilities were shared among other cabinet and junior ministers. Furthermore, an informal pairing arrangement for Dáil votes was entered into with Holly Cairns (TD) of the Social Democrats. A similar arrangement was put in place when Minister McEntee took leave following the birth of her second child in late 2022. However, the precarious nature of informal pairing arrangements was exposed during the course of a contentious Dáil vote in March 2023. Calls for a more formalised pairing process, for example, a panel of rotating pairs, have yet to be realised.

³ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_gender_equality/reports/2022/2022-12-15_final-report-on-unfinished-democracy-achieving-gender-equality_en.pdf

In 2021, the Oireachtas passed the *Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Secretarial Facilities) Regulations 2021*, whereby a public representative is entitled to additional secretarial assistance during a period of maternity leave.

Both the Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality (June 2021) and the Report of the Joint Committee on Gender Equality (December 2022) have called for maternity leave for public representatives with the latter report advising that "paternity and parental leave should be introduced for all elected representatives, alongside maternity leave" (p.114).

In March 2021, the Minister of State for Planning and Local Government, Peter Burke (TD), hosted the first meeting of an all-female working group of councillors to consider the lack of maternity leave at the local level. Subsequently, in June 2022, Minister Burke announced details of a cabinet-approved maternity leave scheme for local councillors, with the relevant legislation passing through the Oireachtas and being signed into law at the end of December 2022. The scheme enables councillors to avail of the same entitlements as employees covered by the Maternity Protection Act 1994. It further enables those who are on maternity leave to designate an individual as their substitute on a temporary basis, standing in for them at meetings, votes, and for all other aspects of the role.

While this represents important progress for local councillors, members of the Oireachtas are not covered by this legislation. Extending these entitlements to Oireachtas members, and introducing temporary substitute or proxy voting, would require constitutional change.

So, progress here has been partial. However, it seems clear that there is momentum on this issue. Action in this area would remove a significant obstacle to women's entry into politics at a national level.



5 C's PROGRESS REPORT CARD

SCORE

D

2. CASH

“women have less access to this resource than men”

REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. The establishment of a national fundraising campaign dedicated to raising money from private donors to finance women's electoral campaigns;
2. State funding to be earmarked for women candidates until a certain target of representation is reached;
3. The voluntary provision of additional funds by political parties to support women candidates.

PROGRESS

No national fundraising campaign (similar to EMILY's List in the United States) has been established, nor has there been any real drive to do so.

State funding for political parties has been linked to the gender composition of candidates since the legislative gender quota for general elections came into effect (see 'candidate selection' section). There is no provision which requires parties to earmark any state funding for female candidates. However, parties are obliged by the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO) to outline how much of their exchequer funding is expended on activities to promote participation by women. This was less than five-and-a-half percent in 2021⁴.

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government introduced a funding scheme for the 2019 local elections, rewarding parties for running female candidates. Parties achieving a minimum of 30 percent of female candidates received a payment of €250 for each woman they selected to run, while those failing to reach that threshold received €100. These funds could not be directed towards female candidates, but rather, had to be ring-fenced for disbursement on activities by the party to increase women's participation at local elections.

In 2021, the Department approved €150,000 for political parties and independents which must be linked to targeted measures to support female candidates at the upcoming local elections in 2024. Further funding was announced at the end of 2022.

⁴ <https://www.sipo.ie/reports-and-publications/state-financing/expenditure-of-exchequer/Exchequer-Funding-of-Political-Parties-2021.pdf>

No political party has announced a strategy of directing funds towards their female candidates. However, research by Buckley and Mariani (2023)⁵ finds that in the 2016 general election, the first election which operated under the legislative gender quota, political parties responded by allocating more funding towards female candidates than male candidates, although women spent less on their campaigns overall.

COMMENTARY

Women in Ireland continue to have less access to cash than do men. According to Eurostat, in 2020, the most recent year for which this data is available, the gender pay gap in Ireland stood at 9.9 percent.⁶

This puts women at a disadvantage when it comes to financing a political campaign. While state funding of political parties is being provided on the basis of the share of women candidates that they are running (i.e. on the condition that parties meet the gender quota), this exchequer funding cannot be directed towards electoral campaigns.

And though political parties did allocate more funding towards female candidates in 2016 (from non-exchequer sources), female challengers spent less on their campaigns compared with male challengers, which indicates that they were less able to fundraise. This is likely due to the fact that they did not enjoy the fundraising advantages that come with incumbency (name recognition; visibility), which are associated with a greater ability to raise money for political campaigns⁷. There is no guarantee that parties will continue to intervene in future elections.

In July 2021, the recommendations of the Moorhead Report (2020) with respect to pay for local councillors were implemented. Councillors saw their pay increase by approximately €7,000 to €25,788 per annum., as well as an increase to €5,160 of vouched expenses. This rise in remuneration goes some way to making the role more accessible to those who are less likely to have income from alternative sources.

And though financial incentives have been introduced to encourage political parties to select women and support women's participation, at the individual level little progress has been made with respect to the implementation of recommendations targeting the gendered barrier of 'cash'.

⁵ Buckley, F., & Mariani, M. (2023). Money Matters: The impact of gender quotas on campaign spending for women candidates. *International Political Science Review*, 44(1), 59–76.

⁶ This measure gives a rough picture of inequalities between men and women with respect to earnings. It is constructed by comparing the gross hourly earnings of men and women working in firms with at least ten employees. However, this is an unadjusted measure, which means that there are no restrictions with respect to hours worked or age of employee.

⁷ For more on this, please see *More Women: changing the face of politics*, a report published by Women for Election in March 2021, which examined the experiences of women running for election in Ireland. It noted the expectation placed on candidates to self-finance their campaigns and the challenges women experienced in doing so.

5 C's PROGRESS REPORT CARD

SCORE

B

3. CONFIDENCE

“women are less likely to go forward for selection”

REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. Political parties should be encouraged to introduce recruitment drives specifically aimed at women, seeking to identify, “head-hunt” and recruit women in local areas, both as party members and potential candidates;
2. Mentoring programmes for new women members and aspiring women candidates should be introduced within the political parties;
3. Leadership training programmes should be provided for aspiring candidates by political parties;
4. The State should provide support for women’s political networks such as the former network “Club 84” of the Women’s Political Association at local, national or European level.

PROGRESS

Informal approaches by parties with respect to recruiting women are common (i.e. approaching women in the local area who the party thinks might be a good fit), and parties have also worked with other organisations (such as Women for Election) to put on events to reach out to women who are not yet party members but have an interest in politics.

Furthermore, several political parties have existing women’s networks. These internal party networks promote women in politics, and provide training, support and mentorship to women who aspire to run for election or who would like to progress to leadership positions within the party.

Beyond political parties, non-partisan organisations like Women for Election aim to get women interested in running for office and to equip them with the tools to do so successfully. Since it was established in 2012, the organisation has provided training to more than 3,000 women. In 2019, the See Her Elected (SHE) project was initiated to encourage and support women in rural Ireland to run for local elections.

Women for Election has established a mentoring programme connecting women who are running in the 2024 local elections. This will see incumbents, newcomers, and experienced politicians exchange knowledge and learn skills for effective campaigning. Women for Election and organisations like SHE have been supported in their work with funding from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The innovative work of both Women for Election and SHE has been recognised at European level in recent years, with both groups receiving innovation awards for their work.

Since the publication of the Oireachtas report in 2009, Ireland has seen collaboration between women across political parties on a more formal basis. In 2017, the Irish Women's Parliamentary Caucus was established to provide a forum for representatives to collaborate on issues affecting women. The caucus connects women with one another. It enables members to discuss strategies to manage or overcome some of the gendered challenges that they may confront as women in politics.

Over the past decade, caucuses have also been established by women engaged in local politics. The National Women's Council produced a report in March 2021, funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, examining the development of local and regional caucuses⁸. The Department supports this initiative by offering funding for caucus activities.

COMMENTARY

There has been significant progress towards implementing the recommendations addressing the issue of 'confidence'.

The implementation of the legislative gender quota for candidate selection at general elections has incentivised parties to recruit women. Political parties offer training and mentoring, for aspiring women candidates and incumbents, through their existing women's networks.

Political parties have been assisted in their efforts by funding from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Seven political parties and two independent groupings received €156,874 in 2021 to fund initiatives to improve gender equality and diversity in candidate selection for the 2024 local elections. At the end of December 2022, a further allocation of €215,594 was announced as part of this scheme⁹.

In addition, the establishment of Women for Election in 2012 provides a non-partisan vehicle for the delivery of training to women in politics and for outreach to women who are interested in politics but do not yet have a political home. Other groups, such as 50:50 North-West and the Women's Manifesto Project (a Longford Women's Link programme), came together to set up the SHE project to target rural areas, in particular Longford and the North West of Ireland, where women are particularly underrepresented in local politics. State funding is provided to support these organisations. In March 2022, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage announced that €129,100 would be provided to Women for Election and €108,000 would be granted to the SHE project. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth granted €80,000 towards core funding to Women for Election in 2022.

⁸ https://www.nwci.ie/learn/publication/women_doing_politics_differently

⁹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/2bad8-minister-burke-allocates-215594-to-political-parties-to-increase-female-participation-and-diversity-in-the-local-elections-2024/>

State funding is also provided to support the establishment of local women's caucuses and initiatives aimed at increasing diversity in local politics. In November 2022, €192,200 of funding was allocated across 18 local authorities and one regional caucus, with sums varying between €2,500 and €22,000¹⁰.

The level of state funding provided to various groups involved in increasing women's presence in political life indicates that this is an important issue for government. However, funding tends to be allocated on an ad hoc basis. This means that these activities are vulnerable to being deprioritised.

In addition, given the scale of the work that needs to be done with respect to providing training and other supports to women, the level of existing funding needs to be substantially increased and regularised. This will allow a considerable investment in tackling the issue of confidence among women, while also enabling these kinds of organisations to future-plan more effectively.

Similarly, the current arrangements that political parties have in place with respect to their recruitment, mentoring and leadership training of women are dependent on the continued support of party leadership. Consideration should be given to how such arrangements can be formalised to ensure that existing interventions are maintained. In particular, it would be beneficial to see women's networks established in those political parties that do not already have one, and for funding to be allocated for dedicated staff to maintain such networks.



¹⁰ <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/9afd9-minister-burke-allocates-192200-to-local-authorities-to-increase-participation-of-women-and-people-of-diversity-in-the-next-local-elections/>

A substantial progress on the implementation of recommendations

C limited progress on the implementation of recommendations

B good progress on the implementation of recommendations

D very limited progress on the implementation of recommendations

5 C's PROGRESS REPORT CARD

SCORE

D

4. CULTURE

“a gendered culture is prevalent even within left-wing parties”

REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. The education system should be used to encourage more women into politics through civic education programmes in secondary schools, for example;
2. Female role models should be identified and used in school and voter education programmes, to change the stereotypical image of the ‘male politician’;
3. To challenge the cultural barrier for women entering politics whereby childcare is always seen as a woman’s responsibility, the issue of father’s rights and paternity leave in society more broadly should be reviewed;
4. An advertising campaign like that initiated in Iceland should be considered with the participation of politicians from all parties, again aimed at challenging traditional stereotypes of male politicians;
5. A national data bank of potential women candidates should be established, administered either by the State, or a national NGO like the NWCI, on a constituency-by-constituency basis.

PROGRESS

No new programme of civic education has been implemented nationally to encourage women to run for office¹¹, which means that any initiatives designed to provide school students with visible female role models are dependent on local initiatives of the kind that involve inviting public representatives to speak at local schools.

The Paternity Leave and Benefit Act 2016 introduced two weeks’ statutory paternity leave for relevant parents. Since then, leave entitlements for parents have been broadened. The Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2019 entitles a parent to take up to 26 weeks of unpaid leave. The provisions of the Family Leave and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2021 entitle parents of children born or adopted on or after November 1st 2019 to a total of five weeks paid leave for each parent. This leave entitlement can

¹¹ Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) has been taught in second-level schools since 1997 to students in the junior cycle. However, since 2019, it is no longer examined as part of the Junior Certificate and has been downgraded to a short course covering 100 hours of learning. Politics and Society is a course for senior cycle that has been available for students to take since 2016, with the first Leaving Certificate examinations being held on that subject in 2018. Neither of the syllabi for these courses contains a component targeted at increasing political interest and/or ambition among young people, particularly girls. However, their focus on citizenship, power, human rights, and inequalities suggests that these subjects might be appropriate vehicles for for such a programme of civic education.

be taken during the first two years after the birth or adoption of the child. Employees are currently entitled to 26 weeks' maternity leave, with Maternity Benefit paid for the full period so long as sufficient PRSI contributions have been paid. It is also possible to take an additional 16 weeks' maternity leave, though this will be unpaid.

Existing research highlights the unequal distribution of household and caring responsibilities between men and women. The CSO's 2021 online Pulse Survey finds that 65 percent of women, living with a partner of the opposite-sex, said they are mainly responsible for household chores¹². According to the 2016 census (the most recent year for which this data is available), 60.5 percent of carers in Ireland are women¹³. We know also that 76.5 percent of recipients of carer's benefit and carer's allowance are women (CSO, 2019)¹⁴. Women spend twice as much time on care work as do men¹⁵.

During the pandemic gender inequalities with respect to caring duties worsened. Across OECD countries, mothers with children under 12 were almost three times as likely as fathers to report that they did all or most of the additional care work arising out of the school and childcare closures during the emergency stage of the pandemic¹⁶.

A 2022 poll by *The Good Information Project/Ireland Thinks* on gender equality finds that less than one in four people in Ireland believe that men and women experience equal treatment in the home. Further, less than 23 percent indicated that there was equal treatment in politics, and just 36 percent stated that they believed men and women received equal treatment in media representation¹⁷. Safe Ireland's 2019 *Gender Matters* report finds that a sizeable share of the Irish population subscribes to gender stereotypes¹⁸. Almost two-thirds of respondents to the survey agreed that women were more likely to respond emotionally, while men were more likely to respond logically.

No national advertising campaign, of the kind initiated by Iceland, was implemented in order to challenge traditional stereotypes of politicians. However, several initiatives to highlight the role of women in politics have been funded by the government. As part of the Centenary celebrations, an exhibition entitled *100 Years of Women in Politics and Public Life* was developed by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and curated by Dr Sinéad McCoole. The pop-up exhibition launched at Dublin Castle in December 2018 before touring other parts of the country. In March 2019, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Minister of State with special responsibility for Local Government and Electoral Reform announced that an information campaign would be launched highlighting the critical role of women in local government prior to the elections that year. A report funded by the Department and produced by the National Women's Council, *Celebrating the role of Women over 120 years of Local Government*¹⁹, was published in May of that year.

¹² <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-syi/statisticalyearbookofireland2021part1/soc/lifeathome/>

¹³ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp9hdc/p8hdc/p9cr/>

¹⁴ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-wamii/womenandmeninireland2019/health/>

¹⁵ <https://www.esri.ie/publications/caring-and-unpaid-work-in-ireland>

¹⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/caregiving-in-crisis-gender-inequality-in-paid-and-unpaid-work-during-covid-19-3555d164/>

¹⁷ <https://www.thejournal.ie/gender-equality-poll-5657868-Jan2022/>

¹⁸ <https://www.safeireland.ie/more-rigid-views-on-gender-equality-and-roles-often-held-by-younger-people-new-safe-ireland-research-indicates/>

¹⁹ https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Celebrating_the_role_of_Women_over_120_years_of_Local_Government.pdf

No national data bank of potential women candidates has been established. However, in 2022, Women for Election was awarded a grant of €47,000 from the Public Service Innovation Fund 2022, operated by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DEPR), to support the establishment of a Women in Politics National Data Hub.

This hub will act as a repository for historical data regarding women's geographical representation at all levels of government, as well as act as a resource to track progress in this area across constituencies and LEAs. The hub will further provide mapping of where women are being selected in the 2024 election, helping to inform strategies and highlight areas where interventions are required. However, in its current form, it will not fulfil the recommendation of the original report which was to establish a databank of potential women candidates.

COMMENTARY

The progress with respect to these recommendations is mixed. The changes to policy around paternity and parental leave have been significant and represent an important step in effecting a cultural mind shift with respect to childcare. In addition, the government has funded initiatives to highlight the important role that women have played in Irish politics since 1918. These too can help to challenge the perception of politics as a male-dominated arena, with the stereotypical politician being male. However, such initiatives, while welcome, are dependent on the priorities of the government of the day and are not systematic in the way that the recommendations of the original report envisaged.

It is particularly concerning that the potential for the education system to be used to tackle gender stereotypes at a young age has not yet been realised. Research from the United States by Fox and Lawless (2014)²⁰ reveals that gender gaps in attitudes about politics emerge while children are still in school, and it is crucial that interventions that aim to tackle a gendered political culture are carried out early on.

The establishment of the Electoral Commission represents an opportunity to revisit these recommendations. The Electoral Reform Act 2022 states that one of the functions of the Commission is an educational one, whereby the Commission will “promote public awareness of, and participation in, the State’s electoral and democratic processes and encourage the public to vote at electoral events”.

The roll-out of a new national civic education programme, possibly co-ordinated by the Electoral Commission, should be prioritised. This programme would promote knowledge of the political system, challenge stereotypes and encourage a more inclusive and diverse political culture.

²⁰ Fox, R. L., & Lawless, J. L. (2014). Uncovering the origins of the gender gap in political ambition. *American Political Science Review*, 108(3), 499-519.

The Oireachtas Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament set out a series of recommendations to effect institutional cultural change within the Oireachtas in its 2021 report. Published a year later, the Report of the Joint Committee on Gender Equality provides a detailed action plan for how the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality can be successfully implemented to achieve a gender equal Ireland. Taken together, these recommendations provide a template to tackle the gendered culture that exists in both Irish politics at the highest level and Irish society more broadly.

Finally, it is worth noting that the original 5 C's report did not consider the abuse that politicians and candidates may experience when they enter public life. In particular, that report could not have foreseen the important role that social media would come to play both as a campaign tool, but also as a vector for such abuse. Recent work by Women for Election highlights the way such abuse or fear of experiencing such abuse, can form an important part of the decision about running for office, either for the first or subsequent time²¹. Research by Valesca Lima and Claire McGing for the National Women's Council highlights the prevalence of online abuse in Irish politics, the inadequacy of the current response by Irish political parties, and provides a toolkit to parties so that they can keep their members safe online²². It is clear that this represents a significant issue – existing research in Ireland finds that women in local government receive eight times as many abusive tweets as do their male counterparts²³.

Such abuse is not confined to the online sphere, however. In the past few months there has been a much wider discussion about the physical, verbal and online threats that public representatives receive, but in particular, that are experienced by women in politics²⁴. In February 2023, the Ceann Comhairle met with female members of the Oireachtas to discuss their experiences. After that meeting, it was announced that a taskforce would be established with a view to tackling the problem of abuse experienced by women in politics.

²¹ Keenan, L. & Buckley, F. (2023b). Exploring political ambition in the Republic of Ireland: a survey of politically interested women. Women for Election.

²² https://www.nwci.ie/learn/article/irish_political_parties_must_tackle_online_abuse_of_women_politicians

²³ Richardson, I. (2022). 'The Dynamics of Political Incivility on Twitter towards Irish Representatives'. Available online at: https://rpubs.com/lan_W_Richardson/Twitter_Irish_Politics

²⁴ In part, this discussion has been driven by a number of incidents that have been reported in the media but also by some female politicians speaking openly about their own experiences with such abuse.

A substantial progress on the implementation of recommendations

C limited progress on the implementation of recommendations

B good progress on the implementation of recommendations

D very limited progress on the implementation of recommendations

5 C's PROGRESS REPORT CARD

SCORE
A

5. CANDIDATE SELECTION PROCEDURES

“the processes by which political parties select candidates have been identified as posing a significant obstacle to women’s political participation”

REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. Candidate gender quota legislation be adopted based on the Belgian model, whereby no party can have more than two-thirds of their candidates of one gender in the next general election, with this target being revised upwards and failure to achieve it resulting in reduced levels of state funding. The legislation would be temporary with an inbuilt “sunset clause”, whereby the quota is removed once the objective has been achieved.

PROGRESS

Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 was passed. Section 42 of the Act introduces a candidate gender quota, requiring parties to field no less than 30 percent of candidates of either gender at the next general election, with the quota rising to 40 percent, seven years thereafter.

Failure to comply with the quota results in a 50 percent reduction in state funding, allocated to political parties, under the Electoral Acts.

There is no “sunset clause” included in the Act.



COMMENTARY

The recommendation was fulsomely adopted for general elections and in a format that did not include a “sunset clause”.

The pathway to the adoption of legislative gender quotas was one many years in the making. As far back as 1936, the Joint Committee of Women’s Societies and Social Workers “proposed a requirement that at least one woman be on the ballot in every electoral area”²⁵. In the years that followed, the issue was raised by women’s groups, notably the Women’s Political Association (WPA) and academics working the area of women’s political representation, for example Prof Yvonne Galligan. In 2010, The 5050 Group was established by a group of activists and academics to campaign on this single issue. Together with other civic society groups and feminist-minded public representatives, this predominantly grassroots-based alliance, advocated for an increased presence of women in political life and the adoption of legislation to facilitate this. The underrepresentation of women in politics formed part of the political reform conversation that took place in Ireland following the financial crash in 2008 and subsequent economic downturn (Buckley, 2013)²⁶. Gender quotas formed part of the Fine Gael-Labour coalition government’s political reform legislative agenda and the ‘gender quota law’ was passed by the Oireachtas in July 2012.

The effect of the legislative gender quota was clear after the first election at which it operated. The quota increased the share of women in Dáil Éireann from 15.1 percent in 2011 to 22.2 percent in 2016. Since the adoption of legislative gender quotas, women’s representation in Dáil Éireann has increased by 48 percent.

The legislative gender quota has created a demand for women’s candidacy among party selectors. Political parties have engaged in offering training and mentoring supports to women candidates. Research also shows that campaign funding supports were also directed to female newcomers at the 2016 election.

However, resistance to gender quotas still remains within political parties, evidenced in the negative reaction toward gender directives at some selection conventions ahead of the 2016 general election²⁷. There is an ongoing constitutional challenge to the legislation, initiated in November 2015²⁸. Women for Election research also highlights that some women candidates’ experience of party politics and election campaigns, reveals an unsupportive and hostile party environment²⁹. Organisations including Women for Election and the National Women’s Council, have called on parties to ensure women are selected to run in constituencies where there is a reasonable chance of success.

²⁵ Galligan Y. (2018). *Women and Politics in Ireland since 1918*. A paper delivered at the 2018 Daniel O’Connell Summer School, 31st August – 1st September 2018. - <https://danieloconnellsummerschool.com/component/edocman/women-and-politics-in-ireland-since-1918-yvonne-galligan-professor-of-political-science-at-queen-s-university-belfast/viewdocument/15?Itemid=0>

²⁶ Buckley, F. (2013). Women and politics in Ireland: the road to sex quotas. *Irish Political Studies*, 28(3), 341-359.

²⁷ Buckley, F., Galligan, Y., & McGing, C. (2016). Women and the election: Assessing the impact of gender quotas. *How Ireland Voted 2016: The Election That Nobody Won*, (pp. 185-205). Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁸ <https://www.pila.ie/resources/bulletin/2019/04/03/irish-supreme-court-finds-fianna-fil-member-has-standing-to-challenge-constitutionality-of-gender-quota-targets>

²⁹ Keenan, L. & Buckley, F. (2023b). Exploring political ambition in the Republic of Ireland: a survey of politically interested women. *Women for Election*; Buckley, F., & Keenan, L. (2021). ‘More Women – changing the face of Politics: women’s experience of running for election in Ireland’. *Women for Election*. Available online at: <https://www.womenforelection.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/WFE-More-Women-Changing-the-Face-of-Politics-small.pdf>

Legislative gender quotas do not apply to local elections, but there is some evidence of a contagion effect from the national level to the local level. Women's candidacy in local elections has increased from 314 in 2009 to 562 in 2019. However, women's candidacy at local elections still falls below 30 percent and just one-of-every-four seats in local government is occupied by a woman. Additionally, regional differences are observed, with lower rates of women's representation on local authorities with large rural areas.

Organisations including Women for Election, See Her Elected and the National Women's Council have declared their support for the extension of legislative gender quotas to local elections, as originally envisaged by the 5 C's report. Both the Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality (June 2021) and the Report of the Joint Committee on Gender Equality (December 2022) have recommended the extension of legislative gender quotas to include all elections: general, Seanad, local and European. Furthermore, there has been increased discussion about how quotas could be used to increase the representation of minority women in Irish politics. A 2022 report³⁰ by Dr Pauline Cullen and Shane Gough for the National Traveller Women's Forum and Akina Dada wa Africa (AkiDwA), recommends that a local gender quota be implemented which incorporates a nested ethnic quota.

Across all levels of politics (local, national and European), there is a need for greater inclusion and diversity, to ensure decision-making fora are representative and reflective of society at large.

Thus the work on facilitating access to politics for all is ongoing.



³⁰ https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/filefield_paths/Different_Paths_Shared_Experiences_Report.pdf

CONCLUSION

More than ten years after the 5 C's report was published, it is clear that progress has been made. While not all of the recommendations contained in the report have been implemented, it is significant that the recommendation that arguably required the most political capital – that is, the implementation of a candidate gender quota – was successfully put in place and, crucially, was implemented in a more ambitious form than that envisaged by the report.

Not only is the incentive for political parties to comply significant (the loss of half of the party's state funding for the full duration of the Dáil term), but the measure does not include the sunset clause that was initially proposed. The direct impact of the legislative gender quota is clear; since its implementation, the share of women running as candidates has doubled and women's representation in Dáil Éireann has increased by 48 percent. However, it is also worth considering the indirect effects of the measure.

Firstly, while this scorecard has highlighted the lack of a systematic approach by many parties with respect to things like mentoring, recruitment drives, and leadership training, it is nevertheless true that the requirement that parties make space for women on their slate of candidates has led parties to engage in a range of activities to encourage women to run. And, when they decide to do so, to prepare them to mount a successful campaign. The quota has pushed parties into implementing initiatives that will go some way towards directly addressing the barrier of 'confidence'.



Secondly, while the candidate gender quota only operates at the general election, parties have thus far used the local elections as an opportunity to run more women candidates, enabling them to gain electoral experience and, potentially, experience in office prior to running for a seat in Dáil Éireann. And while the share of women running in the local elections is below 30 percent, most parties did meet this threshold in 2019. The candidate quota therefore has had a trickledown effect, and we might expect this to continue as the threshold for the gender quota rises to 40 percent at the next general election.



Thirdly, the legislative gender quota is having a cumulative impact on the existing culture in Irish politics. Having more women in politics in and of itself challenges the view of the stereotypical male politician and provides role models for younger women, who might begin to see politics as a potential career for them. Further, increasing the pool of women in decision-making bodies helps to challenge the gendered nature of these institutions and emboldens them to push for change to improve diversity and inclusion. Such reforms, of the kind outlined in the report by the Oireachtas Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament, will pave the way for more women to enter into politics.

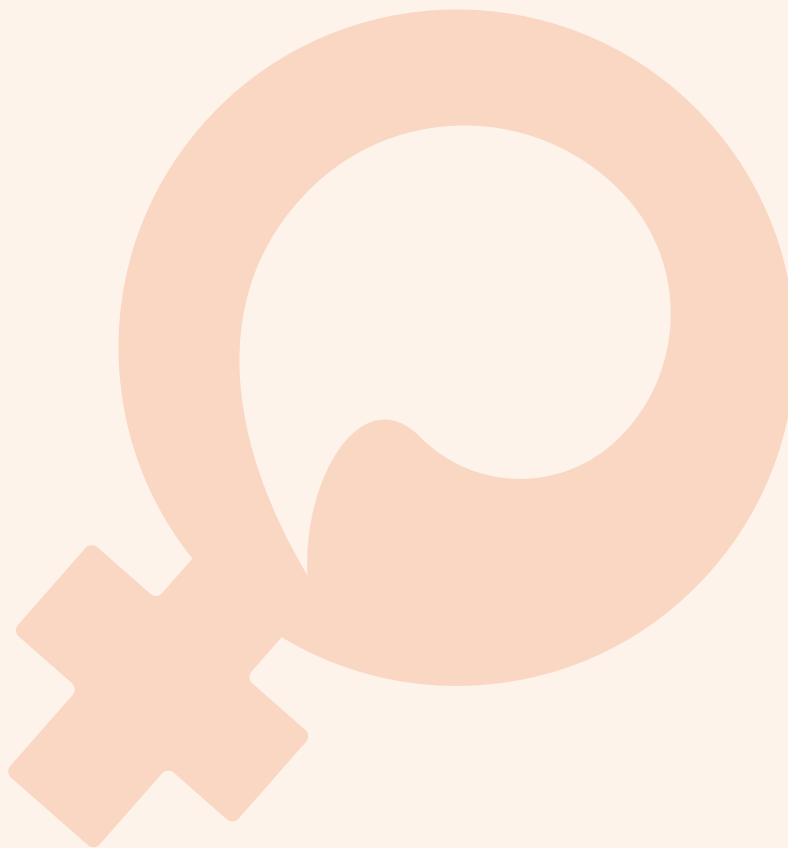
The experience of the legislative gender quota shows that a single policy change can have far-reaching consequences, and that when Irish political parties are provided with the right incentives, they are capable of acting quickly to make adjustments. However, while important progress has been made since the 5 C's report was published in 2009, this scorecard shows there is still much work that remains to be accomplished.

Gender parity in political representation is still far-off; while the legislative gender quota has created a demand for women candidates, research points to internal party structures that are not always supportive of women's candidacy; not enough progress has been made with respect to the gendered barrier of cash; and the recommendations with respect to childcare and culture have only been partially implemented. In addition, when the report was published in 2009, it could not have foreseen the advent of social media and the opportunities it presents to connect with the public. However, such openness lays public representatives open to online abuse. As Richardson's (2022) analysis of tweets directed at Irish politicians makes clear, such abuse can be gendered and has the potential to represent an important deterrent to those women who might otherwise be inclined to run for office. Social media usage represents an important cultural shift in political life, one that is being experienced by politicians around the world, and it is clear that there is no consensus yet on how users should be protected from abuse and harassment.

Further, the failure to adopt in full the recommendations of the report is concerning. Although the complete implementation would have represented an important step in tackling these barriers, on their own they would not fully dismantle them. A much more wide-ranging set of recommendations has been produced by the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality, which reported in 2021, with the goal of seeing the establishment of a more gender equal society. That publication contains some 45 recommendations, many of which echo the objectives of the 5 C's report, and it remains to be seen how many of them are acted upon. We can see that there is a fairly clear picture of where many of the challenges lie, and no shortage of proposals for how to tackle them. But so far this has not been matched by a willingness to actually implement them.



It is clear then that while we have seen some progress, there is no room for complacency. More than a decade on from the publication of the report by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Equality Defence and Women's Rights, the picture is one of *much done but more to do*.





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