



Submission to Houses of the Oireachtas Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament

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Introduction

Women for Election (WFE) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organisation that is focused on achieving 50/50 gender balance in Irish politics. WFE facilitates practical training and support programmes to inspire and equip women to enter and succeed in politics. We also advocate for systematic changes to remove barriers that prevent the full participation of a diversity of women in Irish politics.

Currently only 23% (36/160) of sitting TDs are women and as was recently [reported](#) 40% of government committees do not include female representatives. Ireland is currently ranked 100th in the world for the percentage of women in parliament.

We are delighted to be represented on the Forum by our Chairperson Alison Cowzer and we very much welcome this initiative. In addition to our representation on the Forum, as an external stakeholder we have prepared this submission in the anticipation that it can further assist the Forum in its deliberations. For ease of reference we have hyperlinked any reference material throughout this submission.

[An Oireachtas report](#) in 2009 found five main barriers into women's participation in Irish politics which included *Culture* and *Care*. We are currently working with the Rapporteur of this report Senator Bacik along with Dr Fiona Buckley and Dr Lisa Keenan to conduct a review of the 5 main barriers (5 C's) and any additional barriers that are impeding women's participation in politics. We very much welcome the Forum's invitation for WFE to present the preliminary relevant findings from this review when they are available in August/September.

Women for Election strongly advocate for family friendly working practices including the promotion of work/family life balance so that all members of the Oireachtas can fulfil their work and family roles and duties. We also welcome the Forum's focus on developing a more gender and diversity aware culture within the parliamentary community which will make the Oireachtas a more attractive and inclusive place to work. By doing so, this will remove some of the key barriers that prevent women and those marginalised in society from partaking in political life while also encouraging elected female TD's and Senators to run again for election, notwithstanding the benefits to the wider parliamentary community.

The following summates the practical steps we believe if included in the Forums plans will lead to a family friendly, gender sensitive and inclusive workplace for the parliamentary community.

Goal One: Making the Houses of the Oireachtas a more inclusive, family friendly and gender-sensitive workplace for the parliamentary community

1. Recognise the responsibility of all groups within the Oireachtas to actively choose gender balanced committees, at all levels, where possible. (Recommendation 17- [The Good Parliament: Childs](#))
2. Gender quotas to ensure balance on the Business Committee and any other committees which oversee the operations of the House. (Gender Quotas on

Parliamentary Committees, Recommendation 15- [The Good Parliament: Childs](#))

3. Gender targets set for all committees in the Oireachtas which rise incrementally as more women are elected/nominated to both houses. (i.e. available to sit on committees).
4. Publish monitoring reports of membership of committees disaggregated by gender and ethnic identity.
5. Introduction of remote voting by way of constitutional referendum (if necessary) so to facilitate those with caring responsibilities or living rurally to be able vote from home as needed and particularly during unsociable hours as well as to facilitate care priorities/emergencies. Consideration also of a post-pandemic hybrid model for parliamentary debates and committees as technology develops to facilitate remote participation at meetings.
6. Legislate for the provision of maternity, paternity, parental and adoption leave to be explicitly available as an option for all TD's, Senators and Ministers including the office holders of the Taoiseach and Tánaiste in line with national legislative standards.
7. Provide for a 'substitute' resource for TD's particularly those on maternity or paternity leave.
8. Practical assessment of suitability and accessibility of existing on-site care support provisions including creche/nursery and breastfeeding facilities. For example - Do the current provisions meet the needs of all relevant staff/members.
9. Constitutional Referendum to enable Ministers and other office holders e.g. Taoiseach to take full maternity/paternity leave without having to resign their portfolio or 'job-share' portfolio with another Ministerial portfolio.
10. Inclusion of TD's and Senators and Local Councillors as a category of 'officer' added to existing Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave legislation.
11. Awareness training for all staff and members on appropriate/acceptable behaviour particularly in relation to sexual harassment, abuse and bullying.
12. Ensure that existing supports are available to all members in relation to reporting and supports re sexual harassment, bullying and any other form of abuse.
13. Conduct regular surveys to ascertain the experience of staff and members of any sexual harassment, bullying, and/or abuse experienced in the course of their work in the parliament in order to monitor the safety of the work environment.
14. Provision of an induction programme for newly elected members of the Oireachtas, in order to aid the navigation of systems and create a collegial and accepting culture amongst staff.

Goal Two: Ensuring that the Houses of the Oireachtas are supported and resourced to take account of gender and equality issues when legislating.

1. Gender and Equality Experts employed to advise on all legislation that is being drafted and amended (Recommendation 11 - [The Good Parliament: Childs](#))
2. Training seminars covering Intercultural Competency, Anti-Racism and Unconscious Bias provided to all members of the Oireachtas. (Recommendation 6- [Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on Travellers](#))
3. Development of a consultancy committee representing minority groups. (Recommendation 9- [Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on Travellers](#))

4. Awareness training for all staff and members on appropriate behaviour particularly in relation to racism, misogyny, homophobia, ageism, sexual harassment, abuse and bullying.

Goal Three: Improve the diversity of the parliamentary community to better reflect society in Ireland.

1. Monitor diversity across positions, committees, roles, ranks etc on a regular basis to identify areas where positive actions to balance diversity are needed.
2. Training seminars covering Intercultural Competency, Anti-Racism and Unconscious Bias provided to all members of the Oireachtas. (as above)
3. Facilitation of paid internships, mentorships, scholarships and work experience for members of marginalised/underrepresented populations - e.g Women, Traveller community, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities as identified from monitoring of diversity in the parliamentary community. (Recommendation 19- [The Good Parliament: Childs](#))
4. Provision of an effective reporting and support mechanism for those who have been negatively affected by or discriminated against due to their gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, disability, family status, age, religious beliefs and/or socio-economic background.
5. As laid out above, as part of point two, the development of a consultancy committee representing minority groups to ensure the parliamentary community is inclusive and considerate to all minority groups. (Recommendation 9- [Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on Travellers](#))
6. All political parties and Oireachtas members to sign up to and enforce anti-racism protocol (Recommendation 7- [Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on Travellers](#))
7. Reserve a seat for a Traveller representative in the Seanad via the Taoiseach nominees.
8. Where practical, facilitate ethnic minority quotas to increase the engagement of minority groups with politics.

Additional Questions

4. Related areas which the Forum's Terms of Reference which do not touch upon, which the Forum should consider

In order for the Houses of the Oireachtas to be more inclusive and diverse it is important that those elected to office are reflective of the society that elects them. While this Forum does not have the remit to determine the election of more women, more Travellers, more migrants, more Black people, more people with disabilities, from working class backgrounds or who identify as LGBTQI, every effort should be made to reflect a parliament that is both inclusive but also proactively working with outside stakeholders to establish mechanisms which can fast track the increase of diversity and interest in public representation.

Such measures could include resourcing external research, facilitating internships for underrepresented populations, resourcing organisations like Women for Election to deliver

the training and mentoring supports needed to help get more women elected. Supporting initiatives to tackle abuse of politicians and candidates. Supporting the development of a government strategy to get 50/50 representation in the Dail and Seanad by 2030.

5. Imagine the Houses of the Oireachtas one, five and ten years down the line, are there changes that you would expect to have happened in order for us to judge the work of the Forum as having been successful?

One Year:

- ⇒ Members of the Oireachtas are offered the choice of maternity, paternity, parental and adoption leave in line with national legislative standards.
- ⇒ Remote voting facilitated.
- ⇒ Gender sensitivity and anti-racism training is standard practice for all members of the parliamentary committee.
- ⇒ All political parties and members of the Oireachtas sign up to an anti-racism and inclusivity mandate.
- ⇒ Increased awareness of sexual harassment and ways to prevent, seek support and report.

Five Years:

- ⇒ That both the upper and lower house of the Oireachtas represent a diverse society, 40:60 gender divide.
- ⇒ Increase in Traveller and ethnic minority representation within both houses of the Oireachtas and the wider parliamentary community.
- ⇒ At least 10% representation of ethnic minorities with the members of the Oireachtas.
- ⇒ At least 10% representation of people with disabilities with the members of the Oireachtas.

Ten Years:

- ⇒ 50:50 gender balance in the houses of Oireachtas.
- ⇒ At least one female Taoiseach, at least one female Minister for Finance in next 10 years. 50% gender balance at the Cabinet and all Committees.
- ⇒ Full representation of diverse society in the Oireachtas.
- ⇒ A safe and welcoming environment for all staff and representatives regardless of gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation, socio economic background, age, religious beliefs or disabilities.

6. Are there any publications (published by you or your organisation) that you believe would be useful to the Forum in its work?

Publications by Women for Election

[More Women Changing the Face of Politics: Women's Experience of Running for Election in Ireland](#)