

# IRISH POLITICS JOBS FOR THE BOYS!

**Recommendations on increasing the number of women in decision-making**

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## PREFACE

Whether elected or appointed, the overwhelming number of those in positions of decision-making in Ireland are male. With women making up 50 per cent of the Irish population, the figures in this research show an evident deep and systematic inequality. They are proof of a failure by successive Governments to end discrimination against women in political and decision-making positions. It is little wonder that for many girls and women a career in politics or public life is still seen as 'not for us', rather as 'jobs for the boys'.

This research is significant because it clearly demonstrates that systematically in elected and selected posts, at all levels from local to European, Irish women are deeply disadvantaged politically. Awareness of this reality is what encouraged NWCI to carry out this research and to commission a photographic display that shows the absence of women in decision-making in Ireland.

The Irish Government has made commitments to change and improve the position of women in decision-making by signing up to the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (1979). Equality between women and men in all spheres is one of the fundamental principles of the EU – yet Ireland's record on national parliamentary elections shows that the number of women elected is closer to the figures from sub-Saharan states, than those of our northern European counterparts. The complete absence of women from some boards and committees gives Ireland a profile of decision-making structures more akin to a fundamentalist Taliban regime than to a European democracy.

Progress on parity democracy for women in Ireland is simply not happening. Proactive measures must now be taken to deliver parity participation for women in all decision-making positions. The face of Irish political life will change and those who benefit from the present system will resist such change. Those committed to genuine equality must now offer support and plan in partnership with women for the development of equality in decision-making between women and men.

This research is intended to kick-start a debate on parity democracy. It clearly sets out the statistics and the percentages of under-representation. It brings the facts to public attention. It names and shames the committees and bodies who ignore their equality obligations.

NWCI believes that Government is obliged to deliver on its equality commitments by raising awareness about the benefits and importance of gender equality in public life and decision-making bodies. Women want and have a right to more gender balanced public representation. They want the barriers to their participation and selection to be removed – whether these barriers are structural (lack of childcare, times of meetings) or attitudinal. The Government, political parties and public bodies must examine their own structures and see how they can proactively increase the numbers of women candidates and women seat/post holders.

A proactive measure, documented in this research, where a Monitoring Committee successfully brought about a more balanced gender composition amongst its membership, is convincing evidence that change can happen when it is a stated pre-requisite and the committee itself is committed to its implementation.

The commitment to gender balance in decision-making will form part of the European Commission's 2003 activities (*Diamantopoulou, 2002 Annual Report*). The NWCI is calling on Government, political parties and public bodies to move now to show their genuine commitment to ending discrimination against women in this field so that the forthcoming local and European elections will show a positive change for women. We hope that, if this action is taken now, it will in turn produce more positive outcomes for women in the next General election. We also demand the introduction of mechanisms, supported by legislation where necessary, for 60:40 gender balance for nominations to State boards.

For our part, NWCI will continue to monitor women's position in society. If resourced adequately, we will develop a women's talent bank to support Government and public bodies in finding the numerous women of skill who are available for public office. We will also continue to support women at local level to move into positions of leadership and decision-making throughout Ireland. We are also committed to seeing a diversity amongst the women elected and selected to decision-making positions - women from all and no political backgrounds, women from every social class, ethnic background, ability, sexual orientation, family status, religion and age.

I want to thank the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Gender Equality Unit for their support – in particular Sylva Langford and Anne Marie McGauran for their vision and enthusiasm about this project. I would also like to thank Dr Yvonne Galligan for her involvement in our series of events on this theme in 2002. Finally, I want to thank the staff of NWCI for their professionalism and teamwork in producing this important research for our national conference on women in decision-making.

**Gráinne Healy**

*Chairwoman, National Women's Council of Ireland*

*November 2002*

## FOREWORD

This report from the National Women's Council of Ireland gives us a comprehensive picture of women and men in elected and appointed office in Ireland. Drawing on a wide range of sources, it uses hard facts to show how few women share in decision-making in Ireland today. The stark picture presented in this report should be of serious concern to us. Women's presence in the Dáil has risen by only 1 per cent in ten years; 10 counties do not have a woman TD; there was no change in women's modest presence on local councils during the last decade; and women have only a marginal hold on many other public and regional bodies. One of the international measures of the status of women in society is the presence of women in decision-making. The disturbing statistics in this report expose the deep and persistent inequality between women and men in Irish society. The report also raises fundamental questions about the representative nature of decision-making in this country. Effective initiatives have been adopted in many other countries to improve women's presence in elected and appointed office, some of which are discussed in this report. These strategies were preceded by extensive discussions in parliament and society on the importance and value of women and men being equally involved in making political and public decisions. More fundamentally, the design of such gender-inclusive measures sprang from a recognition that a democracy should be representative and that all-male forums could not, and ought not, make decisions for a society. In politics and society, we have not even begun to address this debate, yet this report brings home how badly this public discussion is needed.

At an individual level, many women are very aware of their powerlessness. Many women see that nothing will change for them unless they have a voice where decisions are made. We now need a strong, lively and attractive awareness campaign, sponsored by government, to stimulate a public debate on the importance of gender equality in public life. And, given that political parties are now heavily dependent on taxpayers' funds, we also need parties to take a close look at the ways in which they encourage women to play a full part in political life. Parties should clearly demonstrate what proportion of their public funding they allocate to women's empowerment and, if needed, they should be required to devote a specified amount to the development of women's decision-making expertise. An integral part of such a strategy would require parties to set and achieve targets for electing women to assemblies at local, regional, national and European level. Finally, we need to consider a gender equality law for political and public life that would bring women in from the margins to the centre of power.

Ultimately, these various strategies aim to address the persistent inequalities between women and men in political and public life. The solving of this issue requires very little in the way of resources. But it requires one essential ingredient – political will. Without that, we will not see an improvement in the representation of women in political life. Yet, until women and men share power as equals, democracy in this country will remain an unfinished business.

**Dr Yvonne Galligan**

*Director, Centre for the Advancement of Women in Politics, Queen's University, Belfast.*

## **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1. SUMMARY**

This research has been commissioned by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to:

- examine the current level of women's participation:
  - in national politics;
  - in local politics;
  - on regional authorities;
  - on State boards.
- examine the representation of women on National Development Plan Monitoring Committees;
- outline barriers to women's participation on decision-making bodies;
- outline the reasons why the Government and political parties should take action to reverse the under-representation of women;
- identify EU models of good practice.

This research argues that the current electoral system plays an important role in limiting the number of women elected to the Dáil. The research outlines successful strategies used in France, Sweden and Denmark to increase the number of women elected to national politics. It recommends that the Government and political parties should agree a proactive strategy to increase the percentage of women elected to the Dáil and to bring about equal representation of women and men in the Oireachtas. It also urges the Government to make the 40:60 gender balance for nominations to State boards a statutory obligation.

### **2. KEY FINDINGS**

- The percentage of women elected to the Dáil has risen by only 1 per cent, to 13 per cent, over the past 10 years.
- At this rate, it will take 370 years for the percentage of women in the Dáil to reach 50 per cent.
- There are 22 women currently serving as TDs in the Dáil, 13 from Leinster, 5 from Munster, 2 from Ulster and 2 from Connaught. 10 counties do not have any women TDs.
- Almost 45 per cent of serving women TDs come from politically active families.
- Women not belonging to politically active families form only 7 per cent of the current Dáil.
- The number of women appointed to the Cabinet decreased by 7 per cent for the current Government, while the number of women appointed as Ministers of State declined by a full 11 per cent.
- The percentage of women elected as local councillors remained unchanged at 15 per cent in the 1991 and 1999 local elections.
- The percentage of women appointed to State boards has rarely reached 40 per cent, although this has been an official guideline since 1991.
- These findings reflect women's exclusion from other decision-making functions – women account for only 3 per cent of managing directors, 9 per cent of secretaries-general in the civil service and 7 per cent of high court judges.
- EU models show how the under-representation of women can be changed through positive action. Similarly, a proactive strategy by a Government Department to ensure greater gender balance on a National Development Plan Monitoring Committee increased the percentage of female participation by 11 per cent in two years.

### **3: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Government must:

- Introduce legislation into the Oireachtas to make 50 per cent of funding for political parties dependent on maintaining a 40:60 gender balance among candidates selected for general and local elections, in order to achieve parity democracy (equal representation of women and men).
- Introduce quotas to require each political party to have an equal representation of women and men in the following areas:
  - as candidates for general elections;
  - as candidates for local elections;
  - within party executives.
- Resource and support the women's community sector to support greater participation by women in national and local politics.
- Establish a national support structure:

- to support the participation of women within the policy-making system;
- to promote greater participation by women in decision-making structures including on State boards, health boards, regional authorities, County Enterprise Boards and County Development Boards and
- to support training programmes that enhance women's capacity to participate in politics.
- Re-establish an Oireachtas committee dedicated solely to women's affairs.
- Change Dáil working practices to a system of shorter daily Dáil sittings but longer parliamentary sessions.
- Make gender balance on State boards a statutory requirement.
- Resource the NWCI to establish a talent-bank of women interested in going forward for national and local politics, for membership of State boards and all local and regional decision-making bodies.

Political parties must:

- Set an immediate target to double their percentage of women candidates elected to local authorities at the next election.
- Set a programme in place to support at least 50 per cent of their existing women councillors who are not currently TDs to run for election at national level.

## SECTION 2: IRISH POLITICS - THE CURRENT SITUATION

### 1. CURRENT LEVEL OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN NATIONAL POLITICS

Women are the world's largest excluded group. Even though they make up half of the adult population, and often contribute more than their share to society, inside and outside the home, they are frequently excluded from positions of power.<sup>i</sup>

#### National Politics: The Current Situation Election 2002 Results

Party	Men	Women	% Women
Fianna Fáil	74	7	9
Fine Gael	29	2	6
Labour	14	7	33
Progressive Democrats	4	4	50
Green Party	6	0	0
Sinn Féin	5	0	0
Others	12	2	14
Total	<b>144</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>13</b>

The outcome of Election 2002 confirms that women remain significantly under-represented in national politics. The percentage of women elected to the Dáil now stands at only 13 per cent. This is an increase of only 1 per cent over the 1997 figure of 12 per cent. That figure remained unchanged between the 1992 and 1997 elections.<sup>ii</sup> As a result, it has taken 10 years for the percentage to increase by 1 per cent. If nothing was done about this, it would take 370 years (10 years for each 1 per cent increase) for the Dáil to have an equal number of female and male TDs.

Ireland ranks 59th out of 120 nations in the world when it comes to women's parliamentary representation.<sup>iii</sup> That puts Ireland lower than the European average (17 per cent), lower than the average for the Americas (16 per cent), lower than the Asian average (16 per cent) and on a par with the average for sub-Saharan Africa (13 per cent).

If the percentage of women TDs has remained largely static over the past decade, the proportion of women in Government has now declined significantly. In the last Fianna Fáil-Progressive Democrat Government (1997-2002), 20 per cent of Cabinet Ministers and 23 per cent of Ministers of State were women. However, the Taoiseach chose to appoint only two women to full Cabinet rank in this Government and another two women to Minister of State positions. As a result, the current percentage of women Cabinet Ministers has declined by **7 per cent**, to 13 per cent, and that of Ministers of State by **11 per cent**, to 12 per cent. This represents a significant reversal of progress forged slowly over decades to ensure that women, as half of the population, would be properly represented at all decision-making tables.

### 2. JUST HOW REPRESENTATIVE ARE OUR WOMEN TDS?

If politicians elected to the Dáil have the responsibility for representing the interests of the people of Ireland, do our sitting TDs represent the diversity of Irish women? An analysis of the 22 women TDs, who were elected in May 2002, indicates that 8 TDs come from Dublin (including Dún Laoghaire), 2 each from Wicklow and Donegal and 1 each from Cork, Mayo, Kerry, Meath, Limerick, Clare, Sligo and Tipperary. In 2 cases – Laois/Offaly and Longford/Roscommon, 1 woman TD has been elected to represent 2 counties.

On a province-wide basis, the distribution of women TDs is as follows:



Leinster:	13 TDs*	Connaught:	2
Munster:	5		
Ulster:	2		

\* Mae Sexton is included in the Leinster figure as she is based in Longford rather than Roscommon.

The majority of women TDs represent large urban areas – Dublin, Cork and Limerick. Even where a woman TD represents a constituency covering both urban and rural areas, her primary political base is located in a town – Liz McManus is based in Bray, for instance, and Beverley Cooper-Flynn in Castlebar.

The questions which arise from this analysis of sitting women TDs are as follows:

- Can the remaining 10 women TDs who have more rural constituencies represent the diversity of rural women?
- Can 2 women TDs represent women’s needs and interests for the whole of Connaught?
- Who represents the interests of women in those 10 counties which do not have women TDs?

Many of the women who have experienced success in national politics come from economically advantaged backgrounds. Most, for instance, have received university-level education. Many have received training in law. Most represent constituencies that are, broadly speaking, economically prosperous. What is even more striking, however, is that almost 45 per cent of them come from politically active families, and existing political networks.

### 3. HOW MANY WOMEN TDS COME FROM POLITICALLY ACTIVE FAMILIES?

Studies reveal that, historically, the first women elected to national parliaments tended to be members of families long active in electoral politics.<sup>iv</sup> An analysis of the 22 current women TDs shows that Ireland has not moved far from this stage as the proportion of female TDs from political families remains very high. Almost 45 per cent of all serving women TDs come from families where male relatives had previous experience as TDs, senators or local councillors. These are Síle de Valera (grandfather: Eamon de Valera), Mary Hanafin (father: Des Hanafin), Mary Upton (brother: Pat Upton), Beverley Cooper-Flynn (father: Pádraig Flynn), Breeda Moynihan-Cronin (father: Michael Moynihan), Mary Coughlan (father: Cathal Coughlan), Mildred Fox (father: Johnny Fox), Olwyn Enright (father: Tom Enright), Cecilia Keaveney (father: Paddy Keaveney) and Mae Sexton (father: Tommy Breen – a local councillor for many years).

The high percentage of successful women candidates from politically active families highlights the value of strong personal and political support. Despite this support, women clearly need to demonstrate considerable talent and skill to maintain successful political careers. However, this percentage confirms how difficult it is for women outside existing political networks to become involved in politics and to have a successful career at national level. If women from politically active families are excluded from a tally of successful women candidates, what is revealed is an extremely worrying picture for women not belonging to such families. Only 7 per cent of the members of the current Dáil are women who did not have access to family-based political networks and, even in their cases, most were politically active for many years before being elected to national office.

### 4. IS THE SITUATION LIKELY TO CHANGE IN THE SHORT-TERM?

Will the situation change in the immediate future? The two places from which TDs are normally drawn are the Seanad and local politics. However, the number of women in the Seanad remains seriously low.

#### Seanad Éireann

Party	Men	Women	% Women
Fianna Fáil	25	5	17
Fine Gael	14	1	7
Labour	3	2	40
Progressive Democrats	3	1	25
Other	1	0	0
Independents	4	1	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>

The low percentage of women in the Seanad means that, without immediate Government action, there will not be enough women senators going forward for election as TDs, to change the percentage of women in the Dáil in the near future.

What about local politics? Could it provide a useful springboard for more women to enter national politics? Most TDs serve their political apprenticeship on local councils. 13 of the 22 women who were elected to the Dáil in 2002 have seats on local authorities. 3 of the new women TDs – Olwyn Enright, Mae Sexton and Máire Hocht – gained vital experience on local councils. 2 women – Kathleen Lynch and Joan Burton – who regained their seats, are also serving local politicians.

If women are still seriously excluded from national politics, is there any possibility that local politics can provide a useful entry-route? Is there a pool of women currently serving on local authorities who could be supported to run in national elections?

### Membership of County Councils: The Current Situation

County	Men	Women	% Women
Carlow	18	3	14
Cavan	22	3	12
Clare	29	3	9
Cork	42	6	12
Donegal	26	3	10
Dún Laoghaire / Rathdown	19	9	32
Fingal	17	7	29
Galway	27	3	10
Kerry	25	2	7
Kildare	19	6	24
Kilkenny	20	6	23
Laois	22	3	12
Leitrim	19	3	14
Limerick	23	5	18
Longford	19	2	9
Louth	23	3	11
Mayo	28	3	10
Meath	26	3	10
Monaghan	16	4	20
North Tipperary	18	3	14
Offaly	16	5	24
Roscommon	24	2	8
Sligo	22	3	12
South Dublin	19	7	27
South Tipperary	25	1	4
Waterford	18	5	22
Westmeath	22	1	4

Wexford	17	3	15
Wicklow	20	4	17

### County Boroughs and Borough Corporations

Corporation	Men	Women	% Women
Cork County Borough	27	4	13
Clonmel	11	1	8
Drogheda	11	1	8
Dublin County Borough	44	8	15
Galway County Borough	12	3	20
Kilkenny	9	3	25
Limerick County Borough	14	3	18
Sligo	10	2	17
Waterford County Borough	12	2	14
Wexford	10	2	17

### Town Councils

Town Council	Men	Women	% Women
Arklow	8	1	11
Athlone	9	0	0
Athy	9	0	0
Ballina	7	2	22
Ballinasloe	7	2	22
Birr	9	0	0
Bray	9	3	25
Buncrana	8	1	11
Bundoran	6	3	33
Carlow	8	1	11
Carrickmacross	6	3	33
Carrick-on-Suir	8	1	11
Cashel	7	1	12
Castlebar	9	0	0
Castleblayney	7	2	22
Cavan	7	2	22
Clonakilty	8	1	11
Clones	7	2	22
Cobh	7	2	22
Dundalk	10	2	17
Dungarvan	7	2	22

Ennis	7	2	22
Enniscorthy	9	0	0
Fermoy	7	1	12
Kells	8	1	11
Killarney	7	2	22
Kilrush	9	0	0
Kinsale	9	0	0
Letterkenny	8	1	11
Listowel	7	2	22
Longford	7	2	22
Macroom	7	2	22
Mallow	8	1	11
Midleton	5	4	44
Monaghan	7	2	22
Naas	8	1	11
Navan	7	2	22
Nenagh	7	2	22
New Ross	8	1	11
Skibbereen	7	2	22
Templemore	7	2	22
Thurles	6	3	33
Tipperary	8	1	11
Tralee	8	4	33
Trim	9	0	0
Tullamore	6	3	33
Westport	7	2	22
Wicklow	9	0	0
Youghal	8	1	11

*\* Information provided by the Department of the Environment and Local Government.*

Unfortunately, as the above tables demonstrate, the situation is little better for women in local politics. The percentage of women elected as local councillors rose to 15 per cent in 1991 but did not improve in the 1999 local elections.<sup>v</sup> As a consequence, the percentage of women councillors has remained static at 15 per cent for a decade. This means that there is only a limited pool of women currently serving as councillors who can be encouraged to run as candidates in the next general election. Government action is needed to encourage more women to enter local politics so that they can then be supported to become candidates at national level.

### **SECTION 3: SITUATION OF WOMEN ON STATE BOARDS, REGIONAL AUTHORITIES AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN MONITORING COMMITTEES**

#### **1. SCARCITY OF WOMEN IN POLITICS – REFLECTS WOMEN’S EXCLUSION FROM DECISION-MAKING MORE GENERALLY**

Recent research on the British political system argues that improvements in the percentage of women in politics are brought about only by years of effort. The low level of female participation in politics is seen to reflect the fact that women are excluded from other decision-making hierarchies such as the judiciary, the police, civil service, the professions and the leadership of industry.<sup>vi</sup> Similarly, in Ireland, the continuing low percentage of women elected to the Dáil reflects women’s broader exclusion from most senior decision-making functions. Statistics from the Government’s draft National Plan for Women confirm that women accounted for only 3 per cent of managing directors in 1998, only 9 per cent of secretaries-general in the civil service and only 7 per cent of high court judges as of 2000.<sup>vii</sup>

As these tables will reveal, women remain excluded from all other regional decision-making structures and from State boards, in spite of Government guidelines recommending that appointments to State boards should observe a balance between women and men. Guidelines were put in place in 1991, to implement the recommendation of the Second Commission on the Status of Women, requiring Ministers and Government Departments to ensure that at least 40 per cent of all nominations to State boards would be women. Ministers have consistently failed to implement these guidelines.

#### **LOCAL BODIES**

##### **Vocational Educational Committees**

<b>V.E.C.</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>% Women</b>
Carlow	11	5	31
Cavan	9	7	44
Clare	15	3	17
Cork City	13	1	7
Cork County	19	4	17
Donegal	17	4	19
Dublin City	12	2	14
Dublin County	9	7	44
Dún Laoghaire	9	4	31
Galway City	6	8	57
Galway County	14	2	12
Kerry	18	2	10
Kildare	14	4	22
Kilkenny	10	9	47
Laois	11	3	21
Leitrim	12	2	14
Limerick City	13	1	7
Limerick County	12	2	14
Longford	11	4	27
Louth	16	2	11

Mayo	17	3	15
Meath	16	5	24
Monaghan	17	5	23
Offaly	14	4	22
Roscommon	12	2	14
Sligo	14	2	12
Tipperary North	14	6	30
Tipperary South	18	4	18
Waterford Borough	12	1	8
Waterford County	11	5	31
Westmeath	12	3	20
Wexford	14	6	30
Wicklow	17	3	15

*\* Information obtained through telephone contact on 25 October 2002.*

#### **City and County Development Boards**

<b>City/County Development Board</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>% Women</b>
Carlow	22	6	27
Cavan	24	3	11
Clare	20	8	29
Cork City	20	6	23
Cork County	32	5	13
Donegal	30	5	14
Dublin City	20	7	26
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	18	8	31
Fingal	21	9	30
Galway City	22	5	18
Galway County	27	4	13
Kerry	31	4	11
Kildare	24	3	11
Kilkenny	24	4	14
Laois	22	5	18
Leitrim	24	4	14
Limerick City	19	6	24
Limerick County	19	6	24
Longford	18	9	33
Louth	17	11	39
Mayo	26	2	7
Meath	24	4	14

Monaghan	20	6	23
North Tipperary	22	3	12
Offaly	24	4	14
Roscommon	21	7	25
Sligo	23	4	15
South Dublin	19	9	32
South Tipperary	22	6	21
Waterford City	22	5	18
Waterford County	25	3	11
Westmeath	24	4	14
Wexford	24	4	14
Wicklow	24	4	14

*\* Information obtained through telephone contact on 23 October 2002*

### City and County Enterprise Boards

City/County Enterprise Board	Men	Women	% Women
Carlow	10	5	33
Cavan	12	2	14
Clare	10	5	33
Cork City	11	3	21
Cork North Enterprise	12	4	25
Donegal	13	3	19
Dublin City	11	3	21
Fingal	8	5	38
Galway County and City	13	2	13
Kerry	10	4	29
Kildare	11	2	15
Kilkenny	10	3	23
Laois	11	3	21
Leitrim	8	4	33
Limerick City	9	5	36
Limerick County	9	6	40
Longford	11	4	27
Louth	11	3	21
Mayo	11	3	21
Meath	11	2	15
Monaghan	10	2	17
Offaly	12	2	14
Roscommon	12	1	8
Sligo	11	3	21
South Cork	11	3	21
South Dublin	9	7	43
Tipperary North	10	4	29
Tipperary South Riding	11	3	21
Waterford City	11	3	21
Waterford County	12	2	14
West Cork	11	4	27
Westmeath	9	4	31
Wexford	14	1	7
Wicklow	10	4	29

\* Information obtained either through telephone contact on 22 October 2002 or from City/County Enterprise Board websites.

### REGIONAL BODIES



## Regional Assemblies

<b>Regional Assembly</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>% Women</b>
Border, Midland and Eastern	26	3	10
Southern and Eastern	34	7	17

*\*Information obtained through telephone contact on 22 October 2002*

## Regional Authorities

Regional Authority	Men	Women	% Women
Border	35	3	8
Dublin	24	6	20
Mid-East	20	1	5
Midland	22	3	12
Mid-West	25	2	7
South-East	31	2	6
South-West	22	2	8
West	21	5	19

*\* Information obtained through telephone contact on 23 October 2002*

## Regional Tourism Authorities

Regional Tourism Authority	Men	Women	% Women
Dublin Tourism	20	5	20
Midlands-East Regional Tourism Authority	19	2	9
North West Regional Tourism Authority	16	3	16
South East Regional Tourism Authority	11	6	35
South West Regional Tourism Authority	12	4	25
Western Regional Tourism Authority	12	4	25

*\* Information obtained through telephone contact on 25 October 2002*

## Health Boards

Health Board	Men	Women	% Women
Eastern Regional Health Authority	38	15	26
East Coast Area Health Board	13	5	28
Northern Area Health Board	14	5	26
South Western Area Health Board	16	7	30
Midland Health Board	24	5	17
Mid-Western Health Board	20	5	20
North-Eastern Health Board	27	3	10
North-Western Health Board	17	3	15
South-Eastern Health Board	24	7	23
Southern Health Board	27	6	18
Western Health Board	23	8	26

*\*Material obtained either from Health Board websites or by telephone contact on 23 October 2002.*

## State Boards and Bodies of Public Interest\*

<b>State Board</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>% Women</b>
Aer Lingus	11	1	8
Aer Rianta	8	1	11
Arts Council	9	8	47
Board of the Court Service	11	6	35
Bord Bia	12	3	20
Bord na gCon / Irish Greyhound Board	7	0	0
Bord Fáilte Éireann	6	2	25
Bord Gais Éireann	7	1	12
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	5	1	17
An Bord Pinsean / Pensions Board	10	7	41
An Bord Pleanála	7	5	42
Bord Scannán na hÉireann / Irish Film Board	4	3	43
Bus Átha Cliath / Dublin Bus	8	1	11
Central Bank of Ireland	12	0	0
CERT	10	8	44
An Chomhairle Oidhreachta / The Heritage Council	9	5	36
Coillte Teoranta / The Irish Forestry Board	8	1	11
Combat Poverty Agency	3	10	77
Coras Iompair Éireann (CIE)	8	3	37
Dublin Transportation Office	14	1	7
Electricity Supply Board	10	2	17
Enterprise Ireland	6	5	36
Equality Authority	5	8	61
FÁS	12	5	29
Food Safety Authority of Ireland	8	2	20
Forfás	9	3	25
Health and Safety Authority	8	3	27
Higher Education Authority	10	6	37
Iarnród Éireann / Irish Rail	6	2	25
IDA Ireland	10	2	17
Irish Aid Advisory Committee	7	3	30
Irish Blood Transfusion Service	5	5	50
Irish Sports Council	7	3	30
Legal Aid Board	4	7	64
The Medical Council	23	6	21
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	26	5	17
National Disability Authority	11	9	45
National Economic and Social Council	26	5	16
National Lottery	7	1	12

National Roads Authority	9	5	36
National Theatre Society	5	4	44
National Treasury Management Company	7	0	0
An Post	11	3	21
RTE	4	4	50
Teagasc	9	2	18
Údarás na Gaeltachta	18	2	10
Working Group on Court Jurisdiction	16	2	11

*\* The above table, based on data obtained through telephone contact in October 2002, focuses on key boards and is intended to provide a general overview of current levels of female participation on public bodies.*

An analysis of nominations to State boards and bodies of public interest reveal that boards remain overwhelmingly biased in favour of men. Only three boards – the Equality Authority, the Combat Poverty Agency and the Legal Aid Board – have more women than men. Only the RTE Authority and the Irish Blood Transfusion Service have a complete gender balance. As expected, boards in the areas of the arts, culture and equality tend to have a better balance of women and men, principally because of women’s strong involvement in these areas. However, women remain excluded from many areas in which they have a strong interest or concern. It is notable, for instance, that there are **no** women on the boards of key decision-making bodies responsible for managing the economy – namely, the Central Bank of Ireland and National Treasury Management Company. Similarly, there is **no** representation of women on Bord na gCon, in spite of strong involvement by women in breeding greyhounds. Moreover, only one woman has been appointed to each of the following boards, all of which take vital decisions on issues of importance to women – Aer Lingus, Aer Rianta, CIE, the Dublin Transportation Office and Bord Gáis.

It might be argued that nominating authorities are not aware of women available with the necessary expertise to sit on such boards. This highlights the need for the Government to resource a comprehensive talent-bank of all women interested in going forward for State boards. Similarly, the Government needs to remind nominating bodies of the importance of having more balanced representation of women and men on key State boards.

The Government’s recent initiative which obliges all nominating bodies to put forward both a female and male candidate for nomination to State boards, is to be welcomed. Similarly, the requirement that each Minister must report to the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on their record in meeting this obligation should help to improve the current situation. However, the poor record of previous Governments and nominating bodies would suggest that what is ultimately needed is legislation making it compulsory for each Minister to ensure that 40 per cent of members of each State Board are women.

The following case-study is intended to demonstrate how a proactive strategy, combined with a commitment to balanced representation, can have a significant impact on increasing the percentage of women appointed to a Government committee.

**CASE STUDY:  
GENDER BALANCE ON IRISH NDP MONITORING COMMITTEES**

This case study has been introduced to demonstrate how proactive action by a Government body, coupled with a stipulated requirement, has been successful in increasing the participation of women in key decision-making functions. It also aims to highlight how inaction, even where there is a requirement for gender balance, can cause the percentage of women on such committees to fall.

There is a requirement that EU expenditure committed under the National Development Plan (NDP) should be monitored by a committee known as a Monitoring Committee, comprising the Government Departments managing each major area of expenditure – the Managing Authorities, other implementing agencies (such as FÁS) and the social partners. All Monitoring Committees under the National Development Plan are specifically required to have a balanced representation of women and men. However, none of the Monitoring Committees have yet managed to achieved a 40:60 gender balance although the Employment and Human Resources Operational Programme Monitoring Committee achieved a percentage of 38 per cent in 2000.

The balance of women and men at the first meeting of each Monitoring Committee in 2000, at the beginning of the National Development Plan was as follows:

- **Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme:** 38 members, 11 of whom were women, leading to a female participation rate of 29 per cent.
- **Productive Sector Operational Programme:** 61 members, of whom 12 were women – 20 per cent.
- **Employment and Human Resources Operational Programme:** 42 members, of whom 16 were women – 38 per cent.
- **Southern and Eastern Operational Programme:** 51 members, of whom 12 were women – 24 per cent.
- **Border, Midland and West Operational Programme:** 46 members, of whom 12 were women – 26 per cent.
- **National Development Plan Community Support Framework:** 49 members, of whom 11 were women – 22 per cent.

**Overall total: 287 members, of whom 74 were women – 26 per cent.**

The balance of women and men on Monitoring Committees in 2002 is as follows:

- **Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme:** 41 members, 10 of whom are women, leading to a female participation rate of 24 per cent.
- **Productive Sector Operational Programme:** 75 members, of whom 23 are women – 31 per cent.
- **Employment and Human Resources Operational Programme:** 51 members, of whom 19 are women (and 1 vacancy) – 38 per cent.
- **Southern and Eastern Operational Programme:** 54 members, of whom 16 are women – 30 per cent.
- **Border, Midland and West Operational Programme:** 56 members, of whom 13 are women – 23 per cent.
- **National Development Plan Community Support Framework:** 49 members, of whom 12 are women – 25 per cent.

**Overall total: 322 members, of whom 90 are women – 28 per cent.**

In addition, 27 per cent of the Peace Programme's full membership are women.

As the above figures demonstrate, there was a slight overall improvement in the percentage of women sitting on the National Development Plan Monitoring Committees, from 26 per cent to 28 per cent. However, this overall figure masks a considerable disimprovement in the percentage of women sitting on the Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme Monitoring Committee and, to a lesser extent, on the Border, Midland and West Operational Programme Monitoring Committee.

What is particularly serious about the declining female participation on the Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme Monitoring Committee is that this is the Operational Programme with the largest allocation of funds committed under the NDP, covering expenditure on roads, public transport, housing, the environment and hospitals. The social partners (including employers, business interests, trades unions, farmers and the Community and Voluntary Pillar) tend to nominate an equal number of women and men to the committee. Consequently, the low percentage of women in this Monitoring Committee signals the exclusion of women from decision-making in these crucial areas both within the civil service and in the related State and semi-State bodies.

It could be argued that because women may not work in areas related to the NDP or may not have the necessary expertise to sit on the Monitoring Committee, it is not possible to achieve a better gender balance, even if this is an explicit NDP requirement. However, the record of the Managing Authority responsible for one of the Monitoring Committees – that of the Productive Sector OP – serves to refute that argument. As the figures demonstrate, there was an 11 per cent increase in the percentage of women serving on this committee between 2000 and 2002. The improvement came about because of a targeted strategy by the Managing Authority concerned – the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Following the first meeting of the Monitoring Committee in November 2000, the Managing Authority undertook a review of the gender balance on the committee. It found that, while social partner representation was fairly equally balanced between women and men, the representation from the civil service and State bodies was overwhelmingly

dominated by men (28 men and 7 women). The Managing Authority accordingly set a target of 40 per cent female representation by 2003, which required the number of women officials to increase to 17. It wrote to each of the nominating departments in April 2001 and again in June 2001, reminding them of the requirement to have a balance of women and men on the committee. It reviewed its own representation (originally 6 men), reducing this to 4 representatives (2 men, 2 women – thus ensuring a gender balance). It raised the issue at the Spring 2001 Monitoring Committee meeting and, in situations where departmental representatives changed, it requested that nominating bodies consider the issue of balanced representation between women and men. It found that departments responded positively to a proactive strategy of this nature, leading to the strong improvement in the percentage of women on the committee.

This example highlights a key NWCI argument, namely that the percentage of women either on official committees or in national politics will not necessarily improve if no proactive strategy is put in place. In this case, the European Commission requirement that there should be a balanced representation of women and men on all Monitoring Committees set an objective which both raised the issue of female under-representation and obliged Government departments to address this issue. The requirement prompted one Managing Authority to implement a strategy to meet this commitment, setting a timescale by which it intended to meet the target. The strategy worked, without having to resort to the use of sanctions, because of the priority devoted to it by the Managing Authority.

## SECTION 4: WHY POLITICS NEEDS MORE WOMEN AND WHY WOMEN ARE EXCLUDED

### 1. WHY SHOULD THERE BE A BALANCED REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL POLITICS?

As a representative democracy, the credibility of Ireland's political system rests on the basis of whether or not the interests of the people of Ireland are properly represented by the political representatives directly elected in general elections and indirectly elected to the Seanad. The argument that is repeatedly put forward in most studies on women and politics is that the very legitimacy of the democratic system is undermined if action is not taken to combat women's under-representation:

*Having a more proportional representation of important societal groups, such as women, accords government greater legitimacy; allows us to fulfil more closely the requirements of the democratic form of government we claim to prize; provides a previously excluded group with an indication that its interests are now likely to be more thoroughly considered and makes better use of the talents available in society.<sup>viii</sup>*

*An important function of an electoral system is to legitimise the legislative body in the eyes of the citizenry, thereby facilitating the implementation of policy decision. The effectiveness of a government's policies depends in many instances on the active cooperation and support of its citizens. A widespread view that the electoral system is designed deliberately to favour one group over another and that legislators fail to represent citizens adequately will weaken seriously the perceived legitimacy of the policy-makers and their policies.<sup>ix</sup>*

If women, who form half of the population of Ireland, are represented by only 13% of sitting TDs, or if they rely for their representation on men, then the capacity of the existing political system to represent women adequately is seriously diminished. The importance of women's participation in politics has been emphasised, for instance, by the United Nations in a report prepared under the aegis of the UN/NGO Group on Women and Development:

*Why is women's participation so important? In the first place, there can be no true democracy, no true people's participation in governance and development without the equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life and levels of decision-making.<sup>x</sup>*

If women are not supported to participate in politics, then the interests of women will not be represented adequately. Furthermore, given women's differing experiences and interests, it is both impossible and undemocratic for a small minority of women to represent the needs of all women. Increasingly, international bodies such as the UN recognise the right of people to participate in democratic structures in their own right. It is not enough for large numbers of women to be represented at second-hand as is currently happening in Ireland:

*People's participation is becoming the central issue of our time [...] Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives. [...] The important thing is that people have constant access to decision-making and power.<sup>xi</sup>*

What is becoming more and more important is that groups should be supported to represent themselves within decision-making structures, what Anne Phillips has termed the *politics of presence*.<sup>xii</sup>

A counter-argument is often made that surely conscientious male politicians can represent women as adequately as female representatives. What added value can women bring to the political process? While there are huge differences between women, while they adhere to very different beliefs, women do bring a unique perspective to the political system. It has been found in the US, for instance, that women legislators are more concerned with women's issues and with issues related to families and children. Furthermore, when women make up a larger proportion of those elected at national level, they are even more likely to give priority to women's issues.<sup>xiii</sup> This reflects a general consensus among experts that it generally takes a critical mass of women to effect change.<sup>xiv</sup> It is generally recognised that a critical mass is reached only when the percentage of women in parliament has reached 40 per cent.

## 2. NEED FOR DIVERSITY OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS

Government policy-making needs to recognise more fully that women come from different backgrounds and have differing needs and concerns. Male decision-makers often regard women as an undifferentiated group, causing differences between women to be lost, ignoring differences in class, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, ethnic origin and overlooking the urban/rural divide.<sup>xv</sup>

## 3. NEED FOR SUPPORTS

If women in general experience structural barriers preventing them from becoming involved in politics, then the only women who will be able to overcome those barriers will be those who either come from politically active families and who understand the political process or women who are economically or educationally advantaged. A system which is intimidating for most women cannot possibly accommodate women who are marginalised. Should those women be denied the opportunity to have their voices heard? Can we be content with a system where only the most exceptional women can breach its barriers? If supports are not put in place, then the inequalities between women will become exacerbated.

There are a number of serious consequences for a system that excludes the majority of women. Firstly, the assumption is made that women's interests are homogeneous, with the result that the needs of differing groups of women may be ignored. Secondly, a small number of women cannot possibly perform a representative function on behalf of such a broad range of women. Thirdly, there is no possibility that marginalised women will have the opportunity to represent their own needs and interests. The current system essentially dilutes the provision in Article 16 of the Constitution indicating that anybody over the age of 21 is entitled to become a TD.

*Every citizen without distinction of sex who has reached the age of twenty-one years, and who is not placed under disability or incapacity by this Constitution or by law, shall be eligible for membership of Dáil Éireann.*<sup>xvi</sup>

This has an impact on voter participation rates. If a woman has few TDs who reflect her concerns or if she cannot envisage a situation in which she could represent her local community, then she will be less likely to participate in the political process.

*Logically, voter participation by members of a group in an election will be in direct relation to the possible influence that the group can exert. Low voter registration and turnout on election day may be a product of alienation – a sense of powerlessness – rather than apathy.*<sup>xvii</sup>

## 4. BARRIERS PREVENTING WOMEN FROM BECOMING ACTIVE IN NATIONAL POLITICS

While all citizens would appear to be eligible to go forward for national office, the situation is not as simple as it appears, since the system contains hidden barriers preventing many women from exercising their democratic right to become involved in politics. It has been found that social class is a key factor influencing the type of person who goes forward for election. Research has identified a series of other factors preventing women from getting involved in politics. These include:

- **Socialisation:** it is argued that girls and boys are reared to believe that politics is a man's game<sup>xviii</sup> while girls are socialised to identify more with caring duties in the home.<sup>xix</sup> Research on British candidate selection indicates that women often perceive the roles of MPs to be largely based on typically male lifestyles and hence do not regard themselves as eligible.<sup>xx</sup>
- **Incumbency:** it has been argued that the low numbers of women in politics is due to the power held by existing office-holders (incumbents) when they are going forward for re-election.<sup>xxi</sup> In US elections to the House of Representatives, for instance, over 95% of all existing members won their seats in recent elections.<sup>xxii</sup> Low turnover of elected representatives makes it even more difficult for women challengers to get elected.
- **Under-representation of women in traditional entry-points:** it has been argued that another factor is that of occupational segregation and the low percentage of women in law and business, traditional stepping-stones into politics.<sup>xxiii</sup>



- **Childcare**

For Irish women, the NWCi would argue that one of the principal barriers to a career in politics is the absence of childcare supports. Many decades of Government inaction have led to the development of a childcare crisis, which restricts women's opportunities to combine paid employment with family life or to engage in time-demanding career choices such as that of politics.

While the Government has committed 436.79 million euro since 1999 to increase the number of childcare places and facilities, with a target of 28,208 extra places by 2006<sup>xxiv</sup>, this expenditure will not reverse the crisis caused by decades of Government inaction in this area. A report undertaken by Goodbody Economic Consultants on childcare in 1998 estimated that there would be a need for 40,000 additional places by 2010 to meet an escalating demand for childcare. It also estimated that if the ratio of women working full-time in the home was to decrease significantly, that would require a further 43,000 places to be created.<sup>xxv</sup> As the number of mothers in the workforce has risen from 43.6 per cent to 48.7 per cent<sup>xxvi</sup> over the past three years, it would be more accurate to estimate that we will need 83,000 new places by 2010 just to keep pace with existing demand.

Childcare is both expensive and scarce and, like eldercare, is sourced almost completely from private providers. Irish parents pay on average 20 per cent of their average earnings on childcare compared to 8 per cent for their EU counterparts.<sup>xxvii</sup>

- **Family-friendly policies**

Considerable progress will need to be made on family-friendly policies to provide adequate supports for women to reconcile work and family life effectively. While parents in Ireland are entitled to 14 week's unpaid parental leave, those in Germany receive 3 years' paid leave, in Austria, 2 years' paid leave, in Sweden, 18 months and in Italy, 10 months. The absence of adequate family-friendly policies makes it almost impossible for parents of young children, particularly women who bear the more considerable caring role, to enter a career which is demanding, insecure and where the hours are not family-friendly.

- **Family unfriendly working hours**

The absence of childcare supports creates a major barrier preventing younger women from getting involved in politics. Thus, the pool of available women to participate in politics is significantly reduced. There are further barriers preventing women with a strong political interest from becoming involved in politics. The pattern of long working days when the Dáil is in session prevents many women with children considering a career in politics. Long parliamentary sessions lasting into the night were explicitly cited as the reason why many women Labour Party MPs decided not to go forward for re-election in the UK in 2001, even in safe constituencies where they were certain of re-election. This is one area where the Government could introduce immediate reforms – shorter working days, spread over a longer parliamentary session, would make the Dáil more family-friendly.

## SECTION 5: EU ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND WOMEN IN POLITICS

### 1. WHY EU MODELS HAVE BEEN CHOSEN

Most recent research emphasises the importance of the electoral system in determining the percentage of women elected.<sup>xxviii</sup> If the electoral system itself is of huge importance in determining the number of women elected, then it is of interest to examine what has been done in other EU countries to see what is effective and what is not. The NWCI has chosen four EU countries – France, Sweden, Denmark and Belgium.

- **France** is of particular interest since it has a traditionally low percentage of women political representatives. However, action by the Government in the form of a parity law which makes part of a party's funding dependent on having an equal number of candidates for elections has made a notable difference at local level and has improved the percentage of successful women candidates.
- **Sweden** has a traditionally high percentage of women in its parliament and has a gender-balanced government. However, one of the mechanisms which it used to boost the number of women in parliament was through quotas which were also used successfully in Norway and Finland.
- **Denmark** equally has a high level of women in politics – quotas were introduced in the 1980s and ended in 1996 when the level of women in politics had improved significantly.
- **Belgium** has introduced the Smet-Tobback Law which stipulates that there can be no more than 2/3 of any one gender on electoral lists.

### 2. FRANCE<sup>xxix</sup>

France has traditionally had a low percentage of women in politics at national and local level. Sustained lobbying by the women's movement resulted in the introduction of a parity law to address this situation.

#### a) The Parity Law

- **July 1999:** Articles 3 and 4 of the Constitution were amended as follows: *the law favours equal opportunities for women and men with regard to electoral mandates and electoral seats and political parties and groups shall contribute to the implementation of this principle according to the conditions determined by the law.*
- **6 June 2000:** A law was promulgated *with regard to equal opportunities for women and men for electoral mandates and electoral seats, commonly known as the parity law.*

This was the first time that a country had introduced a law making parity between women and men in politics a specific requirement within the political system. Its objective was to accelerate the modernisation of politics and to reinforce democracy by encouraging an equal number of women and men to assume decision-making roles in the different political bodies.

The law covers:

- *elections municipales* (local elections) for towns with more than 3,500 inhabitants;
- *elections regionales* (regional elections);
- *elections à l'Assemblée de Corse* (elections to the Corsican Assembly);
- *elections senatoriales à la proportionnelle* (senatorial elections under the system of proportional representation);
- *elections legislatives* (general elections);
- *elections européennes* (European elections).

The law does not cover:

- local or cantonal elections or elections to the Sénat (Senate) in circumstances where only 1 or 2 senators are being elected.

In all elections involving a list system, the law requires that **50 per cent of candidates be of either gender** (allowing a margin of one), that is to say:

- that women and men should be alternated on the electoral lists for the senatorial and European elections;
- that there should be parity within each group of six candidates, regardless of their position on the list, for the local, regional and Corsican Assembly elections.

#### Penalties:

- lists which do not respect the parity requirement are not registered.

- the law financially penalises political parties or groups which do not select 50 per cent of candidates of each sex (allowing a margin of 2 per cent) for general elections.

## b) Statistics

### 1. Government:

July 1999	Nov 1999	Jan 2000	March 2000	Oct 2000	Feb 2001	March 2001	July 2001	Oct 2001
10/29	5/14	11/29	1/3	10/33	5/17	11/34	5/17	9/34
34.5%	35.7%	37.9%	33.3%	30.3%	29.4%	32.3%	29.4%	26.5%

### 2. Assemblée Nationale:

1981	1986	1988	1993	1997	2002
5.3%	5.9%	5.7%	6.1%	10.9%	12.3%

### 3. Sénat:

1983	1986	1989	1992	1995	1998	2001
2.8%	2.8%	3.1%	5%	5.6%	5.9%	10.9%

Progress has taken place in regions where the law has been applied (where elections have taken place under a system of proportional representation). In these regions, there has been an increase of 20.3 per cent in the number of successful women candidates. There has been no change in areas where the law has not been applied.

### 4. Conseils Régionaux (regional councils, elected through regional elections):

1986	1992	1998
8.5%	12.3%	23.7%

### 5. Conseils Généraux (general councils, elected through district elections):

1985	1988	1992	1998	2001
4.2%	4.1%	5.6%	7.9%	9.9%

### 6. Conseils Municipaux (local councils for towns with more than 3,500 inhabitants):

	1983	1989	1995	2001
<b>Women councillors</b>	14%	17.1%	21.7%	47.5%
<b>Women mayors</b>	4%	5.5%	7.6%	6.9%

	1995	2001
<b>Women councillors</b>	21%	30%



### 7. European Parliament:

1984	1989	1994	1999
21%	22.2%	29.9%	40.2%

(50.8% of candidates included on party electoral lists were women)

### c) Impact of Parity Law

The general assessment of the impact of the parity law is that it has been extremely effective in boosting the number of women elected as councillors. Even allowing for those circumstances in which the law does not apply in senatorial elections, the number of women senators has doubled. Similarly, the impact of the law has been felt even in small municipalities where there has been a 9 per cent increase in the number of women elected.

The law has prompted many more women to become involved in political parties at all levels, although party executives remain dominated by men. Interestingly, political parties have not found it difficult to make changes to their electoral lists.

### 3. SCANDINAVIA

Each of the Scandinavian countries has a tradition of high participation by women in their national parliaments and local authorities. Some research indicates that the success of women in politics in Scandinavia is attributable to the Nordic values of equality and social justice.<sup>xxx</sup> However, women's success in politics in Scandinavia is not due simply to the broader societal culture. In each of the Nordic countries, Governments and political parties have taken conscious decisions to promote the position of women in politics. In each case, serious inequalities persist for women in other areas where measures to bring about change have not been pursued proactively. In Finland, for example, a serious gender pay gap persists, with women earning only 78 per cent of male wages, despite having higher educational qualifications.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The reason why the level of women in politics has increased so significantly is because political parties have responded to the women's movements in their countries by introducing measures to bring about parity between women and men in politics. In Norway, for example, when Gro Harlem Brundtland was elected Prime Minister in 1986, she appointed a cabinet, 44 percent of whom were women. By 1990, women's representation in parliament was 36 per cent, second only to Sweden, and the percentage of women representatives had surpassed 40 per cent at county level.<sup>xxxiii</sup> By 1991, Norway's three main political parties – Labour, Centre and the Conservatives had women leaders.

One of the key mechanisms used to increase the percentage of women in elected office in Norway was that of quotas. By 1975, the Liberal and Socialist Left Parties had adopted a quota where at least 40 per cent of candidates for elections were women. This was subsequently adopted by the Labour Party. The impact was immediately visible – by the 1977 general election, the percentage of women elected to the national parliament had increased from 16 per cent to 24 per cent, and by the 1979 local elections, 1/3 of all elected local representatives were women. It is generally recognised that the quota system has worked very effectively in Norway,<sup>xxxiii</sup> and also considered to be fundamental to the high percentage of women in elected office in Finland.

*Norway: Percentage of Women in the Parliament (Storting)*<sup>xxxiv</sup>

1989	1993	1997	2001
35.6%	39.4%	36.4%	36.4%

*Finland: Percentage of Women in the National Parliament*<sup>xxxv</sup>

1987	1991	1995	1999
31.5%	38.5%	33.5%	37%

## a) Sweden <sup>xxxvi</sup>

The impetus for action to increase the number of women in elected office in Sweden came from two factors. There was a general political consensus on the principles of gender equality incorporated into the Swedish Constitution. Political parties also shared the belief that the number of women candidates needed to be increased. Furthermore, there is a requirement on all ministers to promote and assess equality-related issues within their fields of responsibility.

- In 1979, women from the five major political parties – Social Democrats, Centrists, Communists, Liberals and Moderates – joined together across party lines to demand increased representation of women in politics.
- This led to the introduction by all parties of the 40:60 principle which signalled their intention to nominate no fewer than 40 per cent of candidates from one gender at national, county and municipal levels.<sup>xxxvii</sup>
- An “Equality Affairs Division” was established in the early 1980s at the central governmental level. Its objectives included:
  - providing a gender perspective and promoting gender equality within different organisations in the State sector;
  - conducting equality training for the Cabinet Office and other Government authorities.
- In 1994, the Prime Minister chose a gender-balanced Government (50 per cent women, 50 per cent men).
- In 1994 also, the Social Democratic Party initiated the idea of the so-called “sandwich nomination lists”. This means that every 2nd name on the party’s nomination list must be that of a woman.

Since the 1994 election, the largest political party, the Social Democrats, and later the Green Party and the Christian Democrats, have systematically alternated women and men on their lists of the constituency candidates for the general elections and elections to the EU Parliament.

### 1. Percentage of Women in the Swedish Parliament (Riksdag) <sup>xxxviii</sup>

1970	1988	1994	1998
13%	38%	43%	43%

The Swedish Parliament has a higher number of female members in parliament than any other parliament in the world.

### 2. Percentage of Women in the National Government

18 September 1994	12 October 1998
50%	50%

The high level of female participation in political decision-making in Sweden is a result of long-term development, pressure from strong women’s organisations and networks and a strategic policy within the main parties and the Government. It is important to note that in areas where such proactive measures were not taken – for example in the jobs market – serious inequalities remain. The jobs market remains highly segregated with few women at the top of business corporations. Similarly, women continue to assume the majority of caring work for families.<sup>xxxix</sup> Fundamental to the increased percentage of women in elected office, was the use of quotas and a commitment on the part of the Government to a balanced representation of women and men at cabinet level.

## b) Denmark <sup>xl</sup>

Denmark has one of the highest percentages of women elected to national parliament within the EU. This is due to a proactive gender equality policy within all areas of Government. It was also assisted by the introduction of quotas within political parties for female participation. However, Denmark illustrates one of the potential difficulties which can occur regarding quotas – gender quotas remained voluntary and were not adopted by all parties. Consequently, it was decided in 1996 to end quotas, once female participation had increased significantly.

- In 1977, the Socialist People's Party introduced a quota to increase the percentage of its women candidates.
- This was followed by the introduction of a similar quota by the Left Socialists in 1985.
- The Social Democrats (the largest political party for many years) introduced a quota in 1988 whereby at least 40 per cent of its candidates at national level and 30% at local level were to be women.<sup>xii</sup>
- A Plan of Action on Gender Equality was introduced in 1987, the objective of which was:
  - to oblige Ministries and other central Government organisations to initiate actions to promote gender equality and to act as models of good practice,
  - to call upon County Councils and municipal authorities to take responsibility for the implementation of the existing legislation.
- The political system has a duty to implement the equality acts and other de jure and de facto measures which may have an impact on equality.

1. *Percentage of Women in the National Government*

1994	1996	1998	2000
35%	26.3%	42.9%	45%

2. *Percentage of Women in the National Parliament (Folketing)*

1994	1995	1998
33.7%	34.9%	37.1%

**4. BELGIUM**<sup>xiii</sup>

Belgium has an electoral system in which a candidate's position on the list greatly influences whether the candidate gets elected.

- On 24 May 1994, the Smet-Tobback Law was enacted stipulating that electoral lists should contain a maximum of 2/3 candidates of the same gender.
- If a party does not manage to fill at least 1/3 of the places with candidates of the under-represented gender, these places have to be left vacant.
- Various amendments were introduced in order to define the ranking of both genders on the lists but none were agreed.
- Party quotas were introduced by two parties:
  - SP (Socialists, Flemish) introduced a gender quota of 25 per cent for its party's administrative commission;
  - PS (Socialists, French) introduced a gender quota whereby none of the party's structures could have more than 80 per cent of either gender.
- A further law has been under discussion since 1999 that would impose parity at all levels of power and would require women and men to be alternated on all electoral lists. This has not yet been agreed.

1. *Belgian Senate:*

1987	1991	1995	1999
8.1%	10.8%	23.9%	28.2%

1. *Chamber of Representatives of Belgium:*

1987	1991	1995	1999
8.4%	9.4%	12%	23.3%

## 5. CONCLUSION

While the Smet-Tobback Law has brought about improvements in the percentage of women elected to national office in Belgium, the rate of improvement has been slow. This is because women are badly ranked on electoral lists and the voluntary party quotas remain too low.

In general, proactive action by Governments do bring about an improvement in the percentage of women elected at local and national level. Quotas have been found to be very effective in Sweden where they were implemented across party lines and at a high enough level (40 per cent) to bring about a significant improvement in the number of women elected. A similar result was obtained in Norway and Finland. In Denmark, a comprehensive gender equality policy supplemented the quota mechanism and helped to boost women's participation in politics.

However, it is in France that the rate of change has been most remarkable and most notable. France has significantly improved its formerly low level of women's representation through the introduction of a parity law which is accompanied by financial penalties if parties fail to comply with the parity requirement. The number of women councillors has increased from 21.7 per cent in 1995 to 47.5 per cent in 2001. The percentage of women senators has increased by 5 per cent in 3 years.

The NWCI is calling on the Government to draw on the French model:

- to introduce legislation to bring about parity democracy in Ireland;
- to require political parties to introduce a quota of 40 per cent of women candidates for national and local elections;
- to make 50 per cent of funding for parties dependent on their compliance with this requirement.



## SECTION 6: ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL PARTIES

### 1. IS THERE A ROLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT?

Experts are agreed that serious structural barriers still exist which prevent many women from becoming active in politics. If this is the case, then the Government is obliged to respect the democratic principle by ensuring that barriers to the participation of women in politics are removed. The Government is also obliged to respect the priority which has been placed by the European Union on actions to combat discrimination based on gender. Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam specifically commits the European Union to combat discrimination which may occur over a range of equality grounds, including gender:

*Without prejudice to the other provisions of the Treaty and within the limits of the powers conferred by it upon the Community, the Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.<sup>xliii</sup>*

This research would argue that the persistently low number of women in the Dáil is the product of discrimination within the electoral system, which works to exclude most women. The Government is obliged to take action to respect the spirit of the Treaty of Amsterdam. It should not allow a situation to prevail in which the level of women's participation in national politics remains frozen at 13 per cent. What is needed is proactive action by the Government to promote greater participation by women in politics. Direct representation of women, in accordance with their proportion of the general population *should be a deliberate goal of the electoral system and not the product of happenstance.*<sup>xliv</sup>

### 2. WHAT CAN BE DONE?

A more radical approach is needed. This research recommends that the Government should adopt a two-pronged strategy:

- Firstly, to introduce legislation which would oblige all political parties to introduce quotas where an equal number of women and men would be put forward as candidates for:
  - National elections;
  - Local elections;
  - Party executives.
- Secondly, to introduce a law on parity democracy to guarantee an equal representation of women and men in politics. This would specifically stipulate that any political party failing to meet the requirement to put forward an equal number of female and male candidates would have its funding cut by a designated percentage (50 per cent).

The usual entry-route into national politics is through local politics. Given the persistently low success rate for women candidates in local elections, it is crucial that the political parties begin to consider a strategy to promote female participation in politics at local level. A strategy is needed which will bring about structural change in terms of political parties and the political system. Until now, strategies have focused on developing women's capacities rather than on changing the system itself. Possible options to increase the number of women involved in politics at local level include the following:

- Firstly, political parties need to develop comprehensive strategies to encourage women to run for local elections. Each party should set an immediate target to double its percentage of women candidates elected to local authorities at the next election.
- Secondly, parties should set a programme in place at this stage to support at least 50 per cent of women councillors who are not currently TDs to run for election at national level. Such women have considerable experience of representative politics. If they were supported to run for election for winnable seats at the next general election and if even 50 per cent of those were successful, this would more than double the existing percentage of women in national politics.

The Government should also resource women's groups to support women to go forward for election to local councils and to provide capacity-building and training for women interested in participating in decision-making structures.

### **What else can be done?**

- Political parties could set in place mentoring systems for political representatives, together with systems of rotation and alternation. These options are already being recommended in Northern Ireland. In order to comply with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act which requires balanced representation over a series of equality grounds, including gender, the implementing body for the Peace Programme put forward a mentoring system where women received training to assume a representative role. It also put forward a system of alternates, allowing women an opportunity to attend meetings in an ancillary role until they had gained sufficient representational experience, whereupon the representative function was rotated.
- If the capacity of civil society was supported more adequately, women active in women's and community groups would gain experience in representing their local interests on relevant boards such as County Development Boards and Partnership Committees. 64 per cent of women's groups currently operate on less than 1,270 euro per year.<sup>xlv</sup> If a dedicated budget-line were to be established in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, with a specific funding element to promote participation in decision-making bodies, groups would have the resources to provide mentoring, training and support for women interested in becoming candidates for local politics.
- The NWCi should be supported to develop talent-banks of women interested in becoming involved in local politics. It could then provide political parties with information to increase the number of women candidates for local elections.

### **3. WILL THESE MEASURES BE SUFFICIENT?**

The percentage of women who have been elected to the Dáil has risen by a mere 5 per cent over the past 20 years. The above measures are intended to boost the percentage of women involved in local politics as an entry-point to national politics. However, without an enforceable obligation, political parties will not have the political will to bring about the necessary structural change to ensure that women gain equal representation at national level. The Government has already introduced a provision in the 1997 Electoral Act which provides funding for political parties which promote greater participation by women and young people (Articles 18.1(b) and 20.1). Article 18.1(b) stipulates that:

*Payments made to a qualified party under this Part shall be deemed to include provision in respect of expenditure by the party in relation to the promotion of participation by women and young persons in political activity.*<sup>xlvi</sup>

While this provision is welcome, the scale of the inequality is such that a voluntary recommendation will not bring about the systemic change needed for balanced representation between women and men. Instead, it will act as a sticking-plaster, where minor improvements will mask the continuation of women's exclusion from representative democracy.

### **4. QUOTAS**

Quotas are intended as temporary mechanisms to reverse a situation where women have historically been excluded from politics. While some women and men may be opposed to the use of quotas, seeing them as tokenistic and fearing that women may be regarded as having gained their positions by virtue of the quota system rather than on merit, the persistently low percentage of women in politics requires urgent and radical action. Men have historically enjoyed an advantage over women in politics due to a number of factors such as:

- the structural barriers which have denied many women economic equality;
- the association of men with decision-making roles;
- male-dominated entry-points into politics such as the GAA and the IFA;
- the absence of supports for women's unpaid caring role;
- the lack of a critical mass of women in politics to promote greater female participation;
- the absence of sufficient women in decision-making or representative functions in other areas such as on State boards.

Consequently, as the existing system has privileged men by virtue of their gender, it would not be tokenistic to introduce a temporary system with the objective of reversing a historic imbalance. Quotas could be removed once female representation had stabilised at 40 per cent. The advantage of quotas is that it would broaden the pool of available candidates for political parties. It would introduce new people into local and national politics and would attract women's votes. With new candidates and renewed energy, the level of voter participation might increase.

## **5. PARITY LAW**

It is important that the provision obliging political parties to introduce quotas should be enforceable to prevent parties from renegeing on this obligation. The only effective means of making quotas enforceable is through the introduction of a parity law. The introduction of a parity law in France has had a major impact on the rate of female participation in politics. Such a law, which would make funding dependent on a party's record in promoting women, is intended simply to reverse the persistence of a major inequality experienced by women. It is not intended to disadvantage men but rather to appropriate for women their fair share.

## **6. ARE THERE ADVANTAGES FOR POLITICAL PARTIES?**

Political parties will not lose out by taking action to increase the number of women candidates in national politics. Research has shown that women tend to be successful candidates with a good record in getting re-elected. It has been found, for instance, that once political party and incumbency are taken into account, women candidates tend to do as well as men in elections in the US.<sup>xlvii</sup> Similarly, in Britain, research has shown that a good presence of women candidates feminises party images but does not lose votes.<sup>xlviii</sup>

## **7. WHAT POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE PROMISED**

Each of the major political parties were represented at a seminar, organised by the National Women's Council of Ireland on 8 March 2002, to discuss the issue of putting more women into politics. All parties were agreed that the low percentage of women in politics was a cause for concern and that the system needed root and branch reform. 3 parties favoured the idea of a parity law – the Labour Party, the Green Party and Sinn Féin. These parties also made a commitment that they would support the idea of quotas aimed at increasing the percentage of women in politics to 40 per cent. The NWCI is now calling on all parties to demonstrate their political will to change the political system so that women get a voice and influence proportionate to their share of the population.

## SECTION 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

What the Government must do:

The Government must:

- Introduce legislation into the Oireachtas to make 50 per cent of funding for political parties dependent on maintaining a 40:60 gender balance among candidates selected for general and local elections, in order to achieve parity democracy (equal representation of women and men).
- Introduce quotas to require each political party to have an equal representation of women and men in the following areas:
  - As candidates for general elections;
  - As candidates for local elections;
  - Within party executives.
- Resource and support the women's community sector to support greater participation by women in national and local politics.
- Establish a national support structure:
  - to support the participation of women within the policy-making system;
  - to promote greater participation by women in decision-making structures, including on State boards, health boards, regional authorities, County Enterprise Boards and County Development Boards and
  - to support training programmes to enhance women's capacity to participate in politics.
- Re-establish an Oireachtas committee dedicated solely to women's affairs.
- Change Dáil working practices to a system of shorter daily Dáil sittings but longer parliamentary sessions.
- Make gender balance on State boards a statutory requirement.

What political parties can do:

- Introduce party quotas;
- Support the proposal for the introduction of parity democracy;
- Support the re-establishment of an Oireachtas Committee on Women's Affairs;
- Set an immediate target to double the percentage of women candidates elected to local authorities at the next election;
- Set a programme in place to support at least 50 per cent of women councillors who are not currently TDs to run for election at national level.

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