

Written submission to the Joint Committee on Gender Equality examining the recommendations made by the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

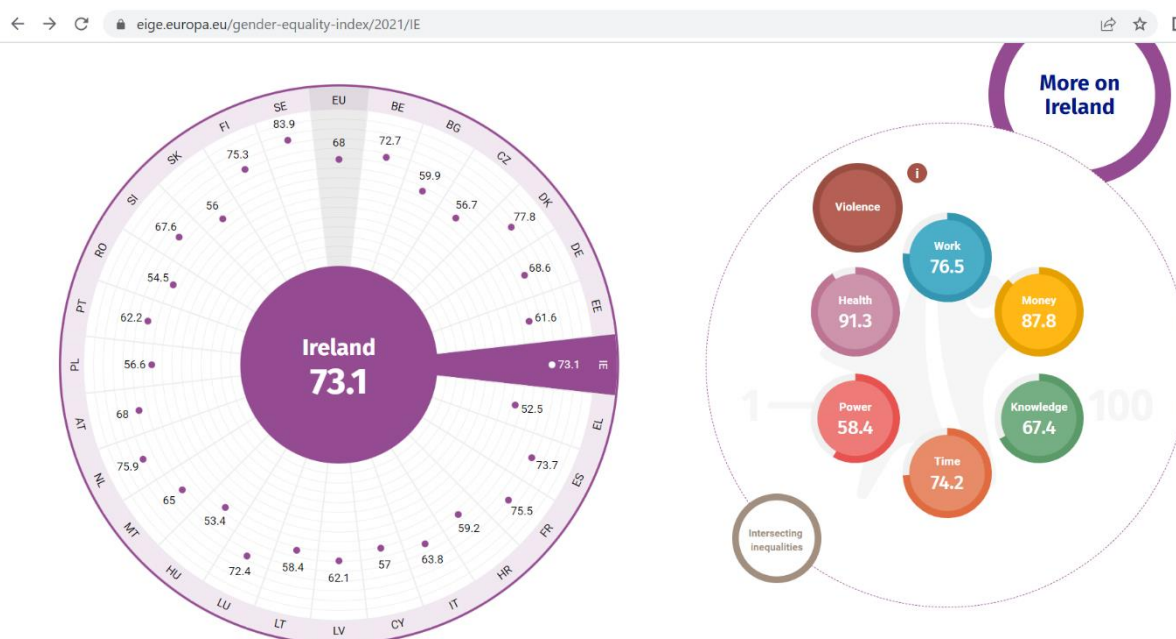
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1. Biography

Fiona Buckley is a lecturer based in the Department of Government and Politics in University College Cork (UCC) where she researches and teaches about women in politics.

2. Introduction

In October 2021, the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) released its annual Gender Equality Index of EU member states. It shows that Ireland ranks 7th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index with a score of 73.1 out of 100 points, 5.1 points above the EU average of 68.



Source: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/IE> (accessed 3 March 2022)

The area in which Ireland performs worse for gender equality is *power*, with a score of just 58.4 out of 100. The EIGE identified gender inequality in decision-making across political, economic and social fora.

Political

- 4 of 15 cabinet ministers are women (26.7%)
- 5 of 20 Ministers of State are women (25%)
- 37 of 160 TDs are women (23.1%).
- 23 of 59 Senators were women (39%) [ahead of the University of Dublin Seanad bye-election]
- Women account for 25.6% of the members of local authorities
- 5 of 13 MEPs are women (38.5%)
- Ireland ranks 21st among the EU27 for women's political representation in the lower house of parliament

- Proportion of women in each party/among independents in Dáil Éireann:
 - Aontú: 0%
 - Fianna Fáil: 13.5%
 - Fine Gael: 17.6%
 - Greens: 16.7%
 - Independents: 23.8%
 - Labour: 14.3%
 - People Before Profit-Solidarity: 20%
 - Sinn Féin: 33.3%
 - Social Democrats: 66.7%
 - The Right to Change Party: 100%

Source: Author's own

Economic

- 29% of members of boards in largest quoted companies, supervisory board or board of directors are women
- 38% of board members of central bank are women

Source: EIGE - <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/domain/power/IE> (accessed 3 March 2022)

Social

- 41% of board members of research funding organisations are women
- 50% of board members of publicly owned broadcasting organisations are women
- 20% of members of highest decision-making body of the national Olympic sport organisations are women

Source: EIGE - <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/domain/power/IE> (accessed 3 March 2022)

This data is just the latest body of evidence highlighting the under-representation of women's voices, perspectives and lived experiences at decision-making tables in Ireland. In 2009, the [Women's Participation in Politics Report](#) described Ireland as an unfinished democracy due to the under-representation of women in politics (p.9). While the positive effect of legislative gender quotas is clear - since the law's adoption, women's representation in Dáil Éireann has increased by 48% - as Ireland was coming from such a low base, prior to the implementation of gender quotas, gender parity in political representation is still some distance away. Across all levels of political decision-making (local, national and European), there is a need for better gender balance, inclusion and diversity, to ensure decision-makers are representative and reflective of Irish society.

Thus, the work on advancing gender equality, diversity and inclusion is an ongoing process, and one which is as relevant, if not more pertinent in today's world, when, as observed by [Pippa Norris in her address to UN Women in September 2020](#), "socially conservative anti-gender social movements have mobilised; growing cultural polarisation has exacerbated threats/acts of violence against women in the public sphere; and gains for authoritarian-populist parties and leaders are threatening to rollback gains for women's rights".

3. Proposals for implementing the Citizens' Assembly recommendations

Extending gender quotas to local, Seanad and European Parliament elections

- Any party in receipt of State funding under the Electoral Acts would receive supplemental funding (proportion to be decided) if they run 40% or more women at local elections, Seanad and European Parliament elections.

Increase incentives for parties to meet their obligations under the legislative gender quota

- In addition to the existing incentive mechanism built into the calculation of State funding allocated to political parties under the Electoral Acts, could the manner by which the Parliamentary

Activities Allowance is calculated be amended to partly link it to the number of women representatives a party/independent group has in the Oireachtas?

- At the national level, political parties are in receipt of two sources of State funding: 1) exchequer funding received under the Electoral Acts and 2) the Parliamentary Activities Allowance which is paid to leaders of qualifying parties as well as to independent members of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann. The extent of both sources of funding is determined by electoral performance.
- The *Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012* specifies that payments to political parties calculated in accordance to the Electoral Acts “shall be reduced by 50 per cent, unless at least 30 per cent of the candidates whose candidatures were authenticated by the qualified party at the preceding general election were women and at least 30 per cent were men”. The gender quota threshold will increase to 40% in general elections from 2023 onwards.
- The Parliamentary Activities Allowance is determined by the number of TDs and Senators a party has in the Oireachtas (or in the case of independents, each independent representative is allocated a Parliamentary Activities Allowance).
- In addition to the existing incentive mechanism built into the calculation of party funding received under the Electoral Acts, could the manner by which the Parliamentary Activities Allowance is calculated be amended to partly link it to the number of women representatives a party/group has in the Oireachtas? If it were constitutionally possible, such a change may have the effect of incentivising parties to increase their efforts to support and promote women’s candidacy during Dáil and Seanad elections.

Moving from 30% to 40% gender quota

- The *Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012* outlines that the threshold of 30% increases to 40% “on the polling day at the general election held next after the expiration of 7 years” following when the legislative gender quota first came into effect. This was 26 February 2016 so the gender quota threshold will increase to 40% for general elections held from 27 February 2023 onwards.

Improve family-friendly practices for all representatives elected to public office

- The Committee should refer to the recommendations of the [Report of the Forum on Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament](#) when seeking mechanisms to improve the family-friendly practices of all representatives elected to public office, specifically the following recommendations:
 - The *Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Secretarial Facilities) Regulations 2021* provides additional secretarial facilities to Members taking maternity leave for 26 weeks. This should be amended to provide additional secretarial facilities to Members for a period of two weeks to Members taking paternity leave. (Recommendation 15)
 - By September 2022, develop a formal pairing system to facilitate Members taking maternity leave, paternity leave, sick leave, or travel for essential Government business. A rotating panel of pairs is preferable to a pairing arrangement that involves two Members. A formal note on Members’ voting records to show both the leave and participation in pairing arrangements by Members. Public information to be included on the Oireachtas website explaining how arrangements work. (Recommendation 16)
 - During the 33rd Dáil, introduce a constitutional referendum to amend Article 15 that would enable the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce proxy voting (for Maternity, Paternity and Sick Leave) and arrangements for Members to participate remotely with parliamentary privilege in certain Oireachtas business. (Recommendation 17)
 - Preferably by the end of the 33rd Dáil term, or until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, assuming a positive outcome, the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce hybrid sittings of some Dáil, Seanad and Committee business where Members can choose

- to participate in certain business remotely or to be physically present. (Recommendation 18)¹
- Preferably by the end of the 33rd Dáil term, or until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, assuming a positive outcome, the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce regional hubs, located in other State buildings, for Members from surrounding constituencies to participate in certain Dáil, Seanad or Committee business without the need to be physically present in the parliamentary complex. (Recommendation 19)
 - By September 2022, provide suitable, comfortable spaces for infant feeding, and ensure adequate infant changing facilities promoted by signage so that staff, Members, and visitors are aware of locations. Also provide a dedicated Family Room (ideally located close to the Chambers) for children of Members. (Recommendation 22)
- The *Report of the Forum on Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament* focused on the Oireachtas only, but its recommendations should also inform the development of family-friendly and inclusive measures across the political system.
 - For example, section 18 4(a) of the *2001 Local Government Act* states: “A person shall be deemed to have resigned from membership of a local authority where the person is absent from attendance at any meeting of the authority for a continuous period of 6 consecutive months” except in cases of “illness or in good faith for another reason”. Some councillors who have become parents while serving in local office, recall having to apply for sick leave to cover the associated period of leave and speak of having to return to their councillor duties and representative role, much earlier than leave periods available to employees. The wording of the *2001 Local Government Act* should be amended to explicitly state provision of leave in cases of maternity leave, paternity leave, adoptive leave, parent’s leave and force majeure leave².
 - A formal pairing system and a facility similar to that provided by the *Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Secretarial Facilities) Regulations 2021*, should be extended to public representatives at all levels, whereby a public representative is entitled to additional secretarial assistance during a period of maternity leave. Consideration should be given to extending this facility to cover other specified forms of leave.

Addressing online abuse of public representatives

- Recommendation 24 of the [Report of the Forum on Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament](#) proposes that there is provision of appropriate personal security for Members and their staff. Establish dedicated supports for Members and their staff facing online abuse and harassment – technical as well as mental health supports. Additional supports to be made available for newly elected Members.
- In her summary of recommendations of organisations including the UN, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the EU, the Council of Europe and the Organisation of American States, Verge (2022: 98-100) highlights that all have recommended “introducing legislation on violence against women in politics or incorporating specific provisions into existing laws on eliminating violence against women, including criminalisation and prosecution of online violence”.
- In her research examining legislative measures to address violence against women in politics, Tània Verge, Professor at the Department of Political and Social Sciences, Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), Barcelona and Minister for Equality and Feminisms of the Catalan Government, observes that just a handful of parliaments worldwide have adopted legislation combatting violence against women in politics (VaWiP) – Bolivia, El Salvador, Argentina, Paraguay, Tunisia, Mexico and the Catalan Parliament. Verge observes (2022: 101) that “legal provisions for violence against women in politics do not exist” in most countries as “elected representatives, in contrast

¹ The *Thirty-Ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Remote Parliamentary Voting) Bill 2020* has completed second-stage in Dáil Éireann. It proposes a constitutional referendum to enable provision is made for remote and proxy voting.

² The *Local Government (Maternity and Family Leave for Elected Members) Bill 2021*, which is currently at second-stage before Dáil Éireann, proposes to change the *2001 Local Government Act* to accommodate these forms of leave.

with parliamentary administrative staff, are not covered by anti-discrimination legislation as they are not considered regular employees—the exceptions in Europe are Denmark and Greece”.

- A law passed by the Catalan Parliament in December 2020 defines VaWiP as “the gender-based violence that occurs in spaces of public and political life, such as political institutions and public administrations, political parties, the mass media or social media” (Verge, 2021: 459). The law applies an intersectional lens that recognises women’s diversity; sets out specific mandates on political institutions, public administration and political parties in addressing incidents of VaWiP; and among a range of actions, includes provision of counselling and supports to victims, as well as reparation measures (Verge, 2021: 459 – 460).
- The consequences of online abuse are underlined by research of Swedish MPs by Erikson *et al* (2021: 1) who find that “men exposed to high levels of online abuse seem slightly more inclined to leave politics whereas women report that they feel that their personal agency is circumscribed to a greater extent”.

4. Further suggestions to advance women in politics

Applying an intersectional lens

- The conditions that shape women’s access into politics are gendered, but research finds this is intensified by demographics including socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, ableness, migrant status, sexuality and age. An intersectional lens must be applied to recognise women’s diversity.
- The *Report of the Forum on Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament* recommended political parties to set targets for ethnic minority women within political parties’ gender quotas (Recommendation 38).
- The [Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on Travellers Towards a More Equitable Ireland Post-Recognition](#), published in January 2020, called for the setting of “targets for Traveller women in mainstream gender quotas, party political gender quotas and State agency quotas” (p. 10).
- Worldwide, Karen Bird (2014) identifies three families of ethnic quota schemes: reserved seats; systems that incorporate designated ethnic groups within larger pan-ethnic parties; and creation of special electoral districts for ethnic interests.
- In the first “worldwide analysis of the effects of gender and minority quotas on minority women’s representation in national legislatures” (p.604) Melanie Hughes (2011: 616) found “that without the assistance of quotas, minority women’s representation is abysmally low. Their odds of election are 1 in 14 compared to majority men, 1 in 2 compared to minority men, and 1 in 3 compared to majority women. But, with the assistance of quotas, some or all of these odds improve”.
- Hughes (ibid) found that “as standalone policies, gender and minority quotas tend to benefit primarily majority women and minority men...The picture changes substantially, however, when these policies combine. The few countries with tandem quotas have dramatically higher levels of minority women’s legislative representation than any other institutional configuration of quotas”.
- Hughes (2011: 618) advises that tandem or paired quotas ‘nest’ gender and minority quotas, requiring selection procedures to look at gender and minority status at the same time and include women “among minorities, or that minorities be included among women”.
- Research by Belschner and Garcia de Paredes (2021: 15), examining the use of paired youth and gender quotas, substantiate Hughes 2011 findings, showing that “paired quotas are indeed most useful to support doubly under-represented groups if they are nested” but caution that “parties tend to enact quotas in a manner that will protect majoritarian groups in parliament”. Research by Mona Lena Krook (2016) on gender quotas has highlighted the multiple ways in which political parties and political actors act to resist and undermine the transformative effects of gender quotas.
- The *Report of the Forum on Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament* recommended that legislative action on ethnic minority representation must be a consultative process involving representative groups.

A role for education, from early childhood forwards

- Evidence from a British Household Panel Survey shows that “at age 15, there is already a substantial gender gap of 20 percentage points in the probability of respondents reporting being politically interested, pointing to gendered socialisation processes as the key explanation for such differences” (Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores 2020: 89). Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores find that the gender gap widens thereafter. It points to a need for age-appropriate citizenship and political education from an early age that encourages, promotes and normalises gender equality in politics.
- While Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores’ research do not refer to Ireland, their findings are salutary. Cormac Harris and Alan O’Sullivan, 6th year students at Coláiste Choilm, Ballincollig, Cork, won the 2020 BT Young Scientist and top prize at the 2021 European Union Contest for Young Scientists for their research on gender bias and stereotypes about STEM among girls and boys, aged 5-7. They also examined mechanisms to combat gender bias and stereotypes. This research on combatting gender biases could be very instructive for the area of citizenship and political education.

State financing

- In addition to reporting on the extent of state funding to promote women and youth within qualifying political parties, the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO) could give expand the reporting categories to request political parties to report on the amount of state funding to promote equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).
- In their recent policy document [Enabling participation: supporting the involvement of disabled people in political parties](#), the Independent Living Movement Ireland called for “a specific fund needs 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” (p.2). 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.
- Could an element of the state funding of political parties be tied to the proportion of women party members?
- Could campaign financing regulations be amended to facilitate allowance for expenditure in relation to care responsibilities?

Political parties

- Promote diversity and inclusion in political party membership, candidature and policy initiatives.
- Conduct and publish annual gender, diversity and inclusion audits of party membership and election candidates. This may be a role for SIPO or the planned Electoral Commission.
- Promote gender equality, diversity and inclusion across all party roles and positions.
- Provide equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) training for all party members and staff
- Women for Election’s [More Women – Changing the Face of Politics Report](#) called for the provision of feedback to interviewees in the candidate selection process and after election campaigns are completed, political parties should provide post-election debriefs for all candidates, particularly unsuccessful candidates.

Political institutions

- Provide EDI training for all public representatives and staff.

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