

# NEW ALLIANCE CALLS FOR 40% Gender Quotas In Local Elections

A new civil society alliance is demanding a 40% gender quota for local election candidates as a key measure to address gender inequality in the next programme for government. The group aims to address the imbalance of women's representation at all levels of politics and wants to keep this critical issue front and centre as the General Election approaches.



NWC's Orla O'Connor, SHE's Dr Michelle Maher and Women for Election's Katie Deegan, pictured outside Leinster House with other group members before the launch of the Alliance for Gender Quotas. (Pic: Dara Mac Dónaill, Irish Times).

**L**ed by the National Women's Council (NWC), the Alliance for Gender Quotas for Local Elections (the 'Alliance') brings together leading academics and advocates for Traveller, migrant, and disabled women, all united in their call for fairer political representation.

Rachel Coyle, Head of Campaigns and Mobilisation at NWC, said: "The numbers of women in politics matter. At local level they tell a stark story of gender inequality. Women make up just 26% of local authority members; only 247 out of 949 councillors are women."

With just nine out of 31 local authorities having reached the 30% threshold for female representation, Coyle said that women are reshaping politics and driving vital issues such as gender-based violence and reproductive health onto the agenda.

"However, progress is painfully slow. The poor results for women in June's local elections are a wake-up call and we cannot wait another local election cycle for political parties to take this seriously. Women's political representation must remain on the

political agenda, now, when we can do something about it.

"Local politics play a crucial role in preparing candidates for general elections. Gender quotas are a necessity, and if women are not on the ballot locally, they simply won't appear nationally."

## MORE DIVERSITY ON BALLOT

In 2020, the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality called on the Government to introduce quotas for the 2024 Local Elections, with an overwhelming 87.6% of citizens in support, showing a growing appetite for more diversity and representation on the ballot.

Liliana Fernandez, NWC's Leadership Officer, said: "Now is the time for urgent action to increase the number of women in politics at local level. Equal numbers of women and men across the country, with improved diversity through representation of women, ranging from disabled women, minority ethnic women including Traveller and Roma women, and women from marginalised identities and communities. Quotas are one proven

mechanism that can bring about action to address the ongoing underrepresentation of women in local government.”

The Alliance is also calling for increased funding for political parties, councils, and NGOs to support the inclusion of women, and it claims that for quotas to be effective, proper resourcing for engagement, capacity building and training will be needed.

The membership of the Alliance is 50/50 Group, 50/50NI, Dr Pauline Cullen & Shane Gough (Maynooth University), Dr Fiona Buckley (UCC), Women for Election, Dr Michelle Maher of See Her Elected (SHE), Independent Living Movement Ireland, Dr Sandra McAvoy, Dr Claire McGing, National Traveller Women’s Forum, AkiDwA and Women’s Collective Ireland (Limerick).

### **SHE WANTS MORE POWER DEVOLVED**

Dr Michelle Maher, Programme Manager of See Her Elected (SHE), said: “As members of the Alliance, we are calling for the implementation of statutory gender quotas of 40% for local elections; commitment to the introduction of mechanisms to ensure the adequate representation of minority groups; increased funding for political parties, councils, and NGOs; and proper resourcing for engagement, capacity building, and training.”

The Alliance heard that it would take five more local election cycles to reach 40% female representation at local government level. “Only 26% of county council seats are filled by women. When gender quotas were brought in for the 2016 Dáil elections, the number of women elected rose from 16% in 2011 to 22% in 2016. Since the law’s adoption,



*SHE programme manager Dr Michelle Maher and NWC’s Leadership Officer Liliana Fernandez pictured in the company of Countess Markievicz in the grounds of Leinster House, following the launch of the Alliance.*

women’s representation in Dáil Éireann has increased by 48%. If gender quotas have worked at the national level, they can support more women at the local level too,” Dr Maher noted.

She said that she would like to see more power devolved to county councillors and she also pointed out that the pay should reflect the level of work involved in the role of a county councillor, which may make it a more attractive job for women.

Dr Maher highlighted the fact that political parties now have a “golden opportunity” to co-opt more women into vacated council seats after the General Election. “Don’t replace middle-aged white men with more middle-aged white men – look at your membership now and if you don’t have any women, including those from minority groups in your party, ask yourself why not?”

### **WOMEN FOR ELECTION WANT CO-OPTION**

Speaking at the launch, Katie Deegan from Women for Election said: “Gender balance in local government isn’t just a matter of fairness; it’s a matter of better decision-making. Democracy functions better when it represents everyone it serves and when there is a balance of

men and women involved.”

“The stagnation in the number of women councillors elected in the 2024 Local Elections, at just 26% – making Ireland 22nd out of the EU 27 countries – means that new radical measures are needed so that we don’t have to wait another three decades for even 40% women in local government. Our democracy is neither healthy nor sustainable if we exclude the voices and experiences of half of the population.”

Deegan noted said that the introduction of gender quotas at the local level was a critical step in ensuring that the many talented, capable women in businesses, communities, farms and workplaces have a fair chance to be at the centre of the decision-making process.

Women for Election is also calling on political parties to introduce women-only selection shortlists and gender balanced co-options into any vacancies, “It is clear from the local elections that the pace of change is painfully slow. It is unacceptable to tell young women today that they’ll have to wait another generation to see equal representation in our local and national government. We need these urgent, radical reforms now, not later,” Deegan concluded.



For further information on the National Women’s Council visit [www.nwci.ie](http://www.nwci.ie)