



Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality

Short Paper¹

Women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in the workplace, politics and public life

Introduction

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (the Commission) was established in 2014 to promote and protect human rights and equality in Ireland.² Achieving equality between women and men in all its dimensions is central to this mandate. An example of this, is that it is a statutory requirement that the Commission membership be gender balanced.³

The Commission carried out a nationwide consultation with diverse groups of women to inform its report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 2017.⁴ The consultation confirmed that women in leadership is a key issue for women in Ireland. In saying this, the Commission recognises that women are not a homogenous group; many groups of women experience greater barriers to achieving gender equality that need tailored actions.

Key Recommendations

In highlighting these recommendations, the Commission would also like to refer members of the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality to the full set of recommendations in its submission.

- **Women in Politics⁵**

The Commission welcomes the focus that the Women's Caucus in the Oireachtas is placing on gender equality there, and the fact that more women than ever put themselves forward as candidates in the 2020 General Election.⁶ However, women account for 36 of the 160 Dáil seats, one seat more than in 2016. The figures are similar for the 2019 local elections.⁷ Research shows that local government experience is more important for women than men in progressing their political careers. The increased number of candidates at the 2020 General Election can be linked to the introduction of gender quotas in General Elections.

The Commission recommends that:

- **Gender quotas should also apply to local government elections and that the Government monitor political party gender recruitment practices.**
- **Government support tailored actions including training and mentoring for women who face the greatest barriers to participation in politics including: Traveller women, women with disabilities, migrant women, women in poverty and women in rural areas.**

¹ This is a summary of selected points from [the IHREC's full submission to the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality](#) located on Citizen's Assembly website.

² See founding legislation [Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014](#).

³ [IHREC Act 2014](#): (Section 12) Membership of the Commission: (ii) Of the members of the Commission, not less than 6 of them shall be men and not less than 6 of them shall be women, and in a case where there are 14 or more members, not less than 7 of them shall be men and not less than 7 of them shall be women.

⁴ [Overview of IHREC Report to CEDAW](#) See pages 6-7.

⁵ For full text see section 3 of the IHREC Submission to the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality, March 2020

⁶ 160 of the 516 candidates were women (31 per cent)

⁷ 2019, women accounted for less than one third (29%) of all local candidates, less than a quarter (23.9) of those elected



- **Women's Leadership in Business⁸**

There is a significant gender gap in the leadership of businesses in Ireland. One in nine CEOs of large enterprises is a woman,⁹ and the same data shows that women make up under 20 per cent of board membership, with some sectors worse than others.

The Commission recommends that a system of gender quotas for company board membership, with appropriate scaling to the size and revenue of the business, be developed and placed on a statutory footing.

- **Women in the civil service, higher education and on state boards¹⁰**

While welcoming gender equality advances in the civil service, the Commission would like to see further action to improve gender distribution amongst the most senior grades. Women constitute 34 per cent of Assistant Secretary and above¹¹. Much greater action is required in higher education to advance gender equality as currently, there are no female university Presidents/Provosts, and only 24 per cent of Professorships are held by women.¹²

The Government reaching its target of 40 per cent gender balance in July 2018 in relation to average board membership is an important milestone, and the target continues to be pursued in respect of all individual boards.

The Commission recommends that the State place gender balance on State Boards on a statutory footing like the Commission.

- **Women in Sport**

An issue raised by many women in our national consultation on CEDAW, mentioned earlier, was equal opportunities for women's leadership in sport. The Commission welcomes the publication of the *National Sports Policy 2018-2027* in July 2018, which aims to increase participation, with a specific focus on women and girls, and which commits to financing 'increasing participation in sport throughout the population'.¹³

The Commission recommends that sporting bodies in receipt of State funding be required to have gender balance on their boards and promote women's participation and leadership; and that a Governmental national action plan be developed to ensure equal representation of women's sport in the media.

⁸ See section 3 of the IHREC Submission to the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality, March 2020

⁹ CSO (23 May 2019) [Statistical Release: Gender balance in business survey](#). Men accounting for 83 per cent of all board membership in the Industry sector and 92 per cent in the construction sector.

¹⁰ See section 3 of the IHREC Submission to the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality, March 2020

¹¹ See the Department of Justice and Equality's *Report of the Comprehensive National-level Review: Twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (June 2019). Available [here](#) (p.7)

¹² Higher Education Authority (2018), [Higher Educational Staff Profiles by Gender](#).

¹³ The Commission acknowledges the private sector-backed campaign, 20x20, which aspires to raise media coverage, attendance and participation across all women's sports by 20 per cent by 2020. The Commission also welcomes improvement in 2019 in terms of coverage of women's sport, including RTÉ and TG4's shared coverage of the FIFA Women's World Cup, but notes that parity between men and women's sport on national media platforms is far from being achieved



Combatting Discrimination and Promoting Family Friendly Working¹⁴

Finally, gender inequality in care work in Ireland is close to the most pronounced in the European Union.¹⁵ Over half of those carrying out unpaid care work are juggling these responsibilities with employment, and women are significantly overrepresented amongst employees who avail of reduced hours in order to facilitate care and unpaid work, contributing to gender inequality in the labour market and directly impact on their opportunities for progression in their careers and the take up of leadership roles.

The Commission recommends effective and transformative policy in Ireland to address the gendered division of care work.

The Commission recommends that the State modernize the legislative and policy framework for the promotion of family-friendly measures in the workplace.

Conclusion

The Commission's would like to thank the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality for considering this short report and encourage members of the Citizens Assembly to read our full submission.

¹⁴ See section 4 of the IHREC Submission to the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality, March 2020

¹⁵ IHREC/ESRI (2019) [Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland](#). This report was published as part of the Commission's Research Programme on Human Rights and Equality with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).



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an Duine agus Comhionannas**
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission