



Tithe an
Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas

Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament

Report as presented to
the Ceann Comhairle,
Mr Seán Ó Feargháil TD

2 November 2021



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Foreword



When I was first elected to Dáil Éireann in 1999, I was one of only twenty-two women to sit in the 28th Dáil (at the time making up 13% of Dáil Éireann). The Houses of the Oireachtas have moved on over the last 20 years. There are now thirty-seven women sitting in the Dáil, 23% of its membership, all working to represent those living in their constituencies.

Diversity in all its forms is what we aspire to as a national parliament – we aspire to have more women, more people with disabilities, more young people, more members of the Traveller Community, more people with a variety of ethnic backgrounds. We aspire to this, because those with more diverse backgrounds will bring up policy issues traditionally associated with their backgrounds. Also, they will bring their lived experience to all matters of public policy, for example, debates on the budget, on employment legislation, on health and housing policy, on all the issues that are routinely before our Houses of the Oireachtas, at all times bringing different perspectives to inform their contributions. Along the way I have no doubt that they will notice lacunae, weaknesses or imbalances of approaches and will improve the quality of the policy choices and legislation that will apply to all of us.

The challenge of increasing the number of TDs and Senators elected from diverse backgrounds is significant, and one which others, including the recent Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, have sought to address. Alongside that challenge, there are some aspects of the role of being an elected representative and of the environment of the work, that can have a dissuading effect on those thinking of running for election or of remaining in public life. Addressing these is important as it benefits all of us to strengthen the input into our policy and legislative processes. We should all want candidates from diverse backgrounds to put themselves before the electorate. We should all want those from diverse backgrounds to want to work in the Houses of the Oireachtas because it benefits us all. This Forum focused on those aspects and sought to address some of them.

The Houses of the Oireachtas is an unusual workplace, with those from across the parliamentary community and with many stakeholders contributing to the work of the Houses. The way in which the Houses of the Oireachtas operate can make the work lives of all members of the parliamentary community challenging, making it harder to have a balance between work and home and family life, harder to carry caring responsibilities, and harder to take up other opportunities to pursue interests. These challenges can be to such an extent that the pattern can dissuade contributions from many who have really useful inputs to make.

The Ceann Comhairle established this Forum and asked us to generate practical and achievable recommendations that could make the Houses of the Oireachtas a more inclusive, family friendly and gender sensitive workplace. In its 'Open Letter to the Members of the Oireachtas', the Citizens' Assembly looked at what was needed to make political institutions more representative of Irish society and identified the need for change that is ambitious and not incremental and indicated the need for immediate action. The Forum shares the view that the timeline for action in that area and the areas that the Forum considered should be short. We have also identified some 'smaller' actions that could be taken along the way, or until more significant changes are in place. We do not believe these are actions that are 'nice to have', rather they are now 'essential to have'.

Many of our recommendations will not be unexpected. The significant difference is that this Report is written to be submitted directly to the Ceann Comhairle, for him to bring to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission for its consideration. Ultimately, taken together, these recommendations have the capacity to

be transformational for the Houses of the Oireachtas and those who serve and work there. Whilst the potential to make a real difference is there, it will only be felt if the Houses themselves commit to implementing these changes, and in so doing lead others to also take necessary steps. The *how* of the implementation, what form an appropriate structure of oversight for ensuring that plans stay on track and for ensuring that this is delivered upon looks like, we have left to the Ceann Comhairle and the Commission, as those best placed to know what could succeed. The Forum did not cost these “”, and some will clearly have financial implications as they are rolled out. We realise that this will have to be a consideration for those who take on the challenge of implementing them. While financial considerations are important, I would suggest that the final cost of *not* doing something now, of *not* addressing these issues now, far outweighs the cost of tackling the challenge.

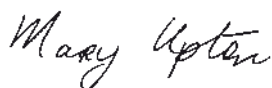
The Forum operated completely through the use of remote technology. Whilst this might not have been ideal, we made it work. The composition of the membership of the Forum, including as it did Members of the Houses, outside experts, as well as others in the parliamentary community, became a real strength. Our discussions were broad ranging, as we tested ideas and how they might work, and I am particularly grateful to the ‘external’ members of the Forum for pushing the discussion to be brave and ambitious and challenge the how and why things are done the way they have been in the past. I am grateful to the ‘internal’ Forum Members who are also Members of the Oireachtas or staff of the Oireachtas and of political groups for being open to those ideas and then exploring how things could actually work in the complex organisation that is the Houses of the Oireachtas. A synergy was created through these discussions and through this work. To all of the Forum Members my personal thanks for sharing so generously of your time and expertise.

The Forum was really grateful to receive so many submissions from interest groups, experts, and individuals with varying connections to the Houses. Some of those also presented and engaged directly with us at meetings. Your interest in our work, your contributions and ideas benefited us significantly in what we were trying to do. On behalf of all of the Forum Members – thank you for taking that time. It added a richness and depth to our work.

My personal thanks to the Secretariat in supporting us in what we were trying to do. Their commitment, expertise and dedication were a tremendous support to me as Chair of the Forum. In particular I want to acknowledge the work of Breda Burke and her team – Charlotte Cousins, Heidi Loughheed, Adele McKenna and Caoimhe O’Rourke. Their professionalism at all times was much appreciated in the delivery of this report.

Finally, my thanks to the Ceann Comhairle, Mr Seán Ó Fearghail TD, for this initiative and for asking me to be involved. I appreciate and admire his leadership in recognising a significant challenge to the institution he has dedicated much of his life to, and for having the courage to ask for ambitious input, not knowing what we would produce. I hope that this gives him some useful ‘food for thought’.

The benefits of inclusivity and greater diversity in workplaces and companies are well known. The benefits of inclusivity and greater diversity in public policy making are well known. The benefits of greater inclusivity and diversity in our national parliament are there to be seized.



Mary Upton
Chair

Membership of the Forum



Uruemu Adejinmi,
Councillor and Cathaoirleach
of Longford Municipal Council



Dr Fiona Buckley,
Lecturer in the Department of
Government and Politics, UCC,
specialising in gender politics



Holly Cairns,
TD



Norah Casey,
Businesswoman
and Broadcaster



Lisa Chambers,
Senator



Jim Clarcken,
CEO Oxfam Ireland, Executive
Director of Oxfam International
and IHREC Commissioner



Alison Cowzer,
Chairperson,
Women for Election



Róisín Deery,
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
Officer, Oireachtas Service



Tom Mallon,
Barrister



Ronan Murphy,
Political scientist – public
service reform and change
management, Oireachtas Service



Cáit NicAmhlaobh,
Political Policy Advisor
and Administrator



Fiona O'Loughlin,
Senator and Chairperson
of the Irish Women's
Parliamentary Caucus



Neale Richmond,
TD



Mary Upton,
Chair, former TD



Fintan Warfield,
Senator

Executive Summary

The Houses of the Oireachtas want and need to reflect in their work all of the diversity that exists in Ireland, to appreciate and understand the varying needs of different people and use that knowledge to improve policy-making and legislating in Ireland. The realities of serving in the Houses of the Oireachtas, and working to support the work of the Houses, can be very exacting. The Forum heard evidence on how challenging that can be for Members, their staff, civil service staff and contractors. We want our national parliament to support and encourage diversity in order to add greater depth and breadth to the decision-making process and for it to be an effective parliament. That work is already underway, and this report represents a roadmap for the next stage of the journey for the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Modelling a family friendly parliament for the 21st century

Irish legislation does not consider Members of the Oireachtas to be employees in the traditional sense. One of the consequences of that, is that no formal provisions are made for Members of the Oireachtas to take an equivalent to maternity leave, paternity leave, adoptive leave, parental leave, *force majeure* leave, carer's leave, and sick leave. Taking leave on these occasions is expected in the modern workplace and is recommended or legally mandated for employees. The nature of the role of parliamentarians and the operation of the Houses of the Oireachtas means that supporting such periods of leave is more complicated than in most workplaces in Ireland.

Modernising the parliamentary workplace will create the environment that will allow a much greater diversity of people to consider public representation, which will benefit us all. The recommendations the Forum is making to address this challenge are substantial, as they include the creation of an equivalent to protective leaves for Members, the introduction of a proxy voting system in limited circumstances, the creation of a formal 'pairing' system and making full use of technological advances to allow for hybrid sittings of parliament. These changes are substantial and will be challenging to implement.

Effect of sitting arrangements for Members and all staff

The lateness and unpredictability of hours were the two issues raised most often by staff and stakeholders who engaged with the Forum. This challenge is one of the hardest to address. COVID-19 has shown how significant changes can be implemented. As new post-COVID workplaces emerge, the Houses of the Oireachtas may wish to take advantage of some of those changes to create an effective and efficient parliament. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service should now address areas where staff are working very long, late and unpredictable hours. Members and political parties and groups should also facilitate appropriate flexible and remote working for their staff.

Including all perspectives when legislating

The sole and exclusive power of making laws for the State rests with the Oireachtas. It is important that the process of considering draft legislation is as robust as possible. Increasing the scrutiny input from people with diverse lived experiences throughout the legislative process will make a tangible difference to the laws that are passed. The diversity of membership of the Houses and their Committees must be improved.

Online abuse and Member and staff safety

The increasingly high levels of online political abuse faced by Members can lead to a reluctance to stand for election or re-election. That online abuse can escalate into personal abuse, and concerns of physical threats for Members, aspiring Members, their families and their staff. Evidence seems to show that those from more diverse backgrounds, especially women, can face a particularly harsh environment. While this is part of a broader trend that goes beyond political discourse and public representatives, the repercussions of such abuse, will have a direct impact on the diversity of our Houses of the Oireachtas.

The 51 recommendations in this report seek to address the challenges of creating an inclusive, family friendly and gender-sensitive workplace for all in the parliamentary community.

Summary of Recommendations

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority Recommendations – Referendum to address remote working and proxy voting

During the 33rd Dáil, introduce a constitutional referendum to amend Article 15 that would enable the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce proxy voting (for Maternity, Paternity and Sick Leave) and arrangements for Members to participate remotely with parliamentary privilege in certain Oireachtas business. (Recommendation 17)

Preferably by the end of the 33rd Dáil term, or until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, assuming a positive outcome, the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce hybrid sittings of some Dáil, Seanad and Committee business where Members can choose to participate in certain business remotely or to be physically present. (Recommendation 18)

Preferably by the end of the 33rd Dáil term, or until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, assuming a positive outcome, the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce regional hubs, located in other State buildings, for Members from surrounding constituencies to participate in certain Dáil, Seanad or Committee business without the need to be physically present in the parliamentary complex. (Recommendation 19)

Priority Recommendations – Increased representation of women on Oireachtas Committees

In the Committees established by the 34th Dáil and 27th Seanad, there must be at least one woman from each House on each Committee. After the following election, Committee Chairs are to be 50% men and 50% women and there is to be a 40% gender balance on all Committees. Additional Parliamentary Assistant support is to be provided for women Chairs until 40% of elected Members are women. (Recommendation 42)

Priority Recommendations – Reduce long, late and unpredictable sitting weeks

With immediate effect, Members and political parties and groups are to facilitate appropriate flexible working and remote working arrangements for their staff to address the long sitting hours, until other recommendations to eradicate long hours have been implemented. (Recommendation 13)

Houses of the Oireachtas Service to address areas where staff are working very long, late and unpredictable hours to serve sittings. This could include additional staff, the use of rosters, and/or role re-design. (Recommendation 10)

By March 2022, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service to promote and facilitate flexible remote and hybrid working arrangements for civil service staff, when appropriate and in line with Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) guidelines. (Recommendation 11)

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**Priority Recommendation – Increasing diversity in the parliamentary community**

At the next election, data on the age, gender and minority status of candidates and Members elected to the Dáil and Seanad to be collected on a voluntary basis and published with official election results. (Recommendation 41)

The Houses of the Oireachtas *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy* to include annual diversity reporting in line with National Inclusion Strategies (Gender, Disability, Traveller & Roma, Migrant Integration & LGBTI) (Oireachtas Annual Report). (Recommendation 43)

Priority Recommendation – Measures to ensure personal safety of Members and their staff

Provide appropriate personal security for Members and their staff. Establish dedicated supports for Members and their staff facing online abuse and harassment – technical as well as mental health supports. Additional supports to be made available for newly elected Members. (Recommendation 24)

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Other recommendations of the Forum

1. With immediate effect, Oireachtas Committees are to adhere to meeting timeslots.
2. By end 2021, both Houses to assert a strong commitment to family friendly practices/sittings in the Standing Orders. Standing Orders to be gender-proofed at every revision.
3. By January 2022, Dáil Éireann to adhere to the time of adjournment set out in the Standing Orders. Where additional business is added to the Dáil schedule, other business to be postponed to another sitting day.
4. By September 2022, Dáil, Seanad and Committees each to publish a sitting calendar for the year, where recess weeks are aligned with school holidays at Easter, Halloween and Christmas, as set out in Department of Education circulars.
5. By September 2022, Seanad to establish adjournment times for sitting days in the Standing Orders and introduce a voting block to be taken in the afternoon of a sitting day.
6. By September 2022, Dáil voting block to be moved within the weekly schedule, so that it is taken in the afternoon.
7. During the 33rd Dáil, assess the feasibility of introducing a fortnightly or monthly schedule for Dáil, Seanad and Committees. Dáil Business Committee currently sets out the schedule on a weekly basis.
8. During the 33rd Dáil, establish an appropriate system for managing the timetabling of Government Bills.
9. During the 33rd Dáil, consider the establishment of a new “main” Dáil Committee¹ where certain non-votable business could be taken, for example Parliamentary Questions and Topical Issues, or additional business added to the schedule.
12. The Forum recommends a review of the pay scales and role profiles for Secretarial Assistants to increase the starting salary, in light of the comparisons to be drawn with the salaries and role profile of Parliamentary Assistants.
14. Houses of the Oireachtas Service to develop and promote a ‘right to disconnect’ policy asking Members and staff to avoid sending non-urgent emails or making calls to colleagues at certain times of the day or at weekends (for example between 7pm and 8am on weekdays).
15. *Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Secretarial Facilities) Regulations 2021* to be amended to provide additional secretarial facilities for a period of two weeks to Members taking paternity leave. The current regulations provide additional secretarial facilities to Members taking maternity leave for 26 weeks.

1 Establishing a new “main” Dáil Committee may involve re-purposing a Committee room or the Audio-Visual room or other suitable space.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

16. By September 2022, develop a formal pairing system to facilitate Members taking maternity leave, paternity leave, sick leave, or travel for essential Government business. A rotating panel of pairs is preferable to a pairing arrangement that involves two Members. A formal note on Members' voting records to show both the leave and participation in pairing arrangements by Members. Public information to be included on the Oireachtas website explaining how arrangements work.
20. Until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, or if the Referendum is rejected, the Dáil to revise Standing Orders so that Dáil sittings are organised to a family friendly schedule: a) to identify routine non-votable business that could be transferred from the Dáil Chamber to a new "main" Dáil Committee to take non-votable business which would not require a decision of the Dáil and would have flexible membership, b) where urgent business is to be added to the schedule it would be taken in the new "main" Dáil Committee or business already on the schedule would be moved to the new "main" Dáil Committee.
21. By December 2022, Houses of the Oireachtas Service to consider amending its application of Carer's Leave so that all staff can take Carer's Leave in the manner that they require.
22. By September 2022, provide suitable, comfortable spaces for infant feeding, and ensure adequate infant changing facilities promoted by signage so that staff, Members, and visitors are aware of locations. Also provide a dedicated Family Room (ideally located close to the Chambers) for children of Members.
23. By December 2022, conduct a full review of the crèche to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the parliamentary community by providing enough spaces and at times that match the sittings of the Houses and associated work of parliament.
25. By September 2022, review existing codes of conduct on appropriate behaviour for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and set out clear sanctions for breaches of these codes.
26. From 2022, conduct surveys of Members, parliamentary staff, political staff and contractors at 3-year intervals to inform the ongoing implementation of the revised Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles and Policy and to review the accessibility of all supports.
27. By September 2022, an accessibility audit of the parliamentary complex is to be completed to ensure that it is fully accessible – including the Dáil and Seanad Chambers. The parliamentary complex should meet the Universal Design standard for accessibility.
28. By January 2022, a review of toilet facilities is to be undertaken to ensure there is an adequate provision of disabled access toilets, female, male and gender-neutral toilets and accessible changing facilities for all. Infant changing facilities should be accessible to both fathers and mothers. Free period products and sanitary bins should be made available in all toilets in the parliamentary complex.
29. Houses of the Oireachtas Service documentation to use non-discriminatory and gender inclusive language.
30. Houses of the Oireachtas Service documentation to adhere to standards of plain English and Irish.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

31. By December 2022, undertake an Inter-Parliamentary Union Gender Sensitive Assessment to be followed by a two-year plan of action including targets and reporting commitments.
32. By January 2022, Government to publish Gender and Equality Impact Assessments with draft legislation.
33. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service to provide for access to external expertise on gender, equality and diversity matters for Members, when considering draft legislation.
34. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service to develop in-house expertise on gender, equality and diversity matters in public policy.
35. Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas to increase the diversity of groups included in public consultations on their work, and to report annually on the diversity of witness lists.
36. Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas should continue to use remote engagement with witnesses, when appropriate, ensuring robust IT supports are in place to facilitate full engagement.
37. Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas should give attention to the potential diversity impact of draft Government Bills during the Pre-legislative consideration of Bills and to Private Members' Bills during Pre-Committee Stage scrutiny.
38. Political parties to set targets for ethnic minority women within political parties' gender quotas.
39. Through the Taoiseach's 11 nominees, representatives from ethnic minority communities to be appointed to the Seanad.
40. Political parties to set targets for ethnic minority representation. If there is no progress following the next electoral cycle, legislation on ethnic minority targets to be developed in consultation with affected groups and devised in a way which does not in its ultimate design exclude groups.
44. Conduct a review of recruitment processes for Civil Service staff and political staff, to minimise any conscious or unconscious bias which might hinder recruitment of a diverse and representative workforce in the Houses.
45. Develop and deliver comprehensive mandatory inclusivity and diversity training to all Members and staff.
46. Develop a suite of work placement programmes with an emphasis on equitable and transparent access, best practice standards and good learning outcomes.
47. Oireachtas *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy* and *Health, Well Being and Inclusion Strategy 2021-23* are to be monitored, and their implementation evaluated, to inform the drafting of future strategies.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

48. Review rules pertaining to the naming of voluntary groups, societies and networks established by Members and staff in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Establish a process whereby these groups can apply to be formally associated with the Houses of the Oireachtas by seeking approval from an appropriate body and committing to a Code of Practice.
49. Oireachtas dress code to recognise national dress as well as acknowledging national/international days of celebration, thus more broadly reflecting modern Irish society.
50. Review images and symbols present in the parliamentary complex and on the Oireachtas website to ensure that they reflect inclusion goals. Continue with the 'women on walls' initiatives and expand it to include images of other underrepresented groups.
51. Houses of the Oireachtas Commission to review the implementation of the Forum's recommendations on a six-monthly basis and report on progress through its Annual Reports over the next four years.

Numbers reflect the numbering of Recommendations in the body of the report.

Introduction

The *Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament* ('the Forum') was established by the Ceann Comhairle of the 33rd Dáil, Mr. Seán Ó Feargháil, T.D., and held its inaugural meeting on 23 March 2021, meeting regularly until the end of October 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic all meetings were held online.

Opening the Forum, the Ceann Comhairle stated that he hoped that, during the course of its work, the Forum would propose *"practical and achievable recommendations that will foster and support a more inclusive and family friendly working environment for all working in our parliamentary community"* and that the Forum, in its final report would present recommendations which will make the parliamentary community *"a more attractive, rewarding and accessible career option for both men and women of all ages and from all walks of life"* and to ensure that *"our national parliament has a parliamentary community that is family friendly and inclusive in its composition, structure, operations and methods of work"*.

At its first meeting, the Forum described its vision for the Houses of the Oireachtas *to be a leading parliamentary community where all people are equally represented, have equality of opportunity, and feel included. The Forum strives to ensure the Houses of the Oireachtas is a dynamic and diverse working environment where every person feels welcome, empowered and valued for their individual experience, opinions and contribution.*

Of its 51 recommendations, the Forum has prioritised five areas:

- A Referendum to amend Article 15 of the Constitution to permit proxy voting and remote participation in some Dáil and Seanad business as this would allow Members to take maternity, paternity and sick leave and it would also enable the Houses of the Oireachtas and Committees to reorganise the sitting weeks to move away from the long and unpredictable sitting hours.
- The need to improve the gender balance on Oireachtas Committees in terms of membership and chairing Committees but also in terms of the people giving evidence to the Committees. Given the detailed scrutiny work done by Committees, it is essential that different gender perspectives are fully considered.
- Related to the sitting hours is the need for measures that will end staff working very long, late and unpredictable hours to serve sittings. This could include additional staff, the use of rosters, and/or role re-design;
- The need to track changes in the diversity of the parliamentary community through appropriate collection and reporting of data on the diversity of the Membership of the Houses of the Oireachtas and the civil service staff;
- Measures to protect Members and their staff from political violence and harassment in real life and online.

Houses of the Oireachtas, the parliament and a place of work

The Irish Parliament is an institution at the heart of the Irish life. Since it was established just over 100 years ago there have been many changes in Ireland, and the population has grown and become more diverse. While more women are now elected to the Dáil, particularly since the introduction of the gender quotas for candidates of political parties, 23% is far from reflecting the population of women in Ireland. At Census 2016 there were 53,009 more females than males in Ireland. More needs to be done to increase the number of women elected. Ireland is ranked 100th in the world for women in national parliaments.² The representation of minority groups also requires some affirmative action to better reflect Irish society.

The Houses of the Oireachtas is a complex workplace with several different employers, and over 1,300 people working in various roles. There are Members of both Houses and the political staff they employ, the civil service staff who serve the parliament, and the journalists who report on the proceedings, as well as contract staff. Everyone working in the parliament has family and a life outside their work.

The Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament comprised 15 people with different perspective on how parliament should and could change its practices to be a better workplace, a family friendly workplace, and an inclusive parliamentary community that reflects Irish society. The definitions of family, family friendly parliament, equality, gender sensitive parliament, and diversity and inclusion that the Forum worked with are set out in the appendices.

The Forum heard from a wide variety of stakeholders who identified the problems and offered solutions. The Forum was told that the Oireachtas should be an exemplar workplace. It was put to the Forum that potential candidates are turned off the idea of running for election when they look at the gruelling hours or the political harassment endured by politicians and how they impact on participation in family life. The Forum was also told that it is not enough that Members legislate for workers generally to improve the terms and conditions including rights under the Organisation of Working Time Act. Those working in the Houses of the Oireachtas must also enjoy these rights.

The Forum brought modern working methods and employee expectations to its consideration of how to make the Houses of the Oireachtas more family friendly and inclusive. It concluded with 51 recommendations. Most of the recommendations can be implemented within the Houses of the Oireachtas. The key to resolving the problems created by the long sitting hours and providing some flexibility to Members rests with a constitutional referendum.

2 <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>

Structure of the report

The report and the recommendations of the Forum are structured around the three goals set out in its terms of reference:

Goal 1: making the Houses of the Oireachtas a more inclusive, family friendly, and gender-sensitive workplace for the parliamentary community.

Goal 2: ensuring that the Houses of the Oireachtas are supported and resourced to take account of gender and equality issues when legislating.

Goal 3: improving the diversity of the parliamentary community to better reflect society in Ireland.

The report sets out a range of recommendations from immediately practical and achievable to ambitious longer-term proposals requiring constitutional reform and significant institutional change. This Report has sought to identify the specific bodies with the capacity to implement them (see below). As an aid to monitoring progress on the implementation of the recommendations they have been categorised as either short-term (12 months) or medium-term (3 years). The medium-term timeframe may extend beyond the life of the current 33rd Dáil.

- **Dáil Éireann** and **Seanad Éireann** determine their rules of procedure in their respective Standing Orders.
- The **Houses of the Oireachtas Commission** is the governing body which oversees the delivery of services to the Houses of the Oireachtas by the Oireachtas Service.
- The **Houses of the Oireachtas Service** provides the advice and support services that keep the Oireachtas working smoothly.
- **Oireachtas Committees** are established by the Dáil and Seanad.
- **Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER)** is responsible for public service pay and the development and implementation of HR policies in the Civil Service.
- The **Office of Public Works (OPW)** is the government agency that manages the States properties, including Leinster House and the parliamentary complex.
- The **Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Franchise Section**, is responsible for developing and overseeing the electoral system.
- An **Electoral Commission** is currently being established to oversee election management in Ireland.

The Chair of the Forum will write to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) to advise on its recommendations about the salary and role profile of Secretarial Assistants in the Houses of the Oireachtas, carer's leave and the extension of paternity leave arrangements to Members of the Oireachtas. Similarly, the Chair of the Forum will write to the relevant sections of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and those establishing an Electoral Commission in Ireland about its recommendations on electoral law, the collection of data on candidates and elected Members and also to bring some of the ideas about how to support from the submissions received by the Forum. (Copies of these letters are included in Appendices).

The final recommendation asks that the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission will review progress on the Forum recommendations on a six-monthly basis and report on developments in its Annual Reports for the next four years.

Goal 1: Making the Houses of the Oireachtas a more inclusive, family friendly, and gender-sensitive workplace for the parliamentary community

The Houses of the Oireachtas are an institution central to the Irish political system, and are also the workplace for a large parliamentary community. In many places, politics and parliament were traditionally an all-male business. Parliaments are recognised as masculine institutions because of the way in which they were established and continue to operate, particularly the times and patterns of parliamentary sittings that require politicians to work long hours away from their families.³ Since the report on women's participation in politics by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights (2009)⁴ and the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) work on Gender Sensitive Parliaments in 2011⁵, several reports have focused on increasing the number of women in politics/parliament, most notably the final report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality.⁶ The Forum endorses the Citizens' Assembly recommendations in this regard (See Appendices). Recently there has been a number of reports on improving the ethnic diversity of parliament.⁷ The Forum has considered the recommendations in these reports and engaged with some of the authors, including Dr Catherine Day (Citizens' Assembly), Ivana Bacik TD and Professor Sarah Childs. Apart from the Citizens' Assembly report, these reports focused on the working conditions of politicians. The Forum has undertaken its work based on the premise that the Houses of the Oireachtas are a workplace for all the parliamentary community.

The parliamentary community includes the Members and staff (civil service staff, political staff and contract staff) which is over 1,300 people, as well as visitors. There are two types of visitor: a) those attending on business, for example committee witnesses, international delegations, interest representative groups and constituency-based groups meeting their elected representatives, and b) visitors who come to Leinster House for tours as part of the Houses of the Oireachtas outreach and public engagement programmes (over 40,000 people in 2019).⁸

The main issues arising under Goal One are the long and uncertain sitting hours, appropriate arrangements for maternity, paternity and other leave for Members of the Oireachtas, opportunities for hybrid working, measures to address harassment and bullying, carer's leave and childcare facilities and the constraints of the physical parliamentary complex.

Late, long and unpredictable sitting hours

There is a consensus on the Forum that the late, long and often uncertain, finishing times for sittings of the Dáil, Seanad and Committees is the greatest impediment to the Houses of the Oireachtas being an inclusive, family friendly and gender-sensitive workplace. This was reinforced by the submissions received and the presentations made to the Forum. The late sitting hours impact on the working lives of all in the parliamentary community. Uncertainty around finishing times makes planning difficult, in particular planning around caring responsibilities and planning for a healthy work/life balance.

3 Josefina Erikson, Cecilia Josefsson, The Parliament as a Gendered Workplace: How to Research Legislators' (UN)Equal Opportunities to Represent, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 2020 <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsaa049>

4 Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights (2009), Second Report. Women's participation in politics.

5 IPU (2011) *Gender Sensitive parliaments. A Global Review of Good Practice*, IPU (2011) *Gender Sensitive parliament. Self-assessment toolkit*

6 [Report-of-the-citizens-assembly-on-gender-equality.pdf](#) (citizensassembly.ie).

7 National Women's Council of Ireland (2019) *Women beyond the Dail: More women in local government*, National Women's Council of Ireland (2013) *Parliament of all talents: Building a women friendly Oireachtas*, Fiona Buckley and Lisa Keenan (2020) *More women. Changing the face of politics*, Sarah Childs (2015) *The Good Parliament*, Sarah Childs (2017) *Diversity Sensitive Parliaments*, UK Parliament (2018) *UK Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018*.

8 *Houses of the Oireachtas Annual Report 2019* There were no physical tours in 2020 due to COVID-19 precautions.

The Houses of the Oireachtas usually meet from Tuesday to Thursday; this is known as the sitting week. Over the last twenty years there has been a steady increase in the number of hours in a week when the Dáil meets, known as the sitting hours. The sitting hours and days are set out in the Dáil Standing Orders. In 2002 the Dáil was scheduled to sit for 23 hours and 15 minutes over the sitting week. The current Standing Orders (2021) provide for 31 hours and 35 minutes sitting time – an increase of eight hours and twenty minutes every week. [See Appendices – weekly sitting Hours]. It is common for the already long sitting hours of the Dáil to be extended at short notice to deal with additional business items. In the last four weeks before the Summer recess 2021, the Dáil sat later than scheduled on seven of thirteen sitting days. In the last four weeks before the Christmas recess 2020, the Dáil sat later than expected on twelve out of fifteen sitting days. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Dáil sat after midnight on eight occasions. By comparison the Dáil sat after midnight approximately one night per year from 2006-2019.

The Forum is aware that the Dáil and Seanad must deal with urgent national business as it arises. However, the Forum is of the opinion that such business should not be scheduled in such a way that it results in later than planned finishing times, except on rare occasions. To accommodate urgent business other business, should be postponed or debates curtailed.

As part of Dáil Reform measures introduced in 2016, the Dáil Business Committee was established to agree arrangements for the business to be taken in the Dáil the following week in line with the Standing Orders, i.e. legislation (Government and Private Members' Bills), Motions and Statements. There is no similar Committee in the Seanad. The Leader of the Seanad issues a schedule as an indication of the business to be proposed in the following week following discussions with political group leaders in the Seanad. The daily Order of Business as proposed by the Leader of the Seanad under Standing Orders usually, but not always, sets the conclusion time for business on that day. On occasion, the finish time is unspecified as the item of business under consideration may be open-ended. Although there is no clear finishing time set for Seanad sittings, they are not as long or as late as Dáil sittings. Oireachtas Committees meet on sitting days, Tuesday to Thursday. The Working Group of Committee Chairs (WGCC) approves the allocation of meeting slots to Committees at the commencement of each Dáil and reviews it on a periodic basis. Committee meetings are generally organised a few weeks in advance, and the weekly schedule of meetings is published online on the preceding Friday. Every Oireachtas Committee has a three-hour timeslot each week, with additional timeslots available. Over time the Oireachtas Committee meeting times have become less family friendly to facilitate the number of Committee meetings required. The current timetable has three x three-hour Committee meeting timeslots on each sitting day, the final meetings end at 10pm on Tuesday and 8:30pm on Wednesday and Thursday. By comparison in 2017 there were two x three-hour timeslots each day with the second meetings finished at 7/8pm on Tuesday and 4:30pm on Wednesday and 5pm on Thursday.

In 2016 a voting block was first introduced in Dáil Éireann as a family friendly measure designed to give Members more flexibility around their attendance in the Chamber during the sitting week, secure in the knowledge that they would not miss a vote. The Dáil voting block is scheduled on a Wednesday night in the current Dáil. There is no similar voting block arrangement in the Seanad.

Members of the Oireachtas have constituency duties in addition to their work in the parliament. Traditionally Monday and Friday have been non-sitting days to facilitate Members engaging in constituency duties. A 2010 survey of TDs found that they spend 53% of the working week on constituency-based work, 38% on legislative work (speaking and participating in plenary and Committee debates, researching legislation and amendments, and participating in parliamentary party life) and 9% on 'other' work which included policy formulation, party activity, ministerial work and meeting with national advocacy groups.⁹ The constituency role of TDs is similar to MPs in other countries, regardless of electoral system.¹⁰ Following the 2011 General Election, a survey found that nearly half of new TDs were 'not very satisfied' or 'not at all satisfied' with the sitting hours and were alarmed at the prospect of four-day sitting weeks.¹¹ One of the reforms introduced in the 31st Dáil was monthly/fortnightly Friday sittings to debate Private Members' Bills.¹² There were no votes held on Friday sittings and there was a poor level of attendance by Members. Friday sittings were discontinued after the 31st Dáil. The Dáil experimented with holding Committee meetings and plenary sessions at different times in the sitting week in the 32nd Dáil, but this was found to be too restrictive.

To inform its work, the Forum considered how other parliaments organise sittings and plan parliamentary business, specifically eight parliaments selected to demonstrate different approaches to scheduling parliamentary work across the sitting week – Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Portugal, Sweden and UK.¹³ These parliaments generally sit for three or four days in a sitting week, leaving one to two days for constituency work. When there is parliamentary business scheduled across five days, the attendance of all Members is not required for the business on Mondays/Fridays.

- One or two late night sittings until 10pm or 11pm are the norm, except in the Germany Bundestag (9pm). The Bundestag sits five days per week and the House of Commons four days per week with 13 additional Friday sittings. In Denmark and Estonia, plenary sessions continue until all business has been completed – there is no set finishing time.
- Some parliaments schedule committee and plenary sittings to be held at different times; committee and plenary weeks (European Parliament), or different timeslots for plenary and committees throughout the sitting week (Estonia and Portugal).
- Fixed voting times, like that in Dáil Éireann (Wednesday night), are considered to be an efficient approach to plenary scheduling as Members know when they are required to attend for a vote and as such they facilitate Members' engagement with other parliamentary activities. On the other hand, separating votes from the relevant debates decreases the chance that Members will be persuaded by a debate. However, as Members tend to vote along party lines in plenary, it is hard to ascertain the real impact of separating the vote from the debate.

9 Joint Committee on the Constitution (2010) Third Report Article 16. Results of survey of Members of both House of the Oireachtas. The Electoral System, Representative Role of TDs and Proposals for Change. Interim Report.

10 Michael Gallagher & Lee Komito (2018) "Constituency role of Dáil deputies" in Coakley and Gallagher Politics in the Republic of Ireland (p.200).

11 Mary Murphy (2011) At home in the new house. A study of Ireland's first-time TDs <https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/publications/briefings/at-home-in-the-new-house-a-study-of-ireland's-first-time-tds>

12 The Friday sittings were monthly between 2011-2013 and fortnightly from November 2013-2016 – see Appendices.

13 Three of the parliaments selected rank in top 12 of the IPU for the level of representation by women – New Zealand (48%), Sweden (47%) and Finland (46%).

- The Australian House of Representatives¹⁴ and the UK House of Commons¹⁵ established additional (overflow) debating chambers in the 1990s as a solution to the challenges of providing additional time for a restricted range of debates without extending the sitting week or sitting days. The concept has also been considered by the Canadian House of Commons.¹⁶ Debates held in the parallel chambers occur simultaneously with debates in the main chamber. It should be noted that there are no votes on business in the parallel chambers.

Legal advice provided to the Forum set out the constitutional requirement and imperative for Oireachtas Members to be physically present within the parliamentary precincts to participate in proceedings of the Houses and their Committees and that Members must be physically present within the Chamber or Committee room to vote and to avail of parliamentary privilege. As such, the effect of this constitutional imperative is to preclude remote participation by Oireachtas Members in Dáil and Seanad debates, Committee proceedings, any kind of remote voting – proxy voting (where another Member is nominated to vote on behalf of the absent Member) or any form of remote electronic voting.

As remote participation and voting are not currently an option, and after due consideration, the Forum has concluded that the three-day sitting week is the most appropriate pattern to facilitate the parliamentary and constituency duties of Members of the Oireachtas. However, measures are urgently required to reverse the continuing expansion of sitting hours and to ensure certainty around the finishing times for sittings to create a family friendly parliament. If that proves impossible in the short-term, the trend for ever increasing hours during the sitting week must be discontinued.

New parliamentary practices are recommended, specifically a system for the timetabling of Government legislation and consideration of a new “main” Committee of the Dáil for certain non-votable Dáil business to ease the pressure on the Dáil chamber and sitting schedule. Timetabling Government legislation would see a set timeframe associated with most Bills, with specific time between the stages in the legislative process so that Members and their staff could prepare for legislative debates. Timetabling would also facilitate the parliamentary service to process the legislative documentation and to provide research and analysis on forthcoming legislation within normal business hours. This would not preclude the urgent treatment of certain Bills. The additional “main” Dáil Committee could be used for certain non-votable business, for example Parliamentary Questions, Topical Issues, or Statements (particularly when Statements are added to the schedule at short notice).

| RECOMMENDATION NO. 1 | COMMITTEES | 12 MONTHS |
|--|------------|-----------|
| With immediate effect, Oireachtas Committees are to adhere to meeting timeslots. | | |

| RECOMMENDATION NO. 2 | DÁIL/SEANAD | 12 MONTHS |
|--|-------------|-----------|
| By end 2021, both Houses to assert a strong commitment to family friendly practices/sittings in the Standing Orders. Standing Orders to be gender-proofed at every revision. | | |

14 Australia. House of Representatives. [Info Sheet 16 The Federation Chamber](#).

15 UK Parliament website. [Westminster Hall Debates](#).

16 Canada. House of Commons. [98th Report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs](#).

RECOMMENDATION NO. 3**DÁIL****12 MONTHS**

By January 2022, Dáil Éireann to adhere to the time of adjournment set out in the Standing Orders. Where additional business is added to the Dáil schedule, other business to be postponed to another sitting day.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 4**DÁIL, SEANAD AND
COMMITTEES****12 MONTHS**

By September 2022, Dáil, Seanad and Committees each to publish a sitting calendar for the year, where recess weeks are aligned with school holidays at Easter, Halloween and Christmas, as set out in Department of Education circulars.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 5**SEANAD****12 MONTHS**

By September 2022, Seanad to establish adjournment times for sitting days in the Standing Orders and introduce a voting block to be taken in the afternoon of a sitting day.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 6**DÁIL****12 MONTHS**

By September 2022, Dáil voting block to be moved within the weekly schedule, so that it is taken in the afternoon.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 7**DÁIL, SEANAD AND
COMMITTEES****3 YEARS**

During the 33rd Dáil, assess the feasibility of introducing a fortnightly or monthly schedule for Dáil, Seanad and Committees. Dáil Business Committee currently sets out the schedule on a weekly basis.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 8**HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS
COMMISSION/DÁIL/SEANAD/
GOVERNMENT****3 YEARS**

During the 33rd Dáil, establish an appropriate system for managing the timetabling of Government Bills.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 9**HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS
COMMISSION/DÁIL****3 YEARS**

During the 33rd Dáil, consider the establishment of a new "main" Dáil Committee¹⁷ where certain non-votable business could be taken, for example Parliamentary Questions and Topical Issues, or additional business added to the schedule.

17 Establishing a new "main" Dáil Committee may involve re-purposing a Committee room or the Audio-Visual room or other suitable space.

Working conditions associated with long and unpredictable sitting hours

Extra attendance is a feature of the civil service, and late-night working is specifically required in the Houses of the Oireachtas from time to time with overtime payments, time *in lieu* or compensatory leave arrangements in line with civil service legislation and circulars. It is important to note that regular overtime does not apply to all grades or sections. There is also a flexi-time scheme available to civil service staff up to, but not including, Assistant Principal grade. Rostered shifts apply for some staff providing services to support the sittings of the Houses of the Oireachtas, for example in the Usher grades, Debates Office, and Rannóg an Aistriúcháin. However, there are staff who attend for normal business hours and continue working until well after sittings have finished to process the decisions made by the Houses and to prepare for the following day's sitting. This tends to be mainly procedural staff who must work to tight deadlines. Often these staff need to attend to work during normal office hours the following day.

The Forum is firmly of the view that the Houses of the Oireachtas Service must take immediate measures to prevent work practices that involve onerous working hours and can lead to breaches of the *Organisation of Working Time Act 1997*. Additional staff, the re-design of job roles, a greater use of rosters for civil service staff and remote working were considered by the Forum as measures to end the long and late working hours of civil service staff serving sittings. Remote working required during the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to explore this method of working on a large scale and it worked successfully for many roles. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) and the Houses of the Oireachtas Service are currently developing remote working policies and practices for the future.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 10 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS SERVICE 12 MONTHS

Houses of the Oireachtas Service to address areas where staff are working very long, late and unpredictable hours to serve sittings. This could include additional staff, the use of rosters, and/or role re-design.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 11 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS SERVICE 12 MONTHS

By March 2022, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service to promote and facilitate flexible remote and hybrid working arrangements for civil service parliamentary staff, when appropriate and in line with Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) guidelines.

Political staff are directly employed by Members and political parties under the *Scheme for the Provision of Secretarial Assistance to Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and Qualifying Parties*.¹⁸ Although the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission pays the salaries of political staff, it is DPER that sets the terms and conditions of employment for the roles. The political staff employed by Members provide support to

18 Houses of the Oireachtas [Scheme for Secretarial Assistance](#).

Members in their parliamentary and representative roles. They may be based in Leinster House or in constituency offices across the country and the roles and responsibilities carried out vary from Member to Member. Deputies may employ a Parliamentary Assistant and a Secretarial Assistant and Senators may employ one Secretarial Assistant. Political staff employed by political parties/groups are employed at a number of different grades and roles. Political staff are required to work outside normal hours and can claim overtime for up to eight hours per week, except in the most senior grades. Flexibility for political staff is at the discretion of the political party/group or Member as the employer.

Through submissions and presentations, the Forum learned of the challenges faced by Secretarial Assistants due to the current salary scale, which begins lower than the 'living wage'. The Forum was also told about the similarity between the work undertaken by Secretarial Assistants and the Parliamentary Assistants on a higher pay scale. The Forum has recommended that DPER and the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission review role profiles and salary scales for Secretarial Assistants and Parliamentary Assistants as a matter of urgency. The pay and conditions are of immediate concern to the current political staff and could also be a barrier to recruiting staff from more diverse backgrounds. A number of political staff have put themselves forward as candidates at election, and as such it is important that people from traditionally underrepresented groups would consider applying for these jobs as a route to elected office.

The Forum further recommends that Members and political parties and groups facilitate appropriate flexible working and remote working arrangements for their political staff. Such flexibility would assist political staff with managing the long sitting days.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 12 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 12 MONTHS
COMMISSION/DPER**

The Forum recommends a review of the pay scales and role profiles for Secretarial Assistants to increase the starting salary, in light of the comparisons to be drawn with the salaries and role profile of Parliamentary Assistants.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 13 POLITICAL PARTIES/MEMBERS 12 MONTHS

With immediate effect, Members, political parties and groups are to facilitate appropriate flexible working and remote working arrangements for their staff to address the long sitting hours, until other recommendations to eradicate long hours have been implemented.

The Right to Disconnect refers to an employee's right to be able to disengage from work and refrain from engaging in work-related electronic communications, such as emails, telephone calls or other messages, outside normal working hours¹⁹. The long hours culture, owing to the sittings, means that the right to disconnect is of critical importance to both the civil service and political staffs.

19 Workplace Relations [Code-of-practice-for-employers-and-employees-on-the-right-to-disconnect.pdf](https://www.workplacelrelations.ie/) (workplacelrelations.ie).

The Forum recommends that the Houses of the Oireachtas, in consultation with staff, develop a 'Right to Disconnect Policy' and deliver an awareness campaign for all staff and advice to Members in their role as employers on the right to disconnect. It is important that such a policy would seek to change the cultural norms on the issue.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 14 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 12 MONTHS
SERVICE/MEMBERS/
POLITICAL PARTIES**

Houses of the Oireachtas Service to develop and promote a 'right to disconnect' policy asking Members and staff to avoid sending non-urgent emails or making calls to colleagues at certain times of the day or at weekends (for example between 7pm and 8am on weekdays).

Maternity, paternity and other leave for Members of the Oireachtas

After sitting hours, the lack of an equivalent to maternity, paternity, sick leave and other protective leaves for Members, is the second greatest impediment to a family friendly, inclusive and gender-sensitive working environment for Members. Maternity leave is a more obvious issue now that more women are putting themselves forward as candidates for election and getting elected. The Forum is aware of two Private Members' Bills (PMBs) that attempted to introduce maternity leave for Members.²⁰

The Forum sought legal advice as to the employment status of Members and the consequences of this status on matters such as maternity and paternity entitlements. The legal advice provided confirmed that Oireachtas Members are not considered as employees and, as a result, may not avail of certain employee protections and neither are they governed by certain legislation which relates to employees' rights and obligations. With this advice the Forum has sought alternative approaches to providing the equivalent to maternity, paternity and sick leave for Members.

There are three elements to consider when a Member takes any period of leave: their salary and allowances, the representation of their constituents, and voting on legislation and other matters in the Dáil, Seanad and Committees.

Members of the Oireachtas are elected and hold their positions at the will of the electorate. They are paid a salary from the time they are elected. They are also entitled to an allowance (the Travel and Accommodation Allowance [TAA]) which is based on attendance, and the amount paid can be fully retained where Members have attended Leinster House on a minimum of 120 days per year. A Member who takes maternity, paternity or any other leave continues to be paid their salary. Their TAA continues to be paid, but a repayment of 1% of TAA must be made by Members for each day less than 120 days attended in a year. The Forum is not making any recommendations about how the salary of Members is treated when they take any period of leave.

²⁰ [Maternity Protection \(Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas\) Bill 2013 – No. 26 of 2013 – Houses of the Oireachtas](#) Sponsor: Seán Ó Fearghail. The Bill was defeated at second stage. [Maternity Protection \(Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas\) Bill 2018 – No. 23 of 2018 – Houses of the Oireachtas](#) Sponsors: Niamh Smyth and Anne Rabbitte. The Bill passed second stage in the Dáil and lapsed on dissolution of the Dáil in 2020.

Under Statutory Instrument, the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission provides additional supports to Members taking maternity and adoptive leave in the form of an additional full-time secretarial assistant for 26 weeks or 34 weeks.²¹ There is no such additional cover currently provided for a Member taking paternity leave or sick leave. The Forum recommends the establishment of an equivalent support for Members taking paternity leave, and it encourages Members who become fathers to take such leave to normalise the practice by men more generally. Paternity leave is also available to same-sex couples.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 15 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 12 MONTHS
COMMISSION/DPER

[Oireachtas \(Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices\) \(Secretarial Facilities\) Regulations 2021](#) to be amended to provide additional secretarial facilities for a period of two weeks for Members taking paternity leave. The current regulations provide additional secretarial facilities to Members taking maternity leave for 26 weeks.

Currently, when a Member is absent from parliament, and therefore not present to vote, they can enter an informal pairing arrangement with a Member from an opposing party who agrees not to vote and so balances out their absence. Generally, these arrangements only cover short absences. In 2021, there have been formal pairing arrangements between Members to cover two different six-month periods of maternity leave. The Forum has noted that in both cases it was other women Members who offered to pair with their colleagues, thus further reducing the number of women voting. It would be preferable if male Members would also participate in this type of pairing.

A Member involved in one of these pairings told the Forum about criticism she has received from the public for not voting. This indicates the need to inform the public about such arrangements – the Oireachtas website provides detailed information for the public on how the parliament works, including the parliamentary rules.

The Forum learned that formal access to maternity, paternity and parental leave is found in several parliaments. In some parliaments, where the electoral system permits, an MP may be substituted while on maternity leave. In other parliaments, maternity is one of the justifiable reasons to be absent from parliament without loss of salary, although there is no substitution and the Member may still attend to vote. Maternity leave is not formally provided by Westminster-style parliaments, except in Canada where it was introduced in 2018. The Spanish Parliament allows MPs on maternity leave to vote remotely and the UK House of Commons permits MPs absent due to childbirth and care of an infant to avail of proxy voting, i.e. they organise for another MP to vote on their behalf.

²¹ [Oireachtas \(Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices\) \(Secretarial Facilities\) Regulations 2021](#).

To make it possible for Members of the Oireachtas to take maternity, paternity and sick leave, the Forum supports holding a referendum to amend Article 15 of the Constitution. This would allow the Dáil and Seanad to develop new Standing Orders that would provide for: a) proxy voting in certain circumstances, and b) remote participation by Members in certain Dáil and Seanad non-votable business.²² It is not envisaged that Members on maternity leave would have to participate in parliamentary business. Introducing proxy voting by means of a referendum is a longer-term project. To address the needs of Members in the short term, the Forum has considered how to improve upon the current informal pairing arrangements.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 16**DÁIL, SEANAD AND
COMMUNICATIONS UNIT****12 MONTHS**

By September 2022, develop a formal pairing system to facilitate Members taking maternity leave, paternity leave, sick leave, or travel for essential Government business. A rotating panel of pairs is preferable to a pairing arrangement that involves two Members. A formal note on Members' voting records to show both the leave and participation in pairing arrangements by Members. Public information to be included on the Oireachtas website explaining how arrangements work.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 17**GOVERNMENT****3 YEARS**

During the 33rd Dáil, introduce a constitutional referendum to amend Article 15 that would enable the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce proxy voting (for Maternity, Paternity and Sick Leave) and arrangements for Members to participate remotely with parliamentary privilege in certain Oireachtas business.

Hybrid Parliament – modernisation

The COVID-19 pandemic forced parliaments across the world to consider new ways of working to ensure the continued functioning of parliament while ensuring the safety of Members and staff. In many cases this required amendments to the rules and procedures of parliament as well as technical solutions to maintain the integrity of voting and to facilitate the broadcasting of proceedings. Some parliaments introduced hybrid working methods where some Members participated remotely in debates and voted remotely in some circumstances.

The Forum is of the opinion that remote or hybrid arrangements would facilitate the re-design of the parliamentary sitting week to break the strict division between parliamentary and constituency days that result in the long sitting days on Tuesday to Thursday which cause the non-family friendly working conditions.

²² There is a Private members' Bill on the Dáil Order Paper currently awaiting Second Stage in Private Members' time [Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution \(Remote Parliamentary Voting\) Bill 2020 – No. 73 of 2020 – Houses of the Oireachtas](#) Sponsors: Jennifer Carroll Mac Neill.

However, the legal advice to the Forum was clear that Members must be physically present in the parliamentary complex to participate in proceedings and for such participation to avail of the privilege afforded by Article 15 of the Constitution. Members can participate, but not vote, in Oireachtas Committee meetings via video conference once they are in the parliamentary complex. Oireachtas Members may only vote while they are within the physical confines of the Chamber or Committee room. The position in relation to witnesses participating in Oireachtas Committee proceedings is somewhat different. Committee witnesses can engage remotely by video conference or be covered by privilege from a room in the parliamentary complex, again *via* video conference.

The Forum supports the holding of a referendum to permit proxy voting and remote participation in parliamentary sittings as the means of modernising the work practices of parliament and facilitating a more family friendly sitting pattern [Recommendation No. 17 above]. Assuming a positive outcome to such a referendum, there are several options that could be explored, including:

- Regional hubs that Members from surrounding constituencies could attend to participate in some Dáil, Seanad and Committee business without being in the parliamentary complex. The hubs could be in other State buildings. The Forum recommends that childcare facilities should be provided at regional hubs to meet the needs of Members and their staff as well as civil service staff on site.
- Hybrid sittings of the Dáil, Seanad and Committees where Members can choose to participate in certain business remotely or to be physically present at Leinster House.
- That the sitting week be re-designed so that all sessions take place remotely at some points in the week, and other parts of the week require physical presence. On that basis it would be possible to spread sittings across the week to avoid late night sittings.

The introduction of proxy voting and remote participation in parliamentary proceedings would require new Standing Orders and revision of the Parliamentary Standard Allowance.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 18 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 3 YEARS
COMMISSION/DÁIL, SEANAD
AND COMMITTEES

Preferably by the end of the 33rd Dáil term, or until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, assuming a positive outcome, the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce hybrid sittings of some Dáil, Seanad and Committee business where Members can choose to participate in certain business remotely or to be physically present.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 19 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 3 YEARS
COMMISSION/DÁIL AND
SEANAD

Preferably by the end of the 33rd Dáil term, or until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, assuming a positive outcome, the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce regional hubs, located in other State buildings, for Members from surrounding constituencies to participate in certain Dáil, Seanad or Committee business without the need to be physically present in the parliamentary complex.

In the event that the referendum cannot be held within the lifetime of this Dáil, the Forum recommends that the Dáil would completely revise the Standing Orders. The revision would start with a blank page to establish the most effective approach to all parliamentary business, to ensure parliament can fulfil its core functions which are to represent the people, to legislate and to hold government to account. Certain non-votable business, like Parliamentary Questions, Statements and Topical Issues could be taken in a new “main” Dáil Committee while other votable business is taken in the Dáil Chamber. The amount of time given to different business items and the timeslots for contributions should be reviewed. Such a revision would be challenging, but the Forum is firmly of the view that only such a disruptive approach can address the expanding sitting hours in the event that remote participation and proxy voting cannot be introduced.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 20 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 3 YEARS
COMMISSION/DÁIL**

Until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, or if the Referendum is rejected, the Dáil to revise Standing Orders so that Dáil sittings are organised to a family friendly schedule: a) to identify routine non-votable business that could be transferred from the Dáil Chamber to a new “main” Dáil Committee to take non-votable business which would not require a decision of the Dáil and would have flexible membership, b) where urgent business is to be added to the schedule it would be taken in the new “main” Dáil Committee or business already on the schedule would be moved to the new “main” Dáil Committee.

Childcare and other caring responsibilities

Childcare is identified as an issue that prevents more women participating in the political system and putting themselves forward for election.²³ The Forum recognises that good quality, affordable childcare is an issue for all working parents, not only elected Members, and endorses the Citizens’ Assembly recommendations in relation to childcare.²⁴ The Forum further recognises that Members and staff also have other caring responsibilities. A family friendly workplace needs to help its workers to balance their caring responsibilities with their work.

The Forum discussions about the provision of childcare facilities addressed the need for on-site facilities with flexibility for users but also acknowledged that many parents prefer to have their childcare needs met closer to home and away from their workplace. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service provides a small onsite crèche which can cater for up to 29 pre-school children. There is also a facility for late night services and a drop-in service. Work is ongoing to provide a family room within the parliamentary complex. This child-friendly room would be available for parents to spend time with their children during long sitting days. This is not an additional childcare arrangement.²⁵ There are also breastfeeding and rest-rooms available across the complex. Breastfeeding is permitted in the Dáil and Seanad Chambers.

23 Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women’s Rights (2009), Second Report. Women’s participation in Politics, National Women’s Council of Ireland (2019) [Women beyond the Dail: More women in local government](#).

24 Citizens’ Assembly – Ireland should: (a) Over the next decade move to a publicly funded, accessible and regulated model of quality, affordable early years and out of hours childcare. (b) Increase the State share of GDP spent on childcare, from the current 0.37% of GDP to at least 1% by no later than 2030 in line with the UNICEF target. [Report-of-the-citizens-assembly-on-gender-equality.pdf](#) ([citizensassembly.ie](#)).

25 The Houses of the Oireachtas Commission agreed to a suggestion from the Oireachtas Women’s Parliamentary Caucus to provide a family room.

The Forum has made recommendations about the Oireachtas childcare facilities and has also recommended an Oireachtas-wide survey to gain a better understanding of the caring needs of the parliamentary community. Submissions and presentations to the Forum addressed the needs of carers and how the application of the current legislation within the Houses of the Oireachtas providing for carer's unpaid leave is too rigid, by not choosing a more flexible approach to the minimum period of leave permitted. Carers would benefit from being able to take shorter periods of leave as appropriate to their requirements. Carer's leave legislation is the responsibility of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth,²⁶ with DPER setting the Guidelines for the Civil Service and the Houses of the Oireachtas implementing that policy at the local level. The Forum recommends that the Houses of the Oireachtas addresses the need for more flexibility in the application of carer's leave in the Houses of the Oireachtas as a matter of urgency. The Forum further supports the slow return to work after maternity leave and extended carer's leave, as the challenges returning to the workplace after such leave can cause some people, and women in particular, to leave the workplace.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 21 HOUSES OF THE OIREACTHAS 12 MONTHS
SERVICE**

By December 2022, Houses of the Oireachtas Service to consider amending its application of Carer's Leave so that all staff can take Carer's Leave in the manner that they require.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 22 HOUSES OF THE OIREACTHAS 12 MONTHS
COMMISSION/OPW**

By September 2022, provide suitable, comfortable spaces for infant feeding, and ensure adequate infant changing facilities promoted by signage so that staff, Members, and visitors are aware of locations. Also provide a dedicated Family Room (ideally located close to the Chambers) for children of Members.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 23 HOUSE OF THE OIREACTHAS 12MONTHS
SERVICE**

By December 2022, conduct a full review of the crèche to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the parliamentary community by providing enough spaces and at times that match the sittings of the Houses and associated work of parliament.

26 S.I. No. 436/2020 – Disability, Equality, Human Rights, Integration and Reception (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2020 (irishstatutebook.ie).

Measures to address harassment and bullying in the parliamentary community

Threats of political violence and harassment, online and in real-life, are a real barrier to women and people from minority backgrounds entering and remaining in politics. Research finds that young women, members of ethnic minority communities and members of the LGBT+ community are disproportionately subject to political violence.²⁷ Politicians who are parents are further concerned for the safety and security of their children. Members of the Forum spoke of their personal experiences and their concerns for their staff as well as themselves. It is clear to the Forum that political violence is a serious threat to an inclusive and diverse parliament that is reflective of Irish society.

Members of the Oireachtas and their staff encounter abusive and threatening communications from the public, particularly on social media platforms. While social media companies have obligations to prevent such communications and there is legislation to deal with the perpetrators, it is important that Members and their staff have the technical support to address such communications as well as appropriate mental health supports. There are supports available through the Workplace Assistance Programme for Members, political staff and their families. The Forum heard of issues in accessing these supports and recommends a review of the accessibility of these supports. The Forum further recommends that newly-elected Members are provided with additional supports to address their personal safety and security.

| RECOMMENDATION NO.24 | HOUSES OF THE OIREACTHAS | 12 MONTHS |
|---|--------------------------|-----------|
| COMMISSION/SERVICE | | |
| Provide appropriate personal security for Members and their staff. Establish dedicated supports for Members and their staff facing online abuse and harassment – technical as well as mental health supports. Additional supports to be made available for newly elected Members. | | |

In 2018 the Houses of the Oireachtas launched the *Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles and Policy* as the standard of respect, dignity, safety and equality for everyone in the parliamentary community to prevent: a) bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment in the parliamentary workplace, and b) deal with complaints. In 2019 a Parliamentary Workplace Survey was carried out as part of the implementation of the policy.²⁸ The survey was intended to determine the extent to which bullying, harassment and sexual harassment was prevalent in the parliamentary community. It was also designed to inform the further implementation of the policy to discourage and prevent behaviours that are contrary to the principles and policy. There was a 37% response rate to the survey from the parliamentary community – 54% of Oireachtas staff and 25% of political staff or Members responded. The results indicated that 78% of respondents feel the Houses of the Oireachtas is a safe place to work. There were 15% who experienced bullying, 8% harassment and 3% sexual harassment, however the majority of those who experienced bullying did not formally report the behaviour, and this was mainly as they felt reporting it would be ineffective or they feared repercussions.

27 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 2018 [Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe](#), AILG (May 2021) [Report following councillor survey on threats, harassment, and intimidation in public office](#), Tom Felle, Eimer McCauley & Amy Blaney (2020) [Toxic tweets: female politicians, misogyny and social media](#), Irish Examiner 20 August 2021. [Claire McGing Violence against women in politics is a rising global problem.](#)

28 Houses of the Oireachtas (2018) [Parliamentary Workplace Survey](#).

The Forum recommends follow-on surveys at regular intervals to monitor the prevalence of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment and inform the ongoing implementation of the policy. It is also a means of promoting awareness of the policy, the reporting mechanisms and supports available. Under Goal 3, the Forum has further recommended mandatory diversity and inclusivity training for all staff and Members.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 25 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 12 MONTHS
COMMISSION, DÁIL AND
SEANAD**

By September 2022, review existing codes of conduct on appropriate behaviour for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and set out clear sanctions for breaches of these codes.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 26 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 3 YEARS
COMMISSION/SERVICE**

From 2022, conduct surveys of Members, parliamentary staff, political staff and contractors at 3-year intervals to inform the ongoing implementation of the revised Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles and Policy and to review the accessibility of all supports.

Physical infrastructure and access to the parliamentary complex

The Houses of the Oireachtas have been meeting in Leinster House since 1922. There have been expansions and extensions to the parliamentary complex in the intervening 100 years. However, it is clear that the complex cannot meet all the needs of a modern parliament. While the specific accessibility issues of Members and staff are treated on an individual basis, it is important that the parliamentary complex is more generally accessible for those visiting on business or on tours and seen to be accessible by those following proceedings online.

The Forum recommends an accessibility audit of the parliamentary complex, with particular reference to toilet facilities, as a matter of urgency and further recommends that the Houses of the Oireachtas meets the Universal Design standard for accessibility. Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.²⁹

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 27 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 12 MONTHS
COMMISSION/OPW**

By September 2022, an accessibility audit of the parliamentary complex is to be completed to ensure that it is fully accessible – including the Dáil and Seanad Chambers. The parliamentary complex should meet the Universal Design standard for accessibility.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 28 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 12 MONTHS
COMMISSION/OPW**

By January 2022, a review of toilet facilities is to be undertaken to ensure there is an adequate provision of disabled access toilets, female, male and gender-neutral toilets and accessible changing facilities for all. Infant changing facilities should be accessible to both fathers and mothers. Free period products and sanitary bins should be made available in all toilets in the parliamentary complex.

To be an inclusive workplace, the Houses of the Oireachtas complex must be accessible to all who work, or aspire to work, there.

The Houses of the Oireachtas has an Access Officer and a Disability Liaison Officer who can give assistance and guidance to people with disabilities in the parliamentary community and visitors. The Access Officer, appointed under section 26 (2) of the Disability Act 2005, provides assistance and advice to people with disabilities accessing the parliamentary complex. All civil service Departments/Offices are required to appoint a Disability Liaison Officer (DLO). The role of the DLO is to provide information and advice in relation to disability to civil service staff with disabilities and to their colleagues and supervisors on a confidential basis.

The way that the Houses of the Oireachtas uses language is another area in which to address inclusivity in person or online – internally for the Parliamentary community but also for visitors. The Houses of the Oireachtas has an Irish Sign Language (ISL) Strategy and was one of the first civil service bodies to recruit full time Sign Language Interpreters. Prior to the COVID-19 restrictions, tours in ISL were provided, and there is ISL interpretation on Oireachtas TV as well as an ISL page on the Oireachtas website.³⁰ The Forum recommends that the Houses of the Oireachtas ensures that all its documentation, including information on the Oireachtas website, uses inclusive and accessible language.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 29 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 12 MONTHS
SERVICE**

Houses of the Oireachtas Service documentation to use non-discriminatory and gender inclusive language.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 30 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 12 MONTHS
SERVICE**

Houses of the Oireachtas Service documentation to adhere to standards of plain English and Irish.

³⁰ Irish Sign Language in the Oireachtas – Houses of the Oireachtas.

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Gender Sensitive Toolkit

The Forum was asked to consider undertaking an audit of the Houses of the Oireachtas using the Interparliamentary Union's Gender Sensitive Toolkit. The IPU developed the toolkit based on research into international best practices by gender-sensitive parliaments to help parliaments evaluate how gender sensitive they are, assess their current practices and policies, identify possible areas for reform, plan for change, and establish mechanisms to monitor progress.³¹ The Forum met with staff from the IPU Gender Team to learn about the process, the experience of other parliaments and the support IPU provides to parliaments with the self-assessment toolkit.

While it was not feasible to do the self-assessment in the timeframe of the Forum's work, it is clear to the Forum that the self-assessment would be a valuable tool to measure the gender/diversity sensitivity of the Houses of the Oireachtas and to develop an action plan. A successful self-assessment requires leadership and buy-in to the process from Members of the Oireachtas and senior officials. Undertaking the self-assessment would build on the work of the Forum.

RECOMMENDATION NO.31

HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS COMMISSION 12 MONTHS

By December 2022, undertake an IPU Gender Sensitive Assessment to be followed by a two-year plan of action including targets and reporting commitments.

31 Gender-sensitive parliaments | Inter-Parliamentary Union (ipu.org).

Goal 2: Ensuring that the Houses of the Oireachtas are supported and resourced to take account of gender and equality issues when legislating

Legislating is one of the key functions of parliament. It is essential that gender and equality issues are at the heart of the legislative process to ensure equal rights and opportunities to access services and resources are established and maintained. Access to appropriate data and analysis, as well as engagement with a diverse range of expertise, can inform Members as they consider legislative proposals and policy options. Pre-legislative scrutiny and the Pre-Committee Stage scrutiny of Private Members' Bills by Oireachtas Committees have expanded the opportunities for Members to influence legislation in recent years.³²

It is clear to the Forum that consideration of draft legislation by Members would be greatly improved if the Government published a Gender and Equality Impact Assessment for each proposal for legislation. There are various processes to ensure gender and equality issues are considered in the development of Government legislation before it reaches the Oireachtas (e.g. Regulatory Impact Analysis and Memorandums for Government).³³ However, the information gathered during these processes is not routinely published.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 32 GOVERNMENT 12 MONTHS

By January 2022, Government to publish Gender and Equality Impact Assessments with draft legislation.

The Forum considered the current resources and supports available to Members. There are new data sources to inform gender and equality considerations when legislating, such as the outputs of budget reform initiatives like Performance Budgeting and Equality Budgeting, as well as the Well-Being Framework. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service provides research and analysis services to support the legislative work of Members, particularly the Library and Research Service, the Parliamentary Budget Office and the Committee Secretariat. While the standard of analysis was found to be high and was useful to Members in their considerations, there is currently no deliberate policy of hiring or providing expertise in gender and equality issues. A number of stakeholders pointed out the value and usefulness of providing such expertise, and the Forum agrees.

The Forum believes that resourcing capacity and developing in-house expertise on gender and equality proofing legislation should be a priority for the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. In the short-term it will be necessary to access external support for this, with the aim of building up internal capacity within the appropriate units of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service to support Members in the medium-term.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 33 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS SERVICE 12 MONTHS

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service to provide for access to external expertise on gender, equality and diversity matters for Members, when considering draft legislation.

32 Oireachtas Library & Research Service (2018) [Spotlight Post-enactment scrutiny by parliament](#), Oireachtas Library & Research Service (2014) [Spotlight Pre-legislative scrutiny by parliament](#).

33 [Cabinet Handbook](#).

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 34 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 3 YEAR
SERVICE**

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service to develop in-house expertise on gender, equality and diversity matters in public policy.

Engagement with experts, interest groups, academics, and researchers as well as those whose lived experience has given them insight into public policy challenges can improve approaches to address those challenges. Although Oireachtas Committees are open to feedback and constructive input, many individuals and organisations do not feel comfortable involving themselves in processes, until invited to do so. Efforts to proactively identify groups, especially organisations representing minority groups, can be hugely rewarding in increasing submissions and ideas. The Forum was made aware that the staff in Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) are often working part-time and that a reasonable deadline for submissions to public consultations is three weeks or longer.

The Forum believes it is important that Oireachtas Committees would engage with a diversity of witnesses to support their work and for this reason recommends that the Houses of the Oireachtas reports annually on the diversity of witness lists, starting with a gender breakdown of witnesses.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 35 COMMITTEES/HOUSES OF
THE OIREACHTAS
COMMISSION 12 MONTHS**

Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas to increase the diversity of groups included in public consultations on their work, and to report annually on the diversity of witness lists.

The COVID-19 pandemic required the Houses of the Oireachtas and other parliaments to pivot in terms of established practices. One change involved Committees inviting witnesses to give evidence remotely. It is important to note that parliamentary privilege only applies to witnesses who attend the parliamentary complex in person. However, for many witnesses, this did not prove to be a matter of concern. Remote participation clearly facilitates engagement with a broader range of experts and stakeholders, and it is also a more family friendly practice that would facilitate the participation of more women.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 36 COMMITTEES 12 MONTHS

Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas should continue to use remote engagement with witnesses, when appropriate, ensuring robust IT supports are in place to facilitate full engagement.

A systematic approach to addressing policy challenges can be instrumental in bringing issues and possible impacts to light. The discipline of using a pre-assigned series of ‘lenses’ through which to view proposals, can be useful in identifying impacts. While the Forum hopes that the Government will consider publishing gender and equality impact assessments for draft legislation, that could be reinforced by Committees considering the gender or equality impacts of proposals for legislation during the Pre-legislative scrutiny of Government Bills. Pre-Committee Stage scrutiny of Private Members’ Bills examines the proposals *“from a policy, legal and financial perspective”*.³⁴ When considering the policy perspectives of a Private Member’s Bill, attention should also be given to the gender and equality impact.

| RECOMMENDATION NO. 37 | COMMITTEES | 12 MONTHS |
|---|------------|-----------|
| Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas should give attention to the potential diversity impact of draft Government Bills during the Pre-legislative consideration of Bills and to Private Members’ Bills during Pre-Committee Stage scrutiny. | | |

34 Dáil Standing Orders, No. 178.

Goal 3: Improving the diversity of the parliamentary community to better reflect society in Ireland

There are several factors that determine diversity in the parliamentary community. First, the Members are elected and while the electoral system includes gender quotas and some financial incentives to promote the participation of women and young people³⁵, there are no other measures (quotas, reserved seats etc.) to address other markers of diversity. Second, the civil service staff are recruited in line with the civil service legislative framework which includes policies that promote the rights and inclusion of groups across the nine equality grounds.³⁶ Third, political staff are recruited directly by Members and political parties under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance.³⁷

Many of those who engaged with the Forum referred to the importance of the Houses of the Oireachtas being diverse in its representation, so that a breadth of experiences and perspectives inform decision-making in Ireland. The recent Citizens' Assembly, in its 'Open Letter to the Oireachtas' made the point very clearly: *"Ambitious, not incremental, change is needed to ensure political, business, sporting and cultural institutions are more representative of Irish society in terms of gender balance and representation of minorities. Without affirmative action to increase the number of women in representative office at national office and local level, change will be too slow and we want to see change now."*

The Forum wants to build on the success of the gender quotas and has recommended affirmative action to improve the diversity of candidates at elections with the objective of making the membership of the Houses of the Oireachtas more diverse. It has further recommended that data be collected, on a voluntary basis, on the age, gender, disability and minority status of candidates and Members elected to monitor progress in this area.

Many of the stakeholders who engaged with the Forum had given much thought to other practical supports that could be put in place to support candidates from groups that are underrepresented in parliament to stand for election. The Forum will share these ideas by letter with the relevant Government Department and those working to establish an Electoral Commission for Ireland. A copy of that letter is included in the appendices to this report.

The other recommendations under this Goal seek to expand and support the diversity of the parliamentary community through recruitment and internship programmes as well as encouraging an organisational culture that supports and celebrates diversity. It is important to the Forum that people living in Ireland can see themselves working in the parliament, as an elected Member, part of the political staff or the civil service staff. Annual reporting on the diversity of the parliamentary community is essential to monitor changes over time. The Forum has also made specific recommendations to ensure gender balance on Oireachtas Committees.

35 Finance under the Electoral Act 1997, as amended.

36 The Civil Service recruitment policies promote the rights and inclusion of groups across the nine-equality ground, there is no specific citizenship requirement for parliamentary staff. Some strategies include specified targets; for example, an increase from 3% to 6% of people with disabilities in the workforce (Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities) and 1% of the workforce to comprise ethnic minorities (Migrant Integration Strategy, National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021).

37 Houses of the Oireachtas [Scheme for Secretarial Assistance](#).

Elected Members and diversity

Legislative electoral quotas are an effective mechanism in diversifying candidacy at elections. Gender quotas are well understood and have proven effective in Ireland.³⁸ The gender quota threshold for political parties running candidates at the General Election will increase to a minimum of 40% for each gender from 2023 onwards. The Forum endorses the Citizens' Assembly recommendation that the increase to 40% be brought forward to 2022.³⁹ It is important that the operation of the legislative gender quota is kept under review, and the new Electoral Commission is probably the most appropriate body to examine the selection and experiences of women candidates. Recognising the importance of local politics as the pipeline for candidates at national elections, the Forum supports the extension of the gender quota legislation to local elections but has not made a formal recommendation on the matter as the remit of the Forum is the Houses of the Oireachtas. However, the Forum does recommend that political parties set specific targets for ethnic minority women within political parties' gender quotas and that the Electoral Commission monitors progress of this.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 38

POLITICAL PARTIES

NEXT GENERAL ELECTION

Political parties to set targets for ethnic minority women within political parties' gender quotas.

Some countries have introduced quotas and reserved seats for minority groups to ensure ethnic minority representation in legislatures.⁴⁰ Recent reports, for example, the Seanad Public Consultation Committee (2020) *Report on Travellers Towards a More Equitable Ireland Post-Recognition*, support this approach.⁴¹ In 2020, Taoiseach Micheál Martin appointed Senator Eileen Flynn to the Seanad. The Forum recommends that this practice is maintained and through the Taoiseach's 11 nominees, representatives from ethnic minority communities are appointed to the Seanad.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 39

AN TAOISEACH

27TH SEANAD

Through the Taoiseach's 11 nominees, representatives from ethnic minority communities to be appointed to the Seanad.

To ensure the Houses of the Oireachtas are more reflective of Irish society, the Forum recommends that political parties set targets for ethnic minority representation and that the Electoral Commission monitors progress of this. If there is no progress following the next electoral cycle, legislative initiative is recommended. It is important that any legislation on ethnic minority targets is developed in consultation with affected groups and devised in a way which does not, in its ultimate design, exclude groups.

38 The number of women candidates almost doubled between 2011 and 2016 when the gender quota was first applied, however there was no significant increase at election 2020. International experience suggests it takes at least three electoral cycles for gender quotas to bed into electoral systems Fiona Buckley & Yvonne Galligan (2020) The 2020 general election: a gender analysis, *Irish Political Studies*, 35:4, 602-614, DOI: 10.1080/07907184.2020.1762283.

39 [report-of-the-citizens-assembly-on-gender-equality.pdf](#) (citizensassembly.ie).

40 Bird K. Ethnic quotas and ethnic representation worldwide. *International Political Science Review*. 2014;35(1):12-26.

41 Seanad Public Consultation Committee (2020) *Report on Travellers Towards a More Equitable Ireland Post-Recognition*.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 40

**POLITICAL PARTIES/
ELECTORAL COMMISSION/
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING,
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND
HERITAGE**

3 YEARS

Political parties to set targets for ethnic minority representation. If there is no progress following the next electoral cycle, legislation on ethnic minority targets to be developed in consultation with affected groups and devised in a way which does not in its ultimate design exclude groups.

Currently, we can describe the diversity of the Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas only in terms of gender and age, and to some extent professional background, and this is based on media coverage and publications like the *How Ireland Voted* series.⁴² There is no data available on Irish politicians by ethnic background, sexual orientation, parental status or disability in the Dáil and Seanad. The Houses of the Oireachtas does not collect or publish any data on the diversity of the membership of the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Forum recommends that data on the gender, age and minority status of candidates and elected Members should be collected by the Electoral Commission and reported with election results. This data collection would enable the tracking of changes in diversity over time and therefore inform any legislative initiative in the area. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) made data on the percentage of seats held by women and minorities an indicator of responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making under Goal 16.⁴³ The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) collects data on the gender and age of parliamentarians and reports on global trends.⁴⁴ Collecting the data on Members of the Oireachtas would inform on the national situation and also contribute to global and regional measurements of diversity among the members of parliament.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 41

**ELECTORAL COMMISSION/
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING,
LOCAL GOVERNMENT &
HERITAGE**

3 YEARS

At the next election, data on the age, gender and minority status of candidates and Members elected to the Dáil and Seanad to be collected on a voluntary basis and published with official election results.

The Forum notes that some of the current Oireachtas Committees have no women Members and has made recommendations to address this after the next election.⁴⁵ Oireachtas Committees are an essential part of parliamentary work: holding Government to account, scrutinising draft legislation, developing policy recommendations, and often providing the most detailed focus on initiatives and proposals. It is essential that gender perspectives are fully considered in Committees. The Selection Committees of the Dáil and Seanad propose the membership of all Committees to their respective Houses, based on nominations from political parties and groups. The Committee Chairs are also nominated by the political

42 Based mainly on publications like the *How Ireland Voted* series or newspapers.

43 [SDG Indicators – SDG Indicators \(un.org\)](#).

44 [Data on youth participation | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](#), [Gender equality \(ipu.org\)](#).

45 Dáil Business Committee, Joint Committee on Public Petitions and the Committee on Transport and Communications and Dáil Select Committee on Agriculture – see Appendices.

parties – the D’Hondt system is used to proportionately allocate the number of Chairs to reflect each party’s representation in the Dáil. ⁴⁶ The Forum has recommended specific targets for women Members to chair and be members of Oireachtas Committees. These are ambitious targets for the political parties given the number of women currently in the Dáil and Seanad. For that reason, the Forum further recommends that women Members who are Chairs are provided with an additional Parliamentary Assistant until 40% of the Members of the Dáil and Seanad are women. This is to address the additional Committee responsibilities that women Members who are Chairs have.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 42**POLITICAL PARTIES AND GROUPS****3 YEARS**

In the Committees established by the 34th Dáil and 27th Seanad, there must be at least one woman from each House on each Committee. After the following election, Committee Chairs are to be 50% men and 50% women and there is to be a 40% gender balance on all Committees. Additional Parliamentary Assistant support is to be provided for women Chairs until 40% of elected Members are women.

Staff and diversity

The Forum believes that annual reporting on the diversity of the parliamentary community is essential for getting an overview of the community as it stands to then monitoring changes over time. The Public Sector Duty recommends that Government Departments and relevant organisations consider gathering diversity data. It is recommended that this be undertaken in line with the key national inclusion strategies which specifically cover five of the nine equality grounds: Gender, Disability, Traveller & Roma, Migrant Integration and LGBTI.⁴⁷ The Forum recommends that the Houses of the Oireachtas collect and publish this data on an annual basis, through the Oireachtas Annual Report, recognising that there may be some gaps as the data collection must be done on a voluntary basis.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 43**HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS SERVICE****12 MONTHS**

The Houses of the Oireachtas Equality, Diversity Inclusion Strategy to include annual diversity reporting in line with National Inclusion Strategies (Gender, Disability, Traveller & Roma, Migrant Integration & LGBTI) (Oireachtas Annual Report).

The Forum has also focused on how recruitment practices and work experience programmes, as well as an organisational culture that is inclusive, can improve the diversity of the parliamentary community.

⁴⁶ [About committees – Houses of the Oireachtas.](#)

⁴⁷ National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2021, National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021, National Disability Strategy 2017-2021, National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2-21, The Migrant Integration Strategy – A Blueprint for the Future.

While there is legislation guiding recruitment practices for the civil service staff, the Forum recommends a review of current practices to deal with any conscious or unconscious bias that might hinder the recruitment of a more diverse workforce in the Houses of the Oireachtas. This should include all documentation and how job opportunities are advertised.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 44 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 12 MONTHS
SERVICE, MEMBERS AND
POLITICAL PARTIES AND
GROUPS**

Conduct a review of recruitment processes for Civil Service staff and political staff, to minimise any conscious or unconscious bias which might hinder recruitment of a diverse and representative workforce in the Houses.

Mandatory inclusivity and diversity training is considered a critical tool in supporting this goal. Many of the submissions and presentations supported the provision of mandatory training for both Members and staff.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 45 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 12 MONTHS
SERVICE**

Develop and deliver comprehensive mandatory inclusivity and diversity training to all Members and staff.

The Forum heard of the value of internship type programmes from many stakeholders working with groups that are underrepresented in the parliamentary community and considered the type of programmes offered in other parliaments. As the Houses of the Oireachtas Service is currently reviewing internships, apprenticeships, and other supported employment programmes, it is timely that the Forum recommends further development of such programmes to complement existing programmes: Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL), Willing, Able, Mentoring (WAM) and Transition Year student placements. The review should specifically consider paid internship and apprenticeship programmes aligned with SOLAS/Department of Education and Skills for those with Level 5 certification and above on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). It is critical that these programmes are publicised appropriately to ensure that underrepresented groups can apply.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 46 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 3 YEARS
SERVICE,**

Develop a suite of work placement programmes with an emphasis on equitable and transparent access, best practice standards and good learning outcomes.

Organisational culture and diversity

It is important that the Houses of the Oireachtas through its formal rules and informal norms and practices fosters an inclusive organisational culture.

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service is developing an *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy* for the Houses of the Oireachtas. The strategy will focus on supporting Houses of the Oireachtas Service staff from minority groups including members of the Traveller and Roma communities, in line with recommendations made under the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021*. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service's *Health, Well Being and Inclusion Strategy 2021-23* places a particular emphasis on supporting staff with disabilities. The Forum welcomes the development of these strategies and recommends that targets are monitored and reported upon to support and increase the number of staff with disabilities and staff from Traveller and Roma communities.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 47 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 3 YEARS SERVICE,

Oireachtas Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Health, Well Being and Inclusion Strategy 2021-23 are to be monitored, and their implementation evaluated, to inform the drafting of future strategies.

In any workplace, social and sporting clubs, and support networks have an important role in developing and maintaining the social cohesion of the workforce. The parliamentary community has an LGBT+ group, a choir and a running group as well as more formal networks for civil service staff. The Forum supports the development of such groups, along with additional groups co-ordinated around culture, ability, gender or pride as well as a family friendly or parents' network.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 48 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 12 MONTHS COMMISSION

Review rules pertaining to the naming of voluntary groups, societies and networks established by Members and staff in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Establish a process whereby these groups can apply to be formally associated with the Houses of the Oireachtas by seeking approval from an appropriate body and committing to a Code of Practice.

The Forum is of the view that images and symbols in the parliamentary buildings can have a powerful impact on people working in and visiting them. Therefore, the images and symbols in the Houses of the Oireachtas, and in all digital and web-based materials, should be inclusive to better reflect the diversity in modern Irish society. Related to this is the need to recognise national dress as appropriate attire for the parliament and acknowledge and celebrate international days of celebration for minority groups.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 49 HOUSES OF THE OIREACTHAS 12 MONTHS
COMMISSION**

Review images and symbols present in the parliamentary complex and on the Oireachtas website to ensure that they reflect inclusion goals. Continue with the 'women on walls' initiatives and expand it to include images of other underrepresented groups.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 50 HOUSES OF THE OIREACTHAS 12 MONTHS
COMMISSION**

Oireachtas dress code to recognise national dress as well as acknowledging national/international days of celebration, thus more broadly reflecting modern Irish society.

Implementation of the Forum's recommendations

The Forum has presented its recommendations to the Ceann Comhairle, Mr Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD who will present them to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission. The Forum carefully noted the body most directly responsible for each recommendation and gave a practical timeframe for the implementation of the recommendations. The final recommendation of the Forum asks that the Commission will monitor the progress on meeting the targets set by the Forum by reviewing the implementation of the Forum's recommendations on a six-monthly basis and report on progress through its Annual Reports over the next four years.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 51 HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS 12 MONTHS
COMMISSION**

Houses of the Oireachtas Commission to review the implementation of the Forum's recommendations on a six-monthly basis and report on progress through its Annual Reports over the next four years.

Summary Table of Recommendations

This table summarises the Forum's 51 recommendations under the three Goals and themes and it identifies the body responsible and the timeframe for implementation.

| GOAL ONE | | | IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN: | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------|------------------------|---------|--|
| Theme | Recommendations | Responsible Body | 12 months | 3 years | |
| Late, long and unpredictable sitting hours | 1. With immediate effect, Oireachtas Committees to adhere to meeting timeslots | Committees | ✓ | | |
| | 2. By end 2021, both Houses to assert a strong commitment to family friendly practices/sittings in the Standing Orders. Standing Orders to be gender-proofed at every revision. | Dáil and Seanad | ✓ | | |
| | 3. By January 2022, Dáil Éireann to adhere to the time of adjournment set out in the Standing Orders. Where additional business is added to the Dáil schedule, other business to be postponed to another sitting day. | Dáil | ✓ | | |
| | 4. By September 2022, Dáil, Seanad and Committees each to publish a sitting calendar for the year, where recess weeks are aligned with school holidays at Easter, Halloween and Christmas, as set out in Department of Education circulars. | Dáil, Seanad and Committees | ✓ | | |
| | 5. By September 2022, Seanad to establish adjournment times for sitting days in the Standing Orders and introduce a voting block to be taken in the afternoon of a sitting day. | Seanad | ✓ | | |
| | 6. By September 2022, Dáil voting block to be moved within the weekly schedule, so that it is taken in the afternoon. | Dáil | ✓ | | |

| GOAL ONE | | IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN: | | |
|--|---|--|-----------|---------|
| Theme | Recommendations | Responsible Body | 12 months | 3 years |
| | 7. During the 33 rd Dáil, assess the feasibility of introducing a fortnightly or monthly schedule for Dáil, Seanad and Committees. Dáil Business Committee currently sets out the schedule on a weekly basis. | Dáil, Seanad and Committees | | ✓ |
| | 8. During the 33 rd Dáil, establish an appropriate system for managing the timetabling of Government Bills | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission/ Dáil/Seanad/ Government | | ✓ |
| | 9. During the 33 rd Dáil, consider the establishment of a new “main” Dáil Committee ⁴⁸ where certain non-votable business could be taken, for example Parliamentary Questions and Topical Issues, or additional business added to the schedule. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission/ Dáil | | ✓ |
| Working conditions associated with long and unpredictable sitting hours | 10. Houses of the Oireachtas Service to address areas where staff are working very long hours to serve sittings. This could include additional staff, the use of rosters, and/or job role re-design. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service | ✓ | |
| | 11. By March 2022, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service to promote and facilitate flexible remote and hybrid working arrangements for civil service parliamentary staff, when appropriate and in line with Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) guidelines. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service | ✓ | |

48 Establishing a new “main” Dáil Committee may involve re-purposing a Committee room or the Audio-Visual room or other suitable space.

| GOAL ONE | | IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN: | | |
|---|--|--|-----------|---------|
| Theme | Recommendations | Responsible Body | 12 months | 3 years |
| | 12. The Forum recommends a review of the pay scales and role profiles for Secretarial Assistants to increase the starting salary, in light of the comparisons to be drawn with the salaries and role profile of Parliamentary Assistants. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission/ DPER | ✓ | |
| | 13. With immediate effect, Members, political parties and groups are to facilitate appropriate flexible working and remote working arrangements for their staff to address the long sitting hours, until other recommendations to eradicate long hours have been implemented. | Political Parties/ Groups/ Members | ✓ | |
| | 14. Houses of the Oireachtas Service to develop and promote a 'right to disconnect' policy asking Members and staff to avoid sending non-urgent emails or making calls to colleagues at certain times of the day or at weekends (for example between 7pm and 8am on weekdays). | Houses of the Oireachtas Service/ Members/ Political Parties | ✓ | |
| Maternity, Paternity and Other Leave for Members of the Oireachtas | 15. <i>Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Secretarial Facilities) Regulations 2021</i> to be amended to provide additional secretarial facilities for a period of two weeks for Members taking paternity leave. The current regulations provide additional secretarial facilities to Members taking maternity leave for 26 weeks. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission/ DPER | ✓ | |

| GOAL ONE | | IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN: | | |
|---|--|--|-----------|---------|
| Theme | Recommendations | Responsible Body | 12 months | 3 years |
| | 16. By September 2022, develop a formal pairing system to facilitate Members taking maternity leave, paternity leave, sick leave, or travel for essential Government business. A rotating panel of pairs is preferable to a pairing arrangement that involves one Member. A formal note on Members’ voting records to show both the leave and participation in pairing arrangements by Members. Public information to be included on the Oireachtas website explaining how the arrangement work. | Dáil, Seanad and Committees | ✓ | |
| | 17. During the 33 rd Dáil, introduce a constitutional referendum to amend Article 15 that would enable the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce proxy voting (for Maternity, Paternity and Sick Leave) and arrangements for Members to participate with parliamentary privilege in certain Oireachtas business remotely. | Government | ✓ | |
| Modernisation: A Hybrid Parliament | 18. Preferably by the end of the 33 rd Dáil term, or until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, assuming a positive outcome, the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce hybrid sittings of some Dáil, Seanad and Committee business where Members can choose to participate in certain business remotely or to be physically present. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission/ Dáil, Seanad and Committees | | ✓ |

| GOAL ONE | | IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN: | | |
|--|--|--|-----------|---------|
| Theme | Recommendations | Responsible Body | 12 months | 3 years |
| | 19. Preferably by the end of the 33 rd Dáil term, or until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, assuming a positive outcome, the Houses of the Oireachtas to introduce regional hubs, located in other State buildings, for Members from surrounding constituencies to participate in certain Dáil, Seanad or Committee business without the need to be physically present in the parliamentary complex. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission/ Dáil and Seanad | | ✓ |
| | 20. Until a Referendum to amend Article 15 can be held, or if the Referendum is rejected, the Dáil to revise Standing Orders so that Dáil sittings are organised to a family friendly schedule: a) to identify routine non-votable business that could be transferred from the Dáil Chamber to a new "main" Dáil Committee to take non-votable business which would not require a decision of the Dáil and would have flexible membership, b) where urgent business is to be added to the schedule it would be taken in the new "main" Dáil Committee or business already on the schedule would be moved to the new "main" Dáil Committee. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission/ Dáil | | ✓ |
| Childcare and other caring responsibilities | 21. By December 2022, Houses of the Oireachtas Service to consider amending its application of Carer's Leave so that all staff can take Carer's Leave in the manner that they require. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service | ✓ | |

| GOAL ONE | | | IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN: | |
|---|---|--|------------------------|---------|
| Theme | Recommendations | Responsible Body | 12 months | 3 years |
| | 22. By September 2022, provide suitable, comfortable spaces for infant feeding, and ensure adequate infant changing facilities promoted by signage so that staff, Members, and visitors are aware of locations. Also provide a dedicated Family Room (ideally located close to the Chambers) for children of Members. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service/OPW | ✓ | |
| | 23. By December 2022, conduct a full review of the crèche to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the parliamentary community by providing enough spaces and at times that match the sittings of the Houses and associated work of parliament | Houses of the Oireachtas Service | ✓ | |
| Measures to address harassment and bullying in the parliamentary community | 24. Provide appropriate personal security for Members and their staff. Establish dedicated supports for Members and their staff facing online abuse and harassment – technical as well as mental health supports. Additional supports to be made available for newly elected Members. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service/Commission | ✓ | |
| | 25. By September 2022, review existing codes of conduct on appropriate behaviour for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and set out clear sanctions for breaches of these codes. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission, Dáil and Seanad | ✓ | |
| | 26. From 2022, conduct surveys of Members, parliamentary staff, political staff and contractors at 3-year intervals to inform the ongoing implementation of the revised Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles and Policy and review the accessibility of all supports. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service/Commission | | ✓ |

| GOAL ONE | | IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN: | | |
|--|---|--|-----------|---------|
| Theme | Recommendations | Responsible Body | 12 months | 3 years |
| Physical Infrastructure and access to the Leinster House campus | 27. By September 2022, an accessibility audit of the parliamentary complex is to be completed to ensure that it is fully accessible – including the Dáil and Seanad Chambers. The parliamentary complex should meet the Universal Design standard for accessibility. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission/ OPW | ✓ | |
| | 28. By January 2022, a review of toilet facilities is to be undertaken to ensure there is an adequate provision of disabled access toilets, female, male and gender-neutral toilets and accessible changing facilities for all. Infant changing facilities should be accessible to both fathers and mothers. Free period products and sanitary bins should be made available in all toilets in the parliamentary complex. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission/ OPW | ✓ | |
| | 29. Houses of the Oireachtas Service documentation to use non-discriminatory and gender inclusive language. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service | ✓ | |
| | 30. Houses of the Oireachtas Service documentation to adhere to standards of plain English and Irish. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service | ✓ | |
| IPU Gender Sensitive Assessment | 31. By December 2022 undertake an IPU Gender Sensitive Assessment to be followed by a two-year plan of action including targets and reporting commitments. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission | | |

| GOAL TWO | | | IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN: | |
|--|---|---|------------------------|---------|
| Theme | Recommendations | Responsible Body | 12 months | 3 years |
| Gender and equality issues when legislating | 32. By January 2022, Government to publish Gender and Equality Impact Assessment on all legislation. | Government | ✓ | |
| | 33. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service to provide for access to external expertise on gender, equality and diversity matters for Members, when considering draft legislation. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service | ✓ | |
| | 34. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service to develop in-house expertise on gender, equality and diversity matters in public policy. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service | | ✓ |
| | 35. Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas to increase the diversity of groups included in public consultations on their work, and to report annually on the diversity of witness lists. | Committees/ Houses of the Oireachtas Commission | | ✓ |
| | 36. Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas should continue to use remote engagement with witnesses, when appropriate, ensuring robust IT supports are in place to facilitate full engagement. | Committees | | ✓ |
| | 37. Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas should give attention to the potential diversity impact of draft Government Bills during the Pre-Legislative consideration of Bills and to Private Members' Bills during Pre-Committee Stage scrutiny. | Committees | ✓ | |

| GOAL THREE | | | IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN: | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|------------------------|---------|
| Theme | Recommendations | Responsible Body | 12 months | 3 years |
| Elected Members and Diversity | 38. Political parties to set targets for ethnic minority women within political parties' gender quotas. | Political parties | | ✓ |
| | 39. Through the Taoiseach's 11 nominees, representatives from ethnic minority communities to be appointed to the Seanad. | An Taoiseach | | ✓ |
| | 40. Political parties to set targets for ethnic minority representation. If there is no progress following the next electoral cycle, legislation on ethnic minority targets to be developed in consultation with affected groups and devised in a way which does not in its ultimate design exclude groups. | Political parties/ Electoral Commission/ Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage | | ✓ |
| | 41. At the next election, data on the age, gender and minority status of candidates and Members elected to the Dáil and Seanad to be collected on a voluntary basis and published with official election results. | Electoral Commission/ Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage | | ✓ |
| | 42. In the Committees established by the 34 th Dáil and 27 th Seanad, there must be at least one woman from each House on each Committee. After the following election, Committee Chairs are to be 50% men and 50% women and there is to be a 40% gender balance on all Committees. Additional Parliamentary Assistant support is to be provided for women Chairs until 40% of elected Members are women. | Political parties and groups | | ✓ |

| GOAL THREE | | | IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN: | |
|---|---|---|------------------------|---------|
| Theme | Recommendations | Responsible Body | 12 months | 3 years |
| Staff and Diversity | 43. The Houses of the Oireachtas Equality, Diversity Inclusion Strategy to include annual diversity reporting in line with National Inclusion Strategies (Gender, Disability, Traveller & Roma, Migrant Integration & LGBTI) (Oireachtas Annual Report) | Houses of the Oireachtas Service/ Commission | ✓ | |
| | 44. Conduct a review of recruitment processes for Civil Service staff and political staff, to minimise any conscious or unconscious bias which might hinder recruitment of a diverse and representative workforce in the Houses | Houses of the Oireachtas Service/ Members, political parties and groups | ✓ | |
| | 45. Develop and deliver comprehensive inclusivity and diversity training that is mandatory for all Members and staff. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service/ Members and political parties | ✓ | |
| | 46. Develop a suite of work placement programmes with an emphasis on equitable and transparent access, best practice standards and good learning outcomes. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service | | ✓ |
| Organisational culture and Diversity | 47. Oireachtas <i>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy</i> and <i>Health, Well Being and Inclusion Strategy 2021-23</i> are to be monitored, and their implementation evaluated, to inform the drafting of future strategies. | Houses of the Oireachtas Service | | ✓ |

| GOAL THREE | | IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN: | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Theme | Recommendations | Responsible Body | 12 months | 3 years |
| | 48. Review rules pertaining to the naming of voluntary groups, societies and networks established by Members and staff in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Establish a process whereby these groups can apply to be formally associated with the Houses of the Oireachtas by seeking approval from an appropriate body and committing to a Code of Practice. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission | ✓ | |
| | 49. Oireachtas dress code to recognise national dress as well as acknowledging national/international days of celebration, thus more broadly reflecting modern Irish society. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission | ✓ | |
| | 50. Review images and symbols present in the parliamentary complex and on the Oireachtas website to ensure that they reflect inclusion goals. Continue with the 'women on walls' initiatives and expanding it to include images of other underrepresented groups | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission | ✓ | |
| Implementation of the Forums recommendations | 51. Houses of the Oireachtas Commission to review the implementation of the Forum's recommendations on a six-monthly basis and report on progress through its Annual Reports over the next four years. | Houses of the Oireachtas Commission | ✓ | |

Appendices

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Appendix 1: Details of the Forum

Membership, Terms of Reference, Meeting Schedule and Details of Submissions received.

Membership of the Forum

The following individuals were invited by the Ceann Comhairle to contribute their expertise to the Forum:

- Ms. Mary Upton, Chair, and former TD
- Ms. Uruemu Adejinmi, Councillor and Cathaoirleach of Longford Municipal District
- Dr Fiona Buckley, Lecturer in the Department of Government and Politics, UCC, specialising in gender politics
- Ms. Holly Cairns, TD
- Ms. Norah Casey, Businesswoman and Broadcaster
- Ms. Lisa Chambers, Senator
- Mr. Jim Clarken, CEO Oxfam Ireland, Executive Director of Oxfam International and a Commissioner at the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
- Ms. Alison Cowzer, Chairperson, Women for Election
- Ms. Róisín Deery, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Officer, Houses of the Oireachtas Service
- Ms. Fiona O'Loughlin, Senator and Chairperson of the Irish Women's Parliamentary Caucus
- Mr. Tom Mallon, Barrister
- Mr. Ronan Murphy, Political Scientist with background in public service reform and change management, Houses of the Oireachtas Service
- Ms. Cáit NicAmhlaoibh, Political Policy Advisor and Administrator
- Mr. Neale Richmond, TD
- Mr. Fintan Warfield, Senator

Forum Terms of Reference

The following are the Terms of Reference which guided and shaped the Forum members approach to their work:

1. The Ceann Comhairle has engaged persons to form a group to be known as the Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament (hereinafter referred to as 'the Forum') to facilitate the Houses of the Oireachtas' ongoing development as a family friendly parliamentary community that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its composition, structures, operations, methods and work and as an inclusive parliamentary community that better reflects society in Ireland.
2. The Forum will offer advice and recommendations to the Ceann Comhairle, who will bring the Forum's report to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission for its consideration.
3. The Forum shall consider and make practical recommendations on:
 - i. making the Houses of the Oireachtas a more inclusive, family friendly, and gender-sensitive workplace for the parliamentary community;
 - ii. ensuring that the Houses of the Oireachtas are supported and resourced to take account of gender and equality issues when legislating;
 - iii. improving the diversity of the parliamentary community to better reflect society in Ireland.
4. The Forum shall consider undertaking an audit of the Houses of the Oireachtas using the Inter-Parliamentary Union's gender-sensitive toolkit.
5. The Forum shall consider the following matters:
 - the relevant provisions of the Constitution, and Dáil and Seanad Standing Orders;
 - the working arrangements of the Houses;
 - the processes that enable the Houses to take account of gender and equality issues in its legislative and scrutiny functions;
 - the relevant policies and procedures of the Houses and of the parliamentary administration;
 - international parliamentary best practice in areas including family friendly policies, inclusivity, and gender-sensitivity,

and such other matters as the Forum thinks fit, in relation to the above.

Forum meeting schedule

The draft meeting schedule was agreed on the 26 April. The Forum met on ten occasions between March and October 2021.

- 23rd March
- 26th April
- 17th May
- 31st May
- 21st June
- 19th July
- 6th September
- 27th September
- 11th October
- 18th October

The following guest speakers made presentations to online meetings of the Forum on dates between April and September 2021:

26 APRIL 2021

Ms Ramona Quinn, Principal Officer, Office of Parliamentary Legal Advice (OPLA)

Ms Elaine Gunn, Clerk-Assistant of the Dáil, Assistant Secretary, Parliamentary Services Division

17 MAY 2021

Ms Jane Boushell, Sector Organiser, State Related Sector & Community Sector, SIPTU

Ms Una Faulkner, Assistant General Secretary, Fórsa

Mr Ciarán Rohan, General Secretary, Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants (AHCPS)

Mr Charles Hearne, Houses of the Oireachtas Service

Mr Noel Ward, Houses of the Oireachtas Service

Ms Karren Jabre, Director of Programmes, Inter-Parliamentary Union, (IPU), *Gender Sensitive Self-Assessment Toolkit*

31 MAY 2021

Ms Orla O'Connor, Director, National Women's Council of Ireland

Ms Emma DeSouza, Women's Leadership Co-ordinator, National Women's Council of Ireland

Ms Paula Fagan, CEO, LGBT Ireland

Mr Jason Kiernan, Chair of the LGBT+ group in the Houses of the Oireachtas

21 JUNE 2021

Mr James Doorley, Deputy Director, National Youth Council of Ireland

Mr John Dolan, CEO, Disability Federation of Ireland

Dr Catherine Day, Chair, Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

Ms Mary-Clare O'Sullivan, Secretary, Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

19 JULY 2021

Ms Maria Joyce, Co-Ordinator, National Traveller Women's Forum

Senator Eileen Flynn, Seanad Civil Engagement Group

Ms Soumya Joseph, New Communities Partnership

Ms Caitriona Gleeson, CEO, Women for Election

Ms Ivana Bacik, TD

27 SEPTEMBER 2021

Professor Sarah Childs, author of *The Good Parliament* report (Westminster, United Kingdom)

Submissions Received by the Forum

There were 43 written submissions received from internal and external stakeholders. Submissions are published on the Forum webpage on Oireachtas.ie.

| INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS (29) | EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS (14) |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Service staff (13) ■ Political staff (2) ■ Politicians (4) ■ Trade unions (FORSA, AHCPs, and SIPTU) ■ Irish Women's Parliamentary Caucus ■ Seanad Civil Engagement group (CEG) ■ Labour Youth/Labour Women ■ Sinn Féin ■ Fianna Fáil ■ LGBT+ Group (Oireachtas) ■ Pi Communications (Contractor) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ National Women's Council ■ Women for Election ■ National Traveller Women's Forum ■ Irish Traveller Movement ■ New Communities Partnership ■ Black and Irish ■ Disability Federation of Ireland ■ LGBT Ireland ■ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) ■ Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) ■ Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) ■ Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) ■ Employment Bar Association. ■ Cllr. Declan Meenagh |

Appendix 2: Definitions used by the Forum

Family

The Forum has chosen to define ‘the family’ in its broadest meaning; and as such does not limit its understanding of the term to the traditional ‘nuclear’ family; but rather understands it to include extended family, blended families, single parent families and those families (and communities) we choose for ourselves.

Family Friendly Parliament

Creating a ‘family friendly’ workplace means striving to develop policies and procedures, everyday work practices, a physical infrastructure and an institutional culture which facilitates and empowers people to balance their duties in the workplace with their familial responsibilities outside the workplace. *“A family-friendly parliament is one that reflects society, is inclusive and diverse, and responds to the needs and interests of all in the parliamentary community. Care responsibilities (including childcare, care for elderly parents, care for dependent family members and care for sick relatives) will impact participants of the parliamentary community at different points in their lives. Thus, a family-friendly parliament is one which ensures its structures, operations and processes are inclusive of the essential human function of care.”* (Campbell and Childs, 2014)⁴⁹

Equality

The *Employment Equality Acts* and *Equal Status Acts 2000-2018* prohibit discrimination on specific grounds. Discrimination occurs where a *“person is treated less favourably than another person in a comparable situation, because they differ under any of the following grounds: Age, Civil Status, Disability, Family Status, Gender, Membership of the Traveller Community, Race, Religion, Sexual Orientation”*. The Forum’s remit to make recommendations which will create a more family friendly and inclusive parliamentary community requires the Houses of the Oireachtas to address discrimination and promote equality, based on these nine grounds.

49 Rosie Campbell and Sarah Childs, Parents in Parliament: ‘Where’s Mum?’ The Political Quarterly 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12092>.

Gender Sensitive Parliaments

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) describes the Gender Sensitive parliament as *“a parliament that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and in its work. Gender-sensitive parliaments remove the barriers to women’s full participation and offer a positive example or model to society at large”*.⁵⁰

The Forum has paid particular attention to gender equality and sensitivity within the parliamentary community. Gender sensitive institutions are *“founded on gender equality, where women and men have an equal right to participate without discrimination or recrimination. Parliaments ought to be places that meet the requirements of both women and men in the way they are run and structured, and where women not only can work, but also want to work. They should be family-friendly environments, where men and women find that their needs to live as well as work are taken into account. They also ought to be places where sexist language or behaviour is not tolerated.”*⁵¹

Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity is the practice of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.

Diversity in the workplace is about recognising difference. It acknowledges *“the benefit of having a range of perspectives in decision-making and the workforce being representative”* of the parliamentary community and wider society.⁵²

Inclusion means people’s differences are valued and used to enable everyone to thrive at work. An inclusive working environment is one in which everyone feels that they belong without having to conform, that their contribution matters and they can perform to their full potential, no matter their background, identity or circumstances. An inclusive workplace has fair policies and practices in place and enables a diverse range of people to work together effectively.⁵³

50 Inter-Parliamentary Union (2011) *Gender Sensitive Parliaments. A Global Review of Good Practice*.

51 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Gender sensitive parliaments <https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/gender-equality/gender-sensitive-parliaments>

52 *Inclusion and Diversity in the Workplace | Factsheets | CIPD*.

53 *Inclusion and Diversity in the Workplace | Factsheets | CIPD*.

Appendix 3: Letter to relevant sections of Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and those establishing an Electoral Commission in Ireland

In March 2021 the Ceann Comhairle of the Houses of the Oireachtas, Mr Seán Ó Fearghail, established a *Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament*. The membership of the Forum brought together experts in the area, Members of both Houses and staff within the Oireachtas and was asked come up with recommendations for the Ceann Comhairle to bring to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission for its consideration.

The Forum has looked at how the Houses of the Oireachtas are organised, with a view to enhancing the parliamentary community, and make practical recommendations on making the Houses of the Oireachtas a more inclusive, family friendly, and gender-sensitive workplace for the parliamentary community.

Increasing the diversity of elected Members was one theme in the work of the Forum, and the Forum has made two recommendations on matters that are within the remit of Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Electoral Commission. The Forum asks that the Department, and when it is established the Electoral Commission, would consider these recommendations with a view to implementing the changes.

| | |
|---|---|
| Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage | Political parties to set targets for ethnic minority representation. If there is no progress following the next electoral cycle, legislation on ethnic minority targets to be developed in consultation with affected groups and devised in a way which does not in its ultimate design exclude groups. (Forum Recommendation 40) |
| Electoral Commission | At the next election, data on the age, gender and minority status of candidates and Members elected to the Dáil and Seanad to be collected on a voluntary basis and published with official election results. (Forum Recommendation 41) |

The Forum made a call for public submissions and benefitted greatly from submissions that were made to it by organisations and individuals with expertise in this area. A number of those submission made reference to the importance of the Houses of the Oireachtas being diverse in their representation. Many made recommendations on how best to support individuals from those groups that are traditionally underrepresented in parliament to stand for election and had ideas on supports that would be useful.

As the Forum focused primarily on actions once Members were elected to the Houses of the Oireachtas, it did not consider in as much depth, the suggestions that were made to improve the election processes and supports for those standing for election. The Forum believes that some of these proposals may be useful to those who do work in this area, and who do have responsibility for public policy choices with regards to the organisation of elections and supports that could be provided for candidates. The Forum supports the ultimate aim of all of these proposals that the public representatives we elect should be as diverse as our population, bringing all life experiences to light in consideration of public policy in Ireland and is including all of the suggestions that were received, whether the Forum considered them in detail or not, or endorsed them or not, as the full list of suggestions received represents an interesting collection of useful practical ideas.

Therefore, on behalf of the Forum, I am including here a list of the recommendations that were made to the Forum in this area:

- The nomination process to the Labour Panel for election to the Seanad should be amended to require representatives of working women organised in trade unions.
- Extension of gender quotas for political party candidates to include local elections, elections to Seanad Éireann, and the European Parliament, as well as General Elections.
- The operation of gender quotas for running candidates at the General Election should be reviewed, and the threshold should be increased to a minimum of 40% for each gender.
- Within the gender quota, set specific quotas for Traveller Women's participation.
- Amend the Electoral Act, to allow for an ethnic minority quota. This should be undertaken in consultation with affected groups and devised in a way which does not exclude groups in its ultimate.
- Establish quotas for Traveller and Roma women in formal political structures with specific seats reserved in the Dáil, Seanad, Constitutional Convention and on Local Councils.
- Definition of under-represented groups to include the nine equality grounds as well as people from different socio-economic backgrounds.
- Encourage under-represented groups to become active in politics and stand for election at all levels. Undertake a review of barriers faced by underrepresented groups in the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- Creation of a candidate support system which recognises the additional costs that people with disability face when running for election and provides an appropriate level of financial assistance which meets some of the additional costs they incur as a result of their disability [to be modelled on the 'Access to Elected Office Fund' that exists in Scotland].
- Creation of a mental health support line, dedicated to support those who run for election and is available for 12 months prior to the elections (when the date is known) or during the period of election (where the date is not known).
- Provision of childcare 'vouchers' for candidates who run for election and are the parents of young children requiring care.
- Diversity and inclusion should be proactively encouraged at local government level in order to support efforts being made at national level.
- Social media companies should be made responsible for the removal of inciteful and discriminatory content on their platforms.

Reference was made in submissions in a report of the *Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights* published in 2009. While some of the recommendations made in that Report have been implemented, not all:

- The education system should be used to encourage more women into politics through civic education programmes in secondary schools, for example.
- Training and mentoring to be provided for women who face the greatest barriers to participation in elections, including Traveller and Roma women, women with disabilities, migrant women, LGBTQI+ women, women in poverty, women parenting alone and women in rural areas.

- The establishment of a national fundraising campaign dedicated to raising money from private donors to finance women's electoral campaigns.
- State funding to be earmarked for women candidates until a certain target of representation is reached.
- The voluntary provisions of additional funds by political parties to support women candidates.
- Female role models should be identified and used in school and voter education programmes, to change the stereotypical image of the 'male politician'.
- To challenge the cultural barrier for women entering politics whereby childcare is always seen as a woman's responsibility, the issue of fathers' rights and paternity leave in society more broadly should be reviewed.
- An advertising campaign like that initiated in Iceland should be considered, with the participation of politicians from all parties, again aimed at challenging traditional stereotypes of male politicians.
- A national data bank of potential women candidates should be established, administered either by the State, or a national NGO like the NWCI, on a constituency by constituency basis.

Yours faithfully,

Mary Upton

Chair

Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament

Appendix 4: Letter to Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

In March 2021 the Ceann Comhairle of the Houses of the Oireachtas, Mr Seán Ó Fearghail, established a *Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament*. The membership of the Forum consisted of various experts, as well as Members of both Houses and Oireachtas staff. The Forum was tasked with drafting recommendations for the Ceann Comhairle to bring to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission, for its consideration.

The Forum has examined how the Houses of the Oireachtas are organised, with a view to enhancing the parliamentary community, and recommending practical steps to make the Houses of the Oireachtas a more inclusive, family friendly, and gender-sensitive workplace for all.

In looking at how the Houses of the Oireachtas operates, a number of proposals were made to the Forum that related to matters that are the responsibility of Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. I am including a copy of the full Report that has been presented to the Ceann Comhairle, and would like to draw your particular attention to the following recommendations for consideration. The first recommendation listed here has consequences beyond the Houses of the Oireachtas whereas the second and third are specific to political staff and Members of the Oireachtas respectively.

1. Review the application of the *Carer's Leave Act 2001* across the public service to permit carers take leave in the manner that they require, including in smaller blocks of time than 13 weeks.
2. Review the pay-scales and role profiles for Secretarial Assistants working in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Concerns were raised, which the Forum believes should be addressed, with regards to the low starting salary for the role. The Forum heard that the work completed by Secretarial Assistants often overlaps with the work undertaken by Parliamentary Assistants. The Forum would suggest that any review should consider how the role compares to the higher paid role of Parliamentary Assistant.⁵⁴ The Forum's interest in this issue derives from its ambition to see greater diversity across the parliamentary community. The Forum heard evidence that would suggest that salary levels for this role are impacting upon the profile of individuals who can afford to undertake the work, to the extent that it is impacting on the diversity of the profile of Secretarial Assistants. As this role gives individuals experience of parliamentary work, which has often encouraged those individuals to later run for election as Members of the Houses, this has a consequence both for the diversity of the parliamentary community as it is now, and the diversity of the parliamentary community of the future.

⁵⁴ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/members/salaries-and-allowances/scheme-for-secretarial-assistance/>

3. Extend the provision of Statutory Instrument No.89/2021 Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Secretarial Facilities) Regulations 2021 ⁵⁵ to provide secretarial support for Members of the Oireachtas taking two weeks paternity leave. The Forum believes that supporting Members' of the Houses of the Oireachtas to lead by example in availing of leave is important. Ultimately, encouraging all new parents to take leave will promote a less gendered and more equal approach to caring responsibilities in general and childcare in particular.

Yours faithfully,

Mary Upton

Chair

55 S.I. No. 89/2021 - Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Secretarial Facilities) Regulations 2021 (irishstatutebook.ie)

Appendix 5: Support for certain recommendations made by the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality published its final report in June 2021, while the work of the Forum was ongoing. Dr Catherine Day, Chair of the Assembly made a presentation to the Forum on the recommendations made in the assembly's final report. The Assembly's remit was broader and more expansive than that of the Forum and therefore many of its recommendations fall outside the scope of the Forum's work. However, the Citizens' Assembly made a number of recommendations which specifically complement the Forum's remit. Therefore, the Forum welcomes the report and endorses the full implementation of the following Citizens' Assembly recommendations:

- Workplaces should be required to develop, resource, implement and monitor gender-neutral recruitment and promotion policies and practices including: a) Specific policies to promote gender equality in leadership positions, b) A requirement to operate gender-sensitive and anti-discriminatory selection and promotions processes, c) Equal access to training, assignments and mentoring opportunities for all employees including part-time and remote workers.
- Improve family friendly practices for all representatives elected to public office by: a) Making maternity, paternity and parental leave available to all elected representatives, including Ministers (through legislation or constitutional amendment as required), b) Providing flexible working options including remote working and voting and adjusting meeting times and rules to suit caring responsibilities (through legislation or constitutional amendment as required).
- Reflecting international best practice, require gender impact assessment of all proposed legislation and legislate for equality budgeting across all Government bodies including local authorities.
- Anti-discrimination and equality legislation should be: a) Regularly reviewed to ensure effective monitoring, investigation, reporting and enforcement, b) A standard part of employee training.
- Article 40.1 of the Constitution should be amended to refer explicitly to gender equality and non-discrimination.
- Empower and adequately resource a statutory body for gender equality under the responsibility of a Cabinet Minister charged with cross government coordination of gender equality issues.
- OECD Recommendations on equality budgeting should be implemented. Robust gender and equality-proofed budgets should be provided.
- Improve gender balance on boards by making funding to public bodies contingent on reaching a 40% gender balance quota by 2025.
- By the end of 2022: Extend the gender quota for party candidates at general elections to local elections, elections to the Seanad and European Parliament elections and review every 5 years.
- By the end of 2022: Increase penalties for parties that do not meet the statutory gender quotas.
- By the end of 2022: The 30% threshold should be increased to 40% for women (and 40% for men) for all elections.

- Strengthen legislation, reporting and monitoring of press and social media by: (a) Holding technology and social media companies accountable for immediately removing online content that constitutes sexual harassment, bullying, stalking, sexually violent or abusive content that they have identified or about which they have been informed. (b) Penalising and eliminating hateful and abusive language, including on the basis of gender, with regular reviews to ensure legislation keeps pace with technological advances.

Appendix 6: Current family friendly initiatives and supports

HOUSES OF THE OIREACTHAS SUPPORTS, POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas

- Flexible working arrangements including modified start and finish times (Flexitime) – Taking account of the longer working hours of the Oireachtas
- Key Leave Arrangements: Paid Maternity Leave/Annual Leave (above statutory allowance)/ Parental Leave/Paternity Leave/Adoptive Leave/Carers Leave/Shorter Working Year/Force Majeure/ Compensatory Leave/Paid sick leave (leave arrangements also apply to political staff)
- Career Break Opportunities
- Attendance Policy and Guidelines including arrangements for management of leave, break times and requirements under the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997.
- Dignity at Work Policy an Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy for the Civil Service

[Dignity at Work Policy](#)

Parliamentary Community

- Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles and Policy (Parliamentary community)
[Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles and Policy](#)
- Breastfeeding, Rest Rooms and Baby Changing Facilities on site in Kildare House, Merrion Building and the Medical Room in Leinster House
- Crèche on site – Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas, political and office staff are eligible to use the creche. The creche is operated by Kids Inc.
- Family room (under development)

External Supports

Staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas

Employee Assistance Service [CSEAS](#)

The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service is a centralised confidential service within the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform which is available to all civil servants at times of personal and/or work-related difficulties. The key function of the CSEAS is to offer a resource and support service for all staff which positively affects both individual health and wellbeing and organisational effectiveness by:

- Providing a support and referral service for staff.
- Providing an advisory service for managers and supervisors.
- Being an information resource for staff.
- Supporting proactive initiatives in the area of staff wellbeing.

HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS SUPPORTS, POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Occupational Health Service [CMO](#)

The role of the Occupational Health Service is to:

- Carry out pre-employment medical assessments on behalf of the Service to establish a candidate's fitness to perform the job.
- Through their workplace rehabilitation programme; work with individuals to support and encourage them to re-enter the workplace as soon as their health permits.
- Provide an advisory service on work related health issues to HR Personnel, line managers, health & safety officers and employee assistance officers.
- Provide screening services for blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol.

Political Staff – Houses of the Oireachtas Workplace Assistance Programme [Spectrum.Life](#)

A confidential service that provides support to Members, political staff and their families. Services are provided 24/7, 365 days a year and include:

- Counselling
- Financial information
- Career guidance
- Life coaching
- Health information
- Cancer support
- Autism support
- Elder care support
- Parent coaching

Political Staff – Occupational Health Service (Details of this service are available to Members through Members HR)

The occupational health service provides the following to political staff:

- Standard occupational health assessments
- Follow-up appointments
- Complex occupational health assessments (e.g. ill-health retirements)

HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS SUPPORTS, POLICIES AND PRACTICES**Health and Wellbeing Supports available to staff****Parliamentary Community**

- Health and Safety Committee
- Fitness Room
- Running Group

Staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas

- Annual Calendar of events of Health and Wellbeing Group
- Health, Wellbeing and Inclusion Strategy

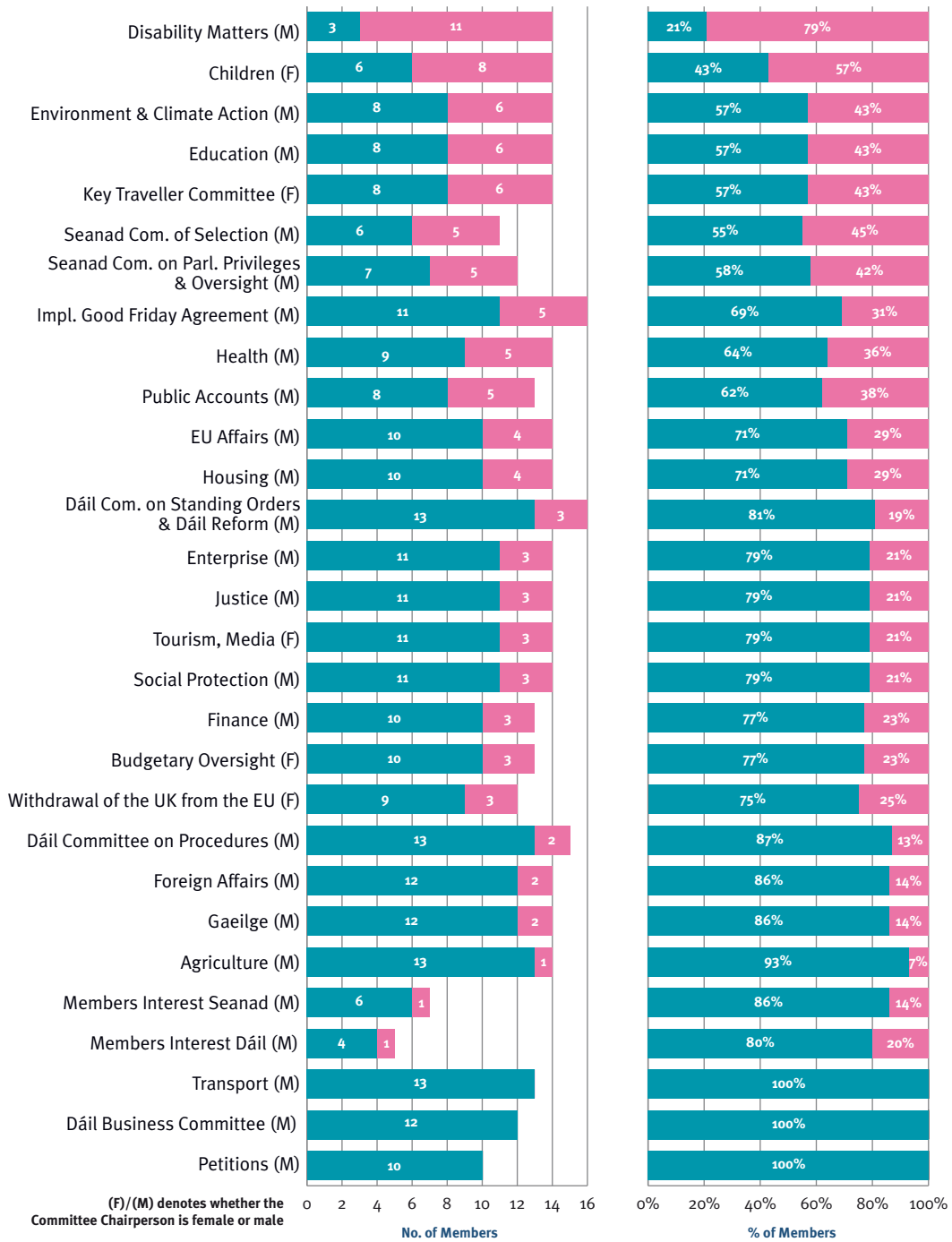
Social Supports/Networks**Staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas**

- Social Club
- PO Network
- AP Network
- HEO Network

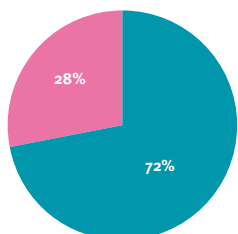
Parliamentary Community

- Choir
- LGBT+ Group

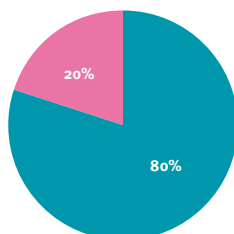
Appendix 7: Gender breakdown by Oireachtas Committee



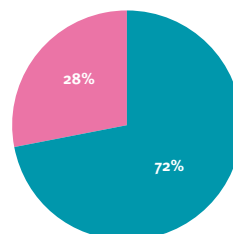
Total Number of Committee Seats



Chairs



Vice-Chairs



Oireachtas members available to sit on Joint Committees, by House and by Gender

| | DÁIL ÉIREANN | | SEANAD ÉIREANN | |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------|----------------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Not Available* | 27 | 9 | 0 | 1 |
| Available Pool | 100 | 24 | 36 | 23 |
| Total | 127 | 33 | 36 | 24 |

*Not available to join committees due to Ministerial/Party Leader Obligations

Data correct as of 10 May 2021

