

## **Candidate Gender Quota for Local Elections Briefing paper**

### **Introduction**

Founded in 1973, the National Women's Council (NWC) is the leading national women's membership organisation. We represent and derive our mandate from our membership, which includes over 190 groups and organisations from a diversity of backgrounds, sectors and locations across Ireland. We also have a growing number of individual members who support the campaign for women's equality in Ireland. Our mission is to lead and to be a catalyst for change in the achievement of equality for women. Our vision is of an Ireland and of a world where women can achieve their full potential and there is full equality for women.

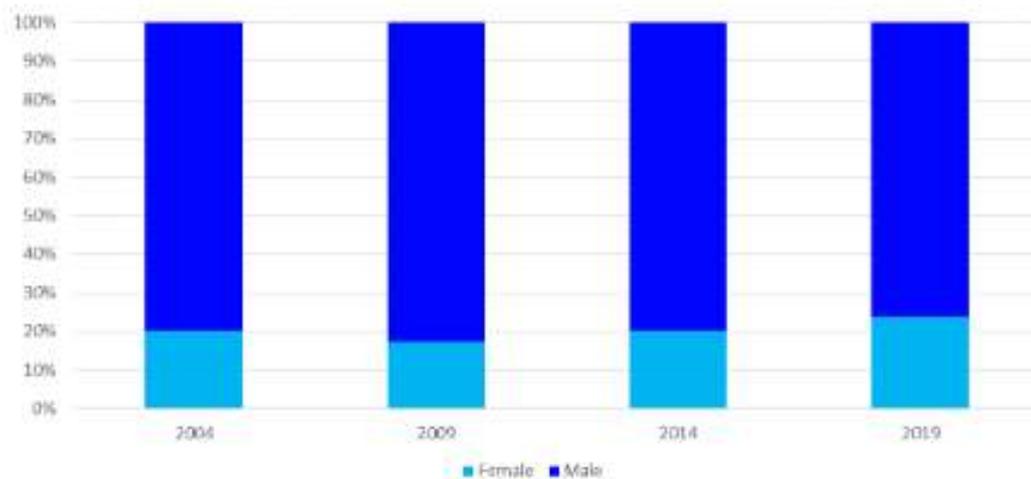
The numbers of women in politics matter. In a representative democracy, it matters who represents us, and what they represent. Women's representation is essential to the quality of our democratic processes. This is because principles of justice and equality dictate that a representative government should constitute a microcosm of the larger society in terms of gender, class, age, minorities and so on. The under representation of any of these groups weakens democracy as their interests are at risk of being marginalised or ignored. Women make up the largest group who are currently under represented. Alongside other measures, a proven successful mechanism for increasing representation is the implementation of quotas.

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## Context

Like national politics, local government in the Republic of Ireland has historically been male-dominated and has some distance to travel before a critical mass of women councillors is achieved nationally. Research has made the link between low levels of women's representation in decision-making and poor outcomes for women's interests.<sup>1</sup> Local government provides essential services such as housing, roads, libraries, planning, environment and economic development as well as being a key part of the functioning of our democratic system. With its proximity to women's lives, local government is uniquely positioned to strengthen women's participation in decision making and improve the representation of their interests. Local political experience is also a key route to national office for women, significantly more so than for men.<sup>2</sup> Over 80% of women TDs have local government experience.

Female representation in Local Government, 2004 to 2019



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Diversity in local representation matters. It is often those who are furthest away from power - Traveller and Roma women, working class women, disabled women, migrant women and carers and women in rural communities – who experience the impact of policy making the most. These groups of women face additional barriers in achieving full and equal participation in public and political life. Targets are required to increase the representation of women from these marginalised groups. It is not enough for political parties and government initiatives to bring in quotas with just gender parity in mind. Instead, they need to engage with organisations representing a diversity of

<sup>1</sup> Holman, M. (2017). Women in Local Government: What We Know and Where We Go from Here. *State and Local Government Review*, 49(4), 285–296

<sup>2</sup> Buckley, B. et al (2015). Is Local Office a Springboard for Women to Dáil Éireann? *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 36:3, 311-335

<sup>3</sup> <https://irelandsdg.geohive.ie/pages/goal5>

women to make sure that an articulation of all interests and perspectives informs decision making.<sup>4</sup>

People in Ireland acknowledge and recognise that work is needed to address gender inequality in politics. A recent Eurobarometer survey found that 72% of people in Ireland think there should be more women in political decision-making roles and 79% are in favour of legal measures to ensure gender equality in politics.<sup>5</sup>

The Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality recently presented their comprehensive recommendations covering so many key areas for women and women's equality, the citizens have outlined a clear pathway to achieve gender equality in Ireland. They have called for the Government to act promptly and decisively. The Citizens have made a clear statement that women's low representation in all sectors of society needs to change and they don't want soft measures, they want quotas. 87.6% of the citizens voted in favour of extending the gender quota for party candidates at general elections to local elections, elections to the Seanad and European Parliament elections by the end of 2022.<sup>6</sup>

## Quotas

The Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 introduced gender quotas into the Irish electoral system. The Act provides that parties who do not put forward 30% female candidates in a general election, will have their state funding cut by half. The 30% gender quota proved to be successful in the 2016 Dáil elections, with the number of women elected rising from 16% in 2011 to 22% in 2016.<sup>7</sup> Well-designed punitive monetary sanctions were highly effective in encouraging parties to comply fully.<sup>8</sup> With little improvement in the recent General Election 2020, parties will have to work harder to meet the 40% quota in 2023. Fundamental change must come from political parties. At local level, we need to see this replicated, with strong commitments rooted in substantive laws, and sanctions where necessary

Quotas are about giving voters more choice on the ballot, not less. We know that they work at the national level, and as such, they now have broad political support. A critical mass of 40% is needed to have impact, change outcomes for women and create a positive chain reaction. And of course, we should not stop there. As women make up over 50% of the population, this level of parity

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<sup>4</sup> Immigrant Council of Ireland (2020). Strength in Diversity the Experience of Migrant Candidates in the 2019 Local Election

<sup>5</sup> European Commission (2017). Eurobarometer on Gender Equality. [https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/79-per-cent-of-Irish-people-in-favour-of-legal-measures-to-ensure-gender-parity-in-politics\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/79-per-cent-of-Irish-people-in-favour-of-legal-measures-to-ensure-gender-parity-in-politics_en)

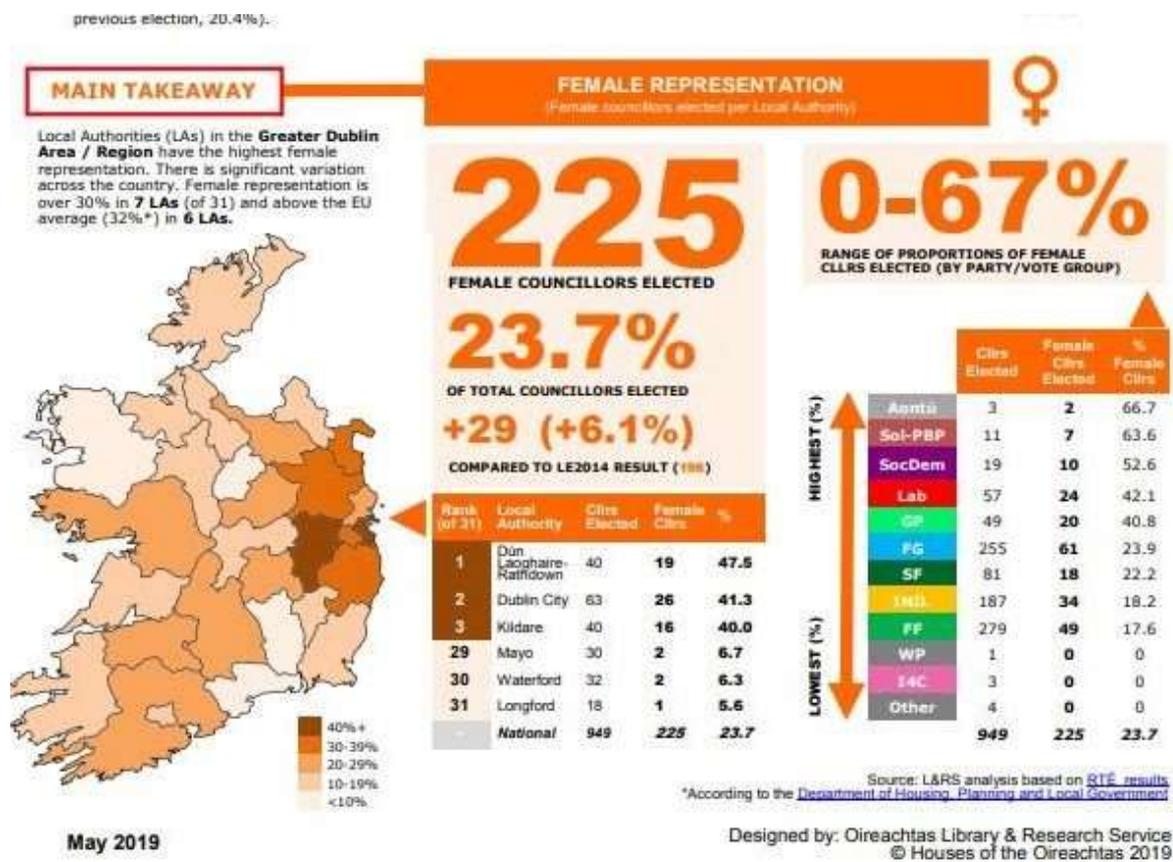
<sup>6</sup> <http://citizensassembly.ie/en/about-the-citizens-assembly/report-of-the-citizens-assembly-on-gender-equality.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/03/16/the-2016-irish-election-demonstrated-how-gender-quotas-can-shift-the-balance-on-female-representation/>

<sup>8</sup> McGing Claire(2018) Electoral Quotas and Womens Rights

must be reflected at the tables of power where important decisions affecting our lives are being made.

## Local Elections 2019



In the 2019 local elections, a record number of 566 women candidates stood, compared with 440 women in 2014. Among these women, we saw greater diversity than ever before, something which is to be welcomed and supported. While more women ran, they still only brought the overall percentage of women candidates to 29%, with strong differences between urban and rural areas. Significantly, the two largest parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, failed to run 30% women as candidates. Only 24% (226) of those elected to local councils were women, compared to an EU average of 32% for local/municipal councils.<sup>9</sup> At least 69 co-options have occurred since the 2019 local elections

<sup>9</sup> European Parliament (2019). Women in local and regional government. European Parliamentary Research Service

and women have filled 37 of these vacancies (56%). These changes have brought the number of women local office-holders up to 241 or 25% of all councillors.<sup>10</sup> Only ten out of thirty-one local authorities have achieved a critical mass of 30% women councillors.

Substantial geographic differences remain, with an almost 50-50 representation on Dun Laoghaire- Rathdown County Council, 40% in Kildare and Dublin City Council. Only one woman elected as a Councillor in Longford. Two now, following the historical co-option of Uruemu Adejinmi. There is only one women councillor now in Offaly after the Seanad elections. There are 23 electoral areas with no women representatives, the majority of which are in rural areas. Nearly four out of ten (38.8%) seats were held by women in Dublin in 2019. Three local authorities have less than 10% of its seats held by women, in Waterford it is 6%. The need for stronger action, broader than incentives<sup>11</sup>, in the form of legislative sanctions from the Government is necessary. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission have deemed these incentives inadequate.<sup>12</sup> At the current pace of change, it would take over a decade to reach a critical mass of women on local councils, a fast track approach is required urgently.

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## How change can be achieved?

With the establishment of the long promised Electoral Commission<sup>14</sup> there will be a body capable of overseeing matters such as quotas, and it may prove easier to introduce quotas for local elections in this way. What is required is

<sup>10</sup> See Her Elected 2020 <https://www.seeherelected.ie/she-speaks-about-vacant-council-seats/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/voting/local-elections/ministers-murphy-and-phelan-announce-new-measures-promote>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/03/IHREC-Submission-to-the-Citizens-Assembly-on-Gender-Equality-March-2020\\_fin.pdf](https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/03/IHREC-Submission-to-the-Citizens-Assembly-on-Gender-Equality-March-2020_fin.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> [https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR\\_Study\\_Women\\_in\\_politics\\_EN.pdf](https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_Study_Women_in_politics_EN.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/voting/electoral-commission/electoral-commission-0>  
<https://www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/voting/electoral-commission/government-approval-establishment-electoral-commission>

the implementation of legislation with sanctions. To ensure their effectiveness, enforcement mechanisms must be introduced.

### Option 1

An amendment of the 1997 Electoral Act could require that parties spend a certain proportion of their State funding on women's internal involvement. Political parties currently must annually declare how much they've spent on women's participation to the Standards in Political Office (SIPO) (it tends to be a very low proportion of overall funding), but are not obliged to spend anything under this heading.<sup>15</sup> Such a reform would encourage more focus on training/mentoring/supporting women and may also, more organically, support women's local representation.

### Option 2

Any party in receipt of state funding under the Electoral Act would get supplementary funding (say 10-15%) if they ran 40% more women candidates than in the previous local election. It would have the benefit of (a) removing independents as a problem, (offering state funding to women to run as independents to counter balance the social networks and division of care work that naturally lend an advantage to men running as independents) (b) is not be applicable to parties who only run at local level (e.g. a campaign to save a local hospital) and thus would not disadvantage them - although there would be no way to tie quotas to them, but these groupings are rare, and (c) does not require the restructuring party funding rules, e.g. 60:40 model

### Option 3

Amending the Electoral Act 1997, Art 17 Sec 3, to allocate state funding to qualified parties based on their first preference vote at the preceding general election and the preceding local election (e.g. 60-40 split). This would allow for a minimum 40% gender quota for the 2024 Local Elections.

### Option 4

Tying candidate selection to party registration would underline that their purpose is to remedy the hindrances that women face when they decide to enter the world of politics. The experience of women is vital to a healthy political life and democracy. For this reason, quotas contribute to the democratisation of politics and also make the nomination or selection process more transparent.

## **Case Studies**

We know that 51 countries in the world have some sort of legislative quota for local government. The introduction of gender quotas in local elections has seen some success internationally. In a recent study of 41 countries, fourteen

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.sipo.ie/reports-and-publications/state-financing/expenditure-of-exchequer/Exchequer-Funding-of-Political-Parties-2018.pdf>

introduced mandatory quotas at the local level. These countries have more women elected at the local level (32% versus 28% in countries with no quotas) but, more importantly, have witnessed greater progression on average (+9% compared to +4%).<sup>16</sup>

- Greece required one third of candidates to be women and if parties fail to put forward this number, the party will not be allowed to contest the elections nationally
- Italy have a quota in place for local regions – requiring parties to run at least 50% women in 12 out of 20 regions.
- Poland requires 35% women candidates from parties.
- Croatia operates financial incentives in order to make the political parties nominate more women<sup>17</sup>
- At the Belgian level, two regions (the Brussels-Capital Region and the Walloon Region) have recently reinforced the obligation of women to be represented on the electoral lists presented by political parties in the context of municipal elections. In these two regions, at the local elections in 2018, the lists will have to be composed of the same number of women and men, and women and men will have to be placed alternately on the entire list. As a reminder, the laws and decrees on parity impose since the early 2000s that the electoral lists are composed of as many women as men. These laws, which apply to all levels of power, also provide for the alternation of men and women in the first two places of the electoral lists.<sup>18</sup>
- Slovenia – Legislated gender quotas for local elections with legal sanctions for non-compliance in the form of the rejection of the party list.<sup>19</sup>
- Most recently, a new system of financial incentives has been adopted in some countries. In Georgia, where a quota bill has repeatedly been turned down, a 2011 provision in the law of political parties stipulates that nominating parties, which include at least 20 per cent candidates of a different sex in the group of every 10 candidates, will receive a 10 percent supplementary funding from the state budget.<sup>20</sup> However, the Georgian system does not seem to have the wanted effect.

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<sup>16</sup> CCME Women in Politics Local and European Trends(2020)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-overview>

<sup>18</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/final\\_version\\_5\\_december.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/final_version_5_december.pdf)

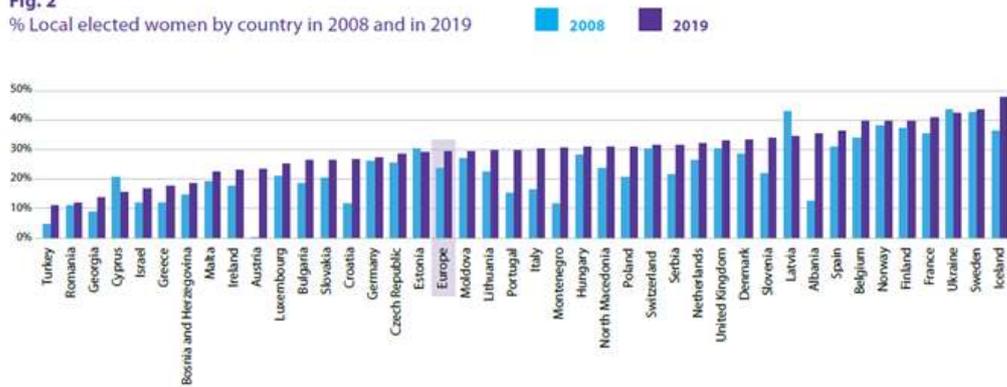
<sup>19</sup> <http://collections.internetmemory.org/haeu/20171122154227/http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender->

[equality/files/exchange\\_of\\_good\\_practice\\_si/summary\\_report\\_si\\_2016\\_final\\_en.pdf](http://collections.internetmemory.org/haeu/20171122154227/http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange_of_good_practice_si/summary_report_si_2016_final_en.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> [www.quotaproject/georgia](http://www.quotaproject/georgia)

Fig. 2

% Local elected women by country in 2008 and in 2019



## NWC recommendations

### To increase women's participation in political and public life

- **Legislate for a quota system to be extended to local elections with an initial quota of 40% women's representation in the Local Elections 2024**
- **Set additional targets to improve diversity including a targeted geographical strategy to address all constituencies**

## Contact

Catherine Lane Policy Officer

E:catherinel@nwci.ie

National Women's Council of Ireland, 100 North King Street, D7  
Tel: 01 6790 100

## Appendix 1 - Supporting Conventions and Instruments

1. Irish Human Rights Equality Commission - The Commission recommends that the Electoral (Amendment) Political Funding Act 2012 be amended to apply to local government elections.<sup>21</sup>
2. The EU Strategy for gender equality has specifically called for improvements in the balance between women and men at all levels of politics. The Commission calls on all Member states to “develop and implement strategies to increase the number of women in decision making positions in politics and policy-making.”<sup>22</sup>
3. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2017 report<sup>23</sup> recommended “that the State party increase the use of temporary special measures, including statutory quotas, in all areas covered by the Convention in which women are underrepresented, such as in local government elections”
4. The National Strategy for Women and Girls has made a commitment to greater female participation in politics, specifically at local level.
5. As part of the Integration Strategy, migrants are encouraged to run for local office themselves and or encourage/support community members to do so.
6. Specific measures are to be put in place to improve the participation of Traveller and Roma women in political and public life as part of the Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/03/IHREC-Submission-to-the-Citizens-Assembly-on-Gender-Equality-March-2020\\_fin.pdf](https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/03/IHREC-Submission-to-the-Citizens-Assembly-on-Gender-Equality-March-2020_fin.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid\\_development\\_cooperation\\_fundamental\\_rights/gender-equality-strategy-2020-2025\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/gender-equality-strategy-2020-2025_en.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fIRL%2fCO%2f6-7&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fIRL%2fCO%2f6-7&Lang=en)

7. Womens Parliamentary Caucus Constitution – “As part of a more gender equal society, the vision of the Women’s Caucus is an Ireland where there is equal representation of women and men in the Oireachtas and on city and county councils.”<sup>24</sup>
8. Fianna Fail General Elections Manifesto – “*While the gender quota requirements introduced by the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 is very much welcome, Fianna Fáil is committed to bringing forward legislation to ensure that gender quotas are also introduced for local elections.*”
9. Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls<sup>25</sup>

## 5.5

Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

### 5.5.1

Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments

10. Recommendations from the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality on Gender Quotas, politics & public life

By the end of 2022:

- (a) 87.6% voted to extend the gender quota for party candidates at general elections to local elections, elections to the Seanad and European Parliament elections and review every 5 years.
- (b) 75.3% voted in favour of increasing penalties for parties that do not meet the statutory gender quotas.
- (c) 83.1% voted in favour of increasing the 30% threshold to 40% for women (and 40% for men) for all elections.

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<sup>24</sup> [https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/communications/other/2018/2018-07-12\\_constitution-of-the-irish-women-s-parliamentary-caucus\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/communications/other/2018/2018-07-12_constitution-of-the-irish-women-s-parliamentary-caucus_en.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> <https://irelandsdg.geohive.ie/pages/goal5>