Different Paths, Shared Experiences:

Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics in Ireland

National Traveller Women's Forum

AkiDwA
AKINA DADA WA AFRICA

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics in Ireland

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Pauline Cullen and **Shane Gough**
Maynooth, March 2022.

About the NTWF

The National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF), established in 1988, is a National Network of Traveller Women's groups and Traveller organisations from throughout Ireland. We recognise the particular oppression of Traveller women in Irish society and are working to address it from a Human Rights and Equality based approach. The NTWF aims to raise awareness of the issues affecting Traveller women, and to work towards ensuring these issues are recognised and reflected in policy development including Government policy.

About AkiDwA

Akina Dada wa Africa-AkiDwA (Swahili for sisterhood) is a national network for migrant women living in Ireland. AkiDwA's mission is to promote equality and justice for all migrant women living in Ireland. All projects aim to build the capacity of migrant women and promote their participation in their local communities, in civic and political structures, government consultations and decision-making processes.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Women from ethnic minority, racial minority and migrant backgrounds in Ireland are largely unrepresented in local and national politics. Researchers Pauline Cullen, Associate Professor, and Shane Gough (Department of Sociology, Maynooth University) collaborated with the National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF) and AkiDwA (the National Network of African and Migrant Women living in Ireland) to offer this first account of how Traveller, Roma and other ethnic minority and migrant women understand, assess, and experience local politics in Ireland. The aim of the research is to move beyond previous assessments of the barriers and facilitating factors for majority-population women in politics and to build an evidence base of how ethnic minority women understand and experience political engagement at the local level. In the research we use the term minoritised[1] to refer to the diversity of women participants and their experiences of intersectional discrimination. The evidence presented is used as a basis to advance recommendations to improve female candidacy within ethnic minority communities. The research also aims to support: civil society partners and collaborators to improve minoritised women's opportunities to influence local governance; training programmes to motivate and encourage minoritised women to become candidates; political parties to engage with minoritised women; and to highlight the racism and sexism that minoritised women experience and the benefits they bring to local politics and policy-making.

The project was initially funded by an *Irish Research Council New Foundations Award* and was extended through Dormant Account funding from the *Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth* (Gender Equality Unit) sourced by the NTWF to include additional participants including women from the Roma community. Traveller, Roma and migrant women voices are centred in the report to understand the intersecting forms of exclusion that shape minoritised women's views about and experiences of local government. Stakeholder perspectives were also key with training programmes, political parties and Department officials offering their assessments on the current context and future possibilities for improving minoritised women's access to local government.

Minoritised Women as Local Political Actors

In our analysis we cover as many stages as possible in the process of running for office, from initial consideration and potential recruitment, to standing for selection, being selected, and running a campaign. Data was gathered between March and September 2021. It comprised 43 online interviews with racialised, ethnic minoritised and migrant women community leaders, those with an interest in (aspirants) and who have run for political office (candidates: successful and unsuccessful); as well as advocacy organisations, public officials and political parties.

We offer a composite of women's accounts from different communities communicated through their own words and analysis. Our approach was attentive to the prevalence of sexist and racist discourse at the local and national level as a factor

1 The term "minoritised" (Gunaratnum 2003) refers to how people are actively minoritised by others rather than naturally existing as a minority, as the terms "racial minorities" or "ethnic minorities" imply. The term "racially minoritised" or "ethnically minoritised" confirms that minoritisation is a social process shaped by power. Although we use "minoritised", we do not dismiss the use of racial and ethnic categories with which people identify, such as Traveller, Roma, Black, Asian, Indigenous, Migrant and mixed race. The term "ethnic-indigenous" is also used by Traveller women as is the term "Minceir". The idea here is to acknowledge the complex ways in which these forms of discrimination intersect in the lived experience of the women participants and their communities.

that can suppress the interest and motivation of minoritised women to become involved in local politics.

We draw on the concepts of *political imagination* (Browne and Diehl 2019) and *political agency* (Buckley and Galligan 2020) to reframe female candidacy from an intersectional perspective. Political imagination refers to what politics means to minoritised women and how they understand and assess themselves as political actors, how their community and/or social group is perceived in political terms, and what they suggest politics should and could be. We situate the political imagination of minoritised women in tension with a broader dominant political imaginary that reinforces existing ideas, practices and patterns of political engagement.

Political Agency is a term used to assess the extent to which women feel enabled to make claims upon democratic politics, the State, and political institutions to pursue/secure political outcomes (Buckley and Galligan 2013). In this study we place the concept of political imagination in dialogue with that of political agency. We do this to acknowledge the links between existing forms of political work done by minoritised women in Ireland and the politicisation they experience through this work that underlines their political imagination. This includes how minoritised women operate forms of collective and careful leadership to challenge cultural attitudes, reform laws and policies, and provide vital social services. This involves invisible yet essential political work that is often not recognised as political leadership by political parties and broader society. A key way to reframe the candidacy of minoritised women is then to highlight the formation of their own distinctive political imagination and how it shapes their sense of political agency and exclusion, a process that has led some women to consider entering public office.

Context: Past and Present

We acknowledge the progress made in women's access to politics in Ireland (Buckley 2020; Galligan and Buckley 2018). However, we note the legacy of Ireland's gender regime and patriarchal constitutional settlement that set the terms for a political culture and institutional system that has perpetuated male overrepresentation in politics. This includes assessments of how political parties have responded to gender quotas in ways that have limited the advancement of women candidates (Mariani et al 2021; Buckley 2020). Any assessment of minoritised women's access to politics in Ireland must recognise the historic and current racialisation, racism and discrimination experienced by Traveller women (FRA 2020; Oireachtas 2021b) and the racism and social exclusion that shape many racial and/or ethnic minority and migrant women's lives (McGinnity et al 2017). We also note the extreme experiences of marginalisation endured by Roma women in Ireland (Pavee Point and National Traveller Women's Forum 2017).

We adopt the definition and understanding of racism used by the *Anti-Racism Committee* in its 2021 National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) interim report (Government of Ireland 2020). This definition of racism includes "the power dynamics present in those structural and institutional arrangements, practices, policies and cultural norms, which have the effect of excluding or discriminating against individuals or groups, based on their identity" (p. 5). This affirms the structural and systemic aspects of racism and draws on Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). Notably, this is a dynamic and living approach that acknowledges the intersectionality between racism and all other forms of oppression, including oppression experienced by people based on gender, sexuality, gender identity, disability and socio-economic circumstances.[2]

2 In line with this we also acknowledge that racialisation (the process of being defined as a racial group) is a gendered process that applies to ethnic-indigenous women, black women and migrant women (Bell and Borelli 2021).

Analysis of racism and discrimination in Irish society has confirmed the persistence of discriminatory behaviours and attitudes (McGinnity et al 2020a; Joseph 2021; Pavee Point and National Traveller Women's Forum 2017). A reluctance to confront white supremacy and privilege maintains existing racial and ethnic hierarchies that are reinforced by generalised ambivalence regarding the benefits that "whiteness" bestows from unearned public and private power (Joseph 2019; Michael and Joseph 2021).

International Policy Context

The low participation levels of minoritised women in politics across Europe is now widely acknowledged as an issue that requires a systematic approach. Outcomes of recent examinations of Ireland by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD 2020), the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe 2018a) and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 2017) all underline the importance of political participation and recommend positive action measures for the political inclusion of minoritised women. The 2020-2025 EU Gender Equality Strategy includes a recognition of the importance of taking a cross-cutting intersectional approach when it comes to the inclusion of women. The EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025, in turn, notes the importance of local community integration initiatives as having significant potential to create more racially tolerant and inclusive communities. The EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027) includes recommendations on gender mainstreaming and anti-discrimination to support representation and inclusion especially at the local level. The EU Roma strategic framework 2020-2030 in turn emphasises political participation and inclusion.

National Policy Context

While the Irish Government's recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 were significant developments, research shows that Travellers continue to experience significant barriers to healthcare, adequate and culturally appropriate housing, education, and meaningful work. Furthermore, the recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority and indigenous peoples has no legislative underpinning, provides no new legal rights to Travellers and places no new legal responsibilities on the State. The Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020 includes commitments to equality and integration yet migrants in Ireland continue to experience exclusion (Michael 2020). Migrant women also suffer due to gender-blind asylum and migration policies, which leave them at risk of economic and social exclusion (MRCI 2008). A cross-cutting priority issue for the NAPAR (p. 16) is Equal Participation in Decision Making. Other national plans, such as the Programme for Government, include commitments to promoting the inclusion and integration of minorities[3] and progress on gender parity in representation at national and local level. The National Strategy for Women and Girls also includes commitments to address the underrepresentation of women in politics.

Compartmentalisation and Fragmentation

Minoritised women are located at *the intersection of policies and strategies* that may aim to address gender inequality and racism, promote integration and/or support Traveller and Roma inclusion. Yet diversity and gender equality policies are often practised along parallel lines and, coupled with the absence of disaggregated data (IHREC 2021b), have made it difficult to articulate and advocate for the intersectional interests of minoritised women

3 The Programme for Government (2020) Mission on Reforming and Reimagining our Public Life includes commitments to "[e]mpower local authorities to encourage improved gender and ethnic mix in local elections" and to "[c]onsider the recommendations of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) report on Women beyond the Dáil, More Women in Local Government".

and their communities. Minoritised women have also been disproportionately negatively affected by the multiplicative and overlapping effects of the economic and Covid-19 crises (Hennessy 2021; Joseph 2021). Understanding minoritised women's political experiences, opportunities and priorities requires a focus on the interaction between a variety of factors that shape their presence, power and influence at the local level.

Local politics and high energy democracy

An erosion of women's rights, and the racism and xenophobia evident in the influence of far-right organisations (Lombardo et al 2021; ISD 2021) underlines the necessity for political and institutional support for diverse representation. Local government reform (Lloyd 2016) and changes to how the State resources civil society organisations have also altered the terms under which minoritised women engage with local structures (Bennett 2021) and the conditions of local councillors working to support their communities (AILG 2021b; Moorhead 2020). Strong and representative local governance is also understood as a prerequisite for the high-energy democracy required to secure equal and sustainable societies (Murphy 2019).

Politics, Diversity and Responsiveness

Where minoritised women are underrepresented in decision-making there is a lack of responsiveness of politics to their interests (Crowder-Meyer 2021). Such imbalance affects how minoritised women feel about democracy and reinforces their perceptions that politics is not for them. Moreover, politics is experienced as something that is done to and not with them (Celis and Childs 2020). In short, the weak representational power of minoritised women means that their specific perspectives and forms of expertise remain marginal to policy debates. However, even as candidates, minoritised women disrupt societal expectations about leadership. In other contexts, the election of minoritised women has contributed to breaking down racial, ethnic and gender barriers in electoral politics (Brown 2014). Minoritised women can then serve as role models and mentors, helping other minoritised women run for office (Sanbonmatsu 2015) and improving the substantive representation of other underrepresented groups, thereby enhancing the legitimacy of democracy.

Calls to reform the conditions of office-holding for all women (Moorhead 2020; AILG 2021b; Oireachtas 2021a; Women for Election 2021; NWC 2021) and recent resourcing of diversity initiatives at local level indicate an impetus to diversify politics. This is aligned with a greater awareness of how sexism and racism in everyday life and social media deters women and especially minoritised women from entering public roles (Michael 2020; Felle et al 2020; NWC 2021; AILG-CMG 2021). This report builds on these analyses and initiatives while drawing attention to the *specific and persistent barriers faced by racialised ethnic and migrant women in public life.*

Summary of Findings

The Political Calculus of Minoritised Women

Racism and sexism are motivating factors for many minoritised women in considering a political role. Traveller women's lifelong experiences of anti-Traveller racism has shaped their political calculus in significant ways. One Traveller interviewee summed up their experience of anti-Traveller racism:

> *"it is important that we believe we can make a change, but you do start to doubt yourself, how can I run for local public office, if I cannot get served in the local pub?!"*

For some migrant women, witnessing the challenges migrants face accessing public services and integrating into local communities influenced their decision to run. This Black migrant woman

interviewee discussed the response she received from local officials when she would advocate for minoritised voters:

> *"most of the time … you don't even get a response.... So I just started to say to myself that I think it's so important that I get involved in politics because I need to be there".*

Some minoritised women, particularly Traveller women, expressed anticipation that the majority population may not vote for them:

> *"I could run to make a point but I know I am not going to get the votes. … the knowledge that the majority of the settled population are not going to vote for you, that the numbers are against them is what deters Travellers from candidacy".*

Minoritised women face a complex set of calculations in weighing up the idea of seeking a local political role. These calculations are influenced by how gender, ethnicity and race intersect to shape access to resources, familial and care responsibilities, and the likelihood of experiencing sexism and racism. Minoritised women participants as such consider candidacy in *relational terms*. They hold communal and value-driven objectives for their communities and the broader society. Women participants also acknowledged common ground with other women from other communities although as one participant underlined, "*similar issues affect us differently".* They also do not necessarily lack confidence or ambition. Rather, they respond rationally to constraints and risks. The *costs of candidacy* for many included a risk of isolation from their own community, especially if they advanced to public office, as well as a lack of inclusion in their new public role.

However, for others the costs of not running are too high (Dittmar 2020b). Catalysts included the extraordinary loss of life in the Traveller community in the 2015 Carrickmines fire or, from further afield, the death of George Floyd in the United States, or how discrimination and disadvantage in education is now reproduced in their own children's lives.

Assets for Local Candidacy

All women interviewed were deeply involved in community organisations. For Traveller and some black women community activism was more likely to be in service of their own communities with less involvement in majority community organisations. This work is often overlooked by political parties when seeking candidates. As such, *not all community activity counts the same.*

Many EU migrant women acknowledged the *benefits that whiteness* provided them *in contrast to the hyper-visibility experienced by both Traveller women and women of colour*. However, white migrant women also experience being 'othered' as women and as migrants. Overall, minoritised women struggle to access assets essential for local political office such as the currency of *localness, including visibility, networks,* and a familiarity with Irish political culture.

"Ambition from the Margins"

For many minoritised women, attempts to enter the institutional contexts of candidacy (political parties, training, fundraising, campaigning, media) forces them to navigate unfamiliar formal and informal rules and spaces that are experienced as exclusionary. Gender, racial and ethnic stereotypes, the lack of role models and being the 'first' to run exacerbates these dynamics. In this sense they were '*space invaders'* (Puwar 2004) and, without sponsorship and support, some were relegated to the margins of these spaces and processes. The result is that for some the experience of party politics confirms a lack of fit with their political imagination and suppresses their interest and motivation to run.

For minoritised women *a decision not to run for office* can also be linked to self-protective strategies that include an avoidance of situations where racism and sexism arise. Deterrence though does not mean the absence of interest in political office, while many women evaluated their prospects of securing office as low, they reasoned that the *symbolic effect* of their candidacies justified their decision to run.

While all these women exercise aspects of *"ambition from the margins"*,[4] women from different ethnic and racial groups also advanced distinctive forms of *political imagination* and different interpretations of *political self-efficacy*. These differences shape their sense of political agency, and their l*inked fate with their own communit*y. This sense of a linked fate was strongest for Traveller and Roma women whose decision to pursue office was in part motivated by a commitment to highlight the trauma and racial discrimination they and their communities experience. For migrant women of colour their sense of linked fate was rooted in their experiences of hypervisibility, gendered racism and, for some, their citizenship status. However, in general women participants expressed their intent to represent not just their own community but also the concerns of the broader local community. Some of these women worked as '*cultural brokers*' initiating local intercultural and/or migrant organisations and community fora.

As one migrant woman stated:

> *"we need a community voice...but it is important to me that I can help bridge divides between communities."*

For Traveller women the cumulative effects of anti-Traveller racism weighed heavily on the community:

> *"there has been too much shame, Travellers stand in the shade – get comfortable hiding – we are doomed to be blamed for the things that other people do, it is time we got out into the light."*

Most successful candidates received significant party support, high intensity mentoring and sponsorship enabling them to adapt to the political system in key ways. However, all women participants maintain a critical sensibility about public life and an expressed commitment to *'do politics differently'*. While some migrant women reported being sought by parties *"looking to connect to my community"* this was not the case for Travellers, confirming weak demand for their votes and candidacy from political parties. As one advocate commented:

> *"I don't see parties trying to locate Travellers or Traveller women to become candidates, there is no drive, there is no campaign."*

Canvassing and Gendered Racism

For candidates and elected representatives, campaigning itself can be seen as an intersectional institution (Siow and Begum 2021) where the intersection of candidates' identities are weighted against the societal value placed on gender, race, ethnicity, class and ablebodiness (ILMI 2022). Canvassing was a mixed experience, positive in some respects, but at times discouraging:

> *"some people they just open the door, it's enough to see your face and they shut it again."*

This interviewee described how racist and sexist incidents affected her while canvassing.

> *"actually puts the fear of god in me in a way, that I wasn't able to cope and then it gave me a thing of wanting to always have eyes in the back of my head because with canvassing you don't know who is following behind you".*

For Traveller, Roma and Black women racialised identities carry specific penalties although all migrant women experience forms of sexualised and racist abuse. This abuse occurred on and offline and included in-person racist and sexist harassment, abuse and intimidation. Concerns were also raised about the links between such abuse and stereotypical representations of minorities in traditional media.

While all women participants acknowledged they had experienced racism and sexism, some downplayed these experiences and their effects. There is apprehension about raising issues of sexism

4 Dowe (2020, 697) introduces the concept of *ambition from the margins* to capture the sense of community that leads Black Women to engage in a unique type of political work. She defines the long history of Black Women's politicisation as a form of *radical imagination* that included innovative forms of political engagement despite *marginalisation*.

and racism because of the *political costs of doing so.* There is also a lack of clarity about where to report such issues.

A common strategy was to 'block' or ignore social media abuse, or, if possible, to delegate its management to a colleague or friend. Of course, these strategies did not always work as harassment also took place face-to-face or at private residences. All participants registered the emotional and psychological 'toll' or 'cost' of contemplating or competing for a political role as a woman, as a carer and as a minority. In line with previous research (Cullen and McGing 2019; Lima 2020), despite these experiences and events, *most participants remained interested in pursuing a local political role.*

Recruitment, Training and Support of Minoritised Women Candidates

Most women engaged with training programmes, although the *network effect* of participation was useful for some more than others and was least useful for Traveller women. Participation in programmes was especially helpful to migrant women and there is evidence that existing programmes are evolving to include the multiple, diverse, and intersectional realities shaping minoritised women's lives. Women participants were clear that training should be inclusive, holistic and attuned to the specific obstacles facing minoritised women:

> *"the training should be a way of protecting yourself … mentally, physically as well as spiritually and emotionally. …if you meet [sexism or racism] on the door you know, yes, it is going to be hurtful … but then after that how do you deal with it in a way that it doesn't remain with you, then it affects your whole campaign".*

For another migrant women candidate, programmes needed to adopt proactive and inclusive strategies to attract the most diverse women:

> *"Popular capable women are ready to run and that is great, but training programmes need to break away from the 'already ready' – that just reinforces the loop within parties who are looking for a particular profile … you have got to get into the community and do in-reach – go to their own organisations and spaces and you will reach women who are most excluded from the political system."*

There was a general sentiment among training programmes of the importance to not only train women but also advocate for changes in systems of representation as one trainer commented: *"to avoid trying to assimilate women into a space that wasn't designed for them.*" Although we caution against making training programmes alone responsible for the diversification of local politics, as this requires a whole of system approach.

We find that stakeholders, including political parties and public officials, endorse diversity in political representation. Individual politicians and party officials voiced strong commitments to anti-racist practices. This was often linked to their awareness of the incidence of far-right activity in Ireland.

Parties demonstrated intent to 'diversify' and improve outreach to minoritised aspirants. Participants from parties underlined their awareness that positive action was required to diversify politics especially at the local level. However, diversity and anti-racism have not yet become core to the organisational capacity of parties and, for some, satisfying existing gender quota requirements is an ongoing challenge that supersedes efforts to attract more diverse candidates. As such, while commitments to anti-racism exist, expertise and human capital to realise such commitments are lacking. As one political party representative commented:

> *"we need to resource a specific officer in parties to recruit women and more diverse candidates, this could be challenging for small parties. But the key is ensuring it is an identifiable role in the party to reach out to local offices and organisations. It is about encouraging women from underrepresented communities; it is not just gender that is holding them back."*

When minoritised women are supported by political parties, this gives important signals to the electorate.

One interviewee said of political parties:

> *"it is not enough to have one face of an African person ... It's not enough at all. ... there has to be participation in every aspect... let there be enough, enough women, enough Africans, enough Travellers, enough. Just one person is not enough."*

The state and government departments play an important role in supporting and scaffolding minoritised women's access to public life. To date compartmentalisation, in particular a tendency to separate gender equality from diversity initiatives, has left minoritised women the subjects of specific interventions without a comprehensive approach to addressing their political exclusion.

Officials offered candid accounts of their efforts to support minoritised women and their interest in acquiring expertise and input to create more integrated responses and better outcomes. As one official noted:

> *"With all the strategies, actual responsibility for local elections, lie within another department. So we have that coordination role, but the actual actions do lie elsewhere. That is a challenge for us to be honest, because we can do only what we can do."*

Increasing the number of minoritised women in local politics requires confronting the sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination including the normative whiteness of public life that combine to discount minoritised women's political imagination and diminish their political agency. Combating the underrepresentation of minoritised women in politics then demands specific and targeted measures that may include achieving gender-balanced electoral lists through gender and ethnic quotas; inclusive training and mentoring programmes; zero-tolerance of sexism and racism (and other forms of discrimination) with clear channels to report sexual and racial harassment or hate speech and targeted funding for minoritised women candidates, minoritised women's associations and networks.

Recommendations

State
Legislate for local gender quota incorporating a nested ethnic quota
Given the numerical disadvantage of Traveller and Roma communities, explore the provision of reserved seats and the development of a Special Electoral District
Reform the Seanad to include a diversity panel with gender parity (including Traveller and Roma women's representation)
Within existing funding to parties under s.18 of the Electoral Act 1997, allow for expenditure to diversify membership and candidate lists. As recommended by SIPO, require parties to spend this funding in the allocated year, or lose it.
Require political parties to collect and publish diversity data on membership and candidates (both nominated and selected candidates) including funding of candidates disaggregated by gender and ethnicity
Fund equality, diversity and inclusion training including intercultural training for elected members and staff of political parties, local authorities, councils and the Oireachtas
Fund a political leadership officer located in the respective minoritised women's representative organisations to liaise between Traveller, Roma and migrant women, and political parties
Require compulsory Codes of Practice with zero tolerance for sexism and racism with sanctions for breaches and clear channels to report incidents of sexism and racism both within political parties and political institutions (Oireachtas and Local Authorities)
Strengthen and provide legislation for Media Codes of Practice on anti-racist and anti-sexist reporting (including a media fund to support positive representations of Traveller, Roma, and other ethnic minority cultures)
Implement hate crime/speech legislation (on and offline) and create specific offences of: • hate speech (including racist and sexist abuse) against politicians; • hate speech against any group while holding elected office; and • include a definition of gender-based political violence.
Facilitate family friendly work practices including provision of childcare facilities, remote meetings of Councils and for remote voting and implement the recommendations of the Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament and of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality on Leadership in Politics and Public Life.
Establish programmes at all levels of education promoting political participation of minoritised women and girls
Provide multiannual funding to support minoritised women's organisations to support participation in programmes to build political knowledge
Provide multiannual funding for training programmes targeted at minoritised women including high intensity mentoring, English language training, childcare support and stipend for attendance

Provide a basic wage for minoritised female candidates for duration of election campaign and allow campaign funding to be used for childcare

Ensure that national strategies (including NTRIS; MIS; NSWG) are integrated and adopt an intersectional approach to minoritised women with a specific focus on political participation

Consult minoritised women's representative organisations in the design and implementation of any positive actions or diversity mechanisms

Political Parties

Develop and implement a Gender and Diversity Action Plan including a dedicated equality, diversity and inclusion officer with relevant expertise

Set candidate targets for ethnic minority representation (including Travellers and Roma, and with gender parity)

Include ethnic minorities (with gender parity) in the Taoiseach's Seanad Nominees

Review and expand candidate recruitment processes to engage minoritised women

Ring fence funding to support minoritised women candidates

Extend participation in internships and shadowing programmes to all minoritised women at the local level

Ensure gender parity with diversity targets for internal party committees (including those involved in the selection of candidates)

Introduce Codes of Practice for party members with zero tolerance on sexism and racism with sanctions for breaches and clear channels to report sexism and racism

Make commitments on by-elections and co-optations for preference to be given to minoritised women

Provide comprehensive resilience training for minoritised women candidates and elected representatives including how to deal with social media abuse, sexism, racism (including anti-Traveller racism)

Collect and publish gender disaggregated data with ethnic identifier on all applicants throughout the selection process, including unsuccessful applicants; candidates and members after the next Local Election with official election results

Support youth wings to outreach to minoritised women and fund leadership training for young minoritised women

Sign the Sixth International Roma Women Conference Pledge on political representation of Roma women

Local Authorities

Provide childcare facilities in Councils (funded by the State)

Create and implement paid internship programmes for minoritised women in local authorities /councils

Sign up to the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life

Electoral Commission

Remove any barriers, in particular the requirement to attend a Garda station, to voter registration for Traveller, Roma and other ethnic minorities

Comprehensive voter registration and awareness campaign to increase the numbers of minorities registered to vote

Collect and monitor gender disaggregated data with ethnic identifier on all political party candidate applicants throughout the selection process, including unsuccessful applicants, candidates and members after the next Local Election with official election results

Civil Society/Training Organisations

Seek opportunities to establish a philanthropic fund for underrepresented women for training and campaign funding

Support leadership initiatives for minoritised women and girls in other contexts (e.g. Community Development Organisations; Trade Unions; Universities)

Ensure the representation of minoritised women on boards and/or steering committees

Training programs: facilitate the creation of networks for minoritised women

Training programs: facilitate inclusive training for minoritised women, with migrant and/or Traveller-led programs including modules led and delivered by role models

Part 1:
Introduction, Analysis and Conclusions

Section 1: Introduction and Context

Introduction

Women from ethnic minority, racial minority and migrant backgrounds in Ireland are largely unrepresented in local and national politics. To date no research exists on their political engagement and candidacy in Ireland. This research offers the first account of how Traveller, Roma and other ethnic minority and migrant women understand, assess and experience local politics in Ireland. The aim of the research is to move beyond previous assessments of the barriers and facilitating factors for majority-population women in politics and to build an evidence base of how ethnic minority women understand and experience political engagement at the local level. In this report we use the term *minoritised women* to include Traveller women, understood as an indigenous ethnic minority, Roma women, other ethnic minority women and those who identify as migrant women. This term aims to capture the complex intra and inter-group diversity of these women and the broader category of power relations within which they exist. When we refer to "women", we refer to women identified. We acknowledge that regardless of how the women participants identify, they may be subjected to and/or experience the process of racialisation (being defined as a racial group).[5]

Local Representation and Minoritised Female Candidates in Ireland

In the 2019 local elections, 28% of candidates were female (562), five identified as Traveller (three were women). In June 2020 the first Traveller woman to hold office in the Oireachtas, Eileen Flynn, was appointed to the Seanad as an Independent. Nan Joyce was the first Irish Traveller to run for election; she ran in the general election in 1982 and got twice as many votes as the anti-Traveller groups she stood against in Dublin.[6]

In 2019, 56 migrant-identified men and women ran in the local elections. Three men and six women migrants were elected. While the majority of migrant candidates ran as independents, all those elected ran for a political party. In February 2020, there was a general election that resulted in a number of co-options. Out of the 34 co-options, two migrant women – Mayor Uruemu Adejinmi and Cllr. Saša Novak Uí Chonchúir – were co-opted to councils.

5 Racialisation is how race is defined, what meanings are attached to it, and how it is used to create and reproduce racism. The application of this term to the experiences of Traveller, Roma and Black people is endorsed by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI 2021). Omni and Winant define racialisation as "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group" (1986 111). Racialisation is often applied to anti-black racism but other ethnic groups also experience racialisation. Garner (2019 513-515) argues that Travellers in England have been historically racialised by the State and the media and acknowledges that racialisation is gendered. This is not to suggest that ethnic-indigenous women in this study identify as belonging to a racial minority but rather that their experiences and social status are shaped by processes of racialisation including racism. We also recognise problems associated with the amalgamation of a variety of groups into the abstract "Gypsy Travellers" or Gypsy Roma and Irish Travellers (GRIT) and are mindful of the cultural and historical distinctions between the groups.

6 Traveller women who have been elected or have run for political office: Ellen Mongan, Elected to Tuam Urban Council in 1999; Rosaleen McDonagh, ran for election to Seanad Éireann on the Trinity Panel three times; Julie O'Reilly, ran in the Local Election in Longford in 2019; Catherine Coffey O'Brien, ran in the Local Election in Cork in 2019; AnnMarie Roche, ran in the Dáil Election in Galway in 2016 and Local Election in Loughrea in 2019

Background

This research originated in an Irish Research Council New Foundations Award granted to understand the factors that shape minoritised women's political engagement with and candidacy for local politics in Ireland. That work began a collaboration with the National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF) and AkiDwA (the National Network of African and Migrant Women living in Ireland) and was concerned with mapping existing supports and documenting experiences of candidacy for local political office. We also initiated an evidence base and constructed a research advisory group to theorise minoritised women's political engagement and candidacy. The project was extended through research funding from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Gender Equality Unit) to include additional participants including women from the Roma community. Traveller, Roma and migrant women's voices are centred in the report to understand the intersecting factors that shape minoritised women's views about and experiences of local government. Stakeholder perspectives were also key with training programmes, political parties and relevant Department officials offering their assessments on the current context and future possibilities for improving minoritised women's access to local government.

The report begins with an executive summary and recommendations on supporting minoritised women's access to local politics in Ireland. It then proceeds in three parts. In **Part 1** we provide an overview of our approach, the methodology used, a summary of literature that informed the research and data collected from participants (namely, minoritised women (aspirants, candidates, and elected representatives) and advocacy organisations and stakeholders (training programmes, political parties, and the State), followed by conclusions. In **Part 2** we include a comprehensive review of the international and national literature that informed the research. In **Part 3** we provide an overview of international resolutions and recommendations on minorities and politics, a review of quota models, and local government and training programmes in other contexts.

Context: Past and Present

Historical forces and contemporary dynamics shape minoritised women's exclusion from politics. We acknowledge progress made in women's access to politics in Ireland (Buckley 2020; Galligan and Buckley 2021). However, we note the legacy of Ireland's gender regime and patriarchal constitutional settlement that set the terms for a political culture and institutional system that has perpetuated male overrepresentation in politics. This includes assessments of how political parties have responded to gender quotas in ways that have limited the advancement of women candidates (Marani et al 2021; Buckley 2020). Any assessment of minoritised women's access to politics in Ireland must recognise the historic and current racialisation, racism and discrimination experienced by Traveller women (FRA 2020; Oireachtas 2021b) and the racism and social exclusion that shape many racial and/or ethnic minority and migrant women's lives.[7] We also note the extreme experiences of marginalisation endured by Roma women in Ireland (Pavee Point 2018).

Research has established the existence of racial and ethnic stereotypes in Ireland (McGinnity et al 2018; McGinnity et al 2020; Joseph 2021) and the racism that migrant women (MRCI 2008) and Roma and Traveller women experience (Pavee Point and National Traveller Women's Forum 2017). In this report we adopt the definition and understanding of racism used by the *Anti-Racism Committee* in its National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) interim report.[8] This definition of racism includes "*the power dynamics present in those structural and institutional arrangements, practices, policies and cultural norms, which have the effect of excluding or discriminating against individuals*

7 See, for example, McGinnity et al 2017.

8 The interim report offers an important compendium of the current if limited data on racial, ethnic and migrant populations in Ireland as well as the legal protections against racism (Government of Ireland 2020).

or groups, based on their identity" (Government of Ireland 2020, p. 5). This affirms the structural and systemic aspects of racism and draws on Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). Notably, this is a dynamic and living approach that acknowledges the intersectionality between racism and all other forms of oppression, including oppression experienced by people based on gender, sexuality, gender identity, disability and socio-economic circumstances (Government of Ireland 2020, 5).[9] The report states:

> *"Racism is embedded in structures; reflected and reproduced in institutions; practices, policies and cultural norms, and through them has the effect of excluding or discriminating against individuals or groups, based on their race or ethnicity (including nationality and membership of the Traveller community)."* **(Government of Ireland 2020, 6).**[10]

Analysis of racism and discrimination in Irish society has confirmed the persistence of discriminatory behaviours and attitudes. Colour-based racism is evident in Ireland. Joseph (2019) argues that despite migrants', and specifically Black migrants', high levels of education and professional expertise, a "migrant deficit" approach is prevalent that maintains their marginalisation and un/underemployment. This narrative is bound up with a colour hierarchy where white-identified migrants may leverage more beneficial outcomes. These processes perpetuate racial stereotypes and reinforce false presumptions of meritocracy as a principle shaping labour markets. The central issue here for Joseph (2021) is that race remains marginal to debates on inequality and is rarely centred in broader assessments of access to socio-economic status in Irish society.

A reluctance to confront white supremacy and privilege maintains existing racial and ethnic hierarchies that are reinforced by generalised ambivalence regarding the benefits that "whiteness" bestows from unearned public and private power (Joseph 2019). Analysis reveals the multiple ways in which race and ethnicity shape access to employment, housing, education, and justice and how processes and institutions reproduce the effects, and the idea, of race and ethnicity in systemically discriminatory, marginalising and exploitative ways (Michael and Joseph 2021).

While the Irish Government's recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority and the *National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy 2017-2021* were significant developments, research shows that Travellers continue to experience significant barriers to healthcare, adequate and culturally appropriate housing,[11] education, and meaningful work. Furthermore, the recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority and indigenous peoples has no legislative underpinning, provides no new legal rights to Travellers and places no new legal responsibilities on the State. The *Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020* includes commitments to equality and integration yet migrants in Ireland continue to experience exclusion (Michael 2020).[12] Migrant women also suffer due to ineffective and gender-blind asylum and migration policies, which leave them at risk of economic and social exclusion (MRCI 2008).

A cross-cutting priority issue for the NAPAR is Equal Participation in Decision Making, summed up in the statement:

9 In line with this we also acknowledge that racialisation (the process of being defined as a racial group) is a gendered process that applies to ethnic-indigenous women, black women and migrant women (Bell and Borelli 2021).

10 Human rights, respect for democracy and the rule of law guide the Anti-Racism Committee's approach which is undergirded by the *Durban Programme of Action*.

11 http://tvgcork.ie/sites/default/files/downLoadableResources/RTAWG-Conference-Launch-Traveller-Homelessness-in-the-South-West-180122_0.pdf.

12 https://www.citizensinformationboard.ie/downloads/social_policy/submissions2021/National-Anti-Racism-Plan-072021.pdf; recommendation 20 refers to quotas for local government.

> *"[T]he absence of people of minority ethnicities in visible positions of power and influence in any society is one of the most salient manifestations of structural racism there is. The ethnic composition of Ireland's current cohort of decision makers and influencers is simply not reflective of the ethnic diversity of its population."* **(Government of Ireland 2020, p. 16).**

Other national plans, including the Programme for Government, include commitments to promoting the inclusion and integration of minorities[13] and progress on gender parity in representation at national and local level.[14] The National Strategy for Women and Girls[15] contains commitments to address the underrepresentation of women in politics. The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality[16] concluded with key recommendations to improve women's presence in leadership and politics, including an extension of gender quota legislation to local elections.

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) project *Women for Change*, *Women in Local Government (Celebration of 120 years)* and *Women Beyond the Dáil: More Women in Local Government* (Cullen and McGing 2019) as well as its submission to the Seanad Public Consultation Committee on *Travellers: Towards a more equitable Ireland post-recognition* (Oireachtas 2020) (representation in politics)[17] have all highlighted structural deficits and a discriminatory and exclusionary culture that combine to maintain systemic underrepresentation of minoritised women in politics in Ireland.

International bodies have repeatedly drawn attention to Ireland's lack of gender parity and diversity in politics. The outcomes of recent examinations of Ireland by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD 2020), the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe 2018a) and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 2017) all underline the importance of political inclusion.

While many of the EU Action Plans fall short in terms of concrete targets and actions as well as the proposed synergies between them to support gender equality, integration and anti-racism objectives (ENAR 2020), they do include recommendations that highlight the importance of political

13 The Programme for Government (2020) Mission on Reforming and Reimagining our Public Life includes commitments to "[e]mpower local authorities to encourage improved gender and ethnic mix in local elections" and to "[c]onsider the recommendations of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) report on *Women beyond the Dáil, More Women in Local Government*"; https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/.

14 *Our Public Service 2020*, the national policy framework for development and innovation in Ireland's public service, includes a commitment to promote equality, diversity and inclusion across the public service. The Department of Rural and Community Development launched a five-year strategy, *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five Year Strategy to support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024* which recognises the role that community organisations can play in the inclusion of marginalised groups. The *Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020* has a focus on attracting less well represented groups into programmes, while the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019* includes ethnic minorities among its target groups.

15 The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 (NSWG) Foreword also refers to the "need to ensure that disadvantaged women, older women, women with disabilities, Traveller and Roma women and migrant women can participate in key decisions concerning their lives." Objective Three of the NSWG is to ensure the visibility in society of women and girls, and their equal and active citizenship. This includes commitments by Government Departments, State agencies and partners to promote the effective participation in public life of groups such as Traveller, Roma, migrant and LGBTI women and women with disabilities through the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, the Migrant Integration Strategy, the LGBTI Inclusion Strategy, and the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, respectively. Objective Four of the NSWG is aimed at advancing women in leadership at all levels and states: "In view of the historic under-representation of Traveller and Roma women in leadership positions, measures will specifically be taken to provide greater opportunities for Traveller and Roma women to participate in leadership." https://justice.ie/en/JELR/National_Strategy_for_Women_and_Girls_2017__2020.pdf/Files/National_Strategy_for_Women_and_Girls_2017_-_2020.pdf.

16 https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/news-publications/press-releases/recommendations-of-the-citizens-assembly-on-gender-equality.html.

17 The latter publication called for positive actions including reserved seats and Traveller quota systems across decision-making bodies including targets for Traveller women in mainstream gender quotas, voter education initiatives, interculturalism training and a code of conduct for political parties.

inclusion and participation of minoritised women.[18] *The EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025*, in turn, notes the importance of local community integration initiatives as having significant potential to create more racially tolerant and inclusive communities. Local authorities are highlighted in the Action Plan as important bodies in promoting better integration of marginalised and excluded communities, and thereby contributing to a more respectful inclusion of people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. *The EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion* (2021-2027)[19] includes recommendations on gender mainstreaming and anti-discrimination supporting representation and inclusion especially at the local level. The EU Roma strategic framework 2020-2030 (European Commission 2020b) in turn emphasises political participation and inclusion.

International commitments to gender equality place a central focus on political empowerment and decision-making including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace (BPfA) 1995 (UN Women 1995, p.119) and UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 empowering women. The 2020-2025 EU Gender Equality Strategy (European Commission 2020c) includes a recognition of the importance of taking a cross-cutting intersectional approach when it comes to the inclusion of women. In addition, the European Gender Equality Institute *Gender Equality Index 2021* documented limited progress for Ireland in political decision-making.[20] The Council of Europe (CoE) Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 (CoE 2018) details recommendations on the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making.[21]

The low participation levels of minoritised women in politics across Europe is now widely acknowledged as an issue that requires a systematic approach. Fawcett (the UK-based women's organisation), the Equality and Human Rights Commissions in Scotland and England (Fawcett 2017),[22] the European Network of Migrant Women (ENOMW 2018), the Council of Europe (Roma taskforce) (Council of Europe 2018), recommendations made by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe 2018a), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD 2020), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 2017) and a former Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (Council of Europe 2008), have all recommended the need for positive actions to address the factors that inhibit minoritised women's participation in public life.

18 The European Pillar of Social Rights includes commitments to gender equality and equal participation: "Each principle should be viewed using a gender lens, taking into account how women's intersectional identities influence their ability to exercise the rights outlined in the pillar. Furthermore, the forthcoming action plan to implement the pillar should specifically outline how it will build synergies with the EU's Gender Equality Strategy, the EU's Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion, and the EU's Anti-racism action plan, particularly when it comes to principle 2 on Gender Equality and principle 3 on Equal Opportunities" (Eurodiaconia 2020).

19 It states: "This action plan will take into account the combination of personal characteristics, such as gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation and disability that can represent specific challenges for migrants. It will build on and complement the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025, the EU Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy and the forthcoming Strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities." (European Commission 2020).

20 https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/country/IE.

21 Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making defines the balanced participation of women and men as a minimum 40% representation of each sex in any decision-making body in political and public life. A set of legislative, administrative and supportive measures is recommended to member states in order to achieve balanced participation and equal sharing of decision-making power between women and men. Its implementation by member states has been monitored to provide member states with information on progress and gaps. https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168064f51b. See also Council of Europe (2020)

22 This research included data gathered from ethnic and racial minority aspirants and candidates with some gender disaggregated analysis.

Minoritised women are located at *the intersection of policies and strategies* that may aim to address gender inequality and racism, promote integration and/or support Traveller and Roma inclusion. Yet diversity and gender equality policies, often practised along parallel lines and coupled with the absence of disaggregated data (IHREC 2021b), have made it difficult to articulate and advocate for the intersectional interests of minoritised women and their communities.[23] Minoritised women have also been disproportionately negatively affected by the multiplicative and overlapping effects of the economic and Covid-19 crises (Hennessy 2021; Joseph 2021). Understanding minoritised women's political experiences, opportunities and priorities requires a focus on the interaction of a variety of factors that shape their access, presence, power and influence at the local level.

The establishment of an Electoral Commission in Ireland also elicited recommendations for the Commission to take a role in enforcing standards in political discourse including tackling discriminatory hate speech. Other recommendations include that the Commission enable the right to participate in public life as set out in domestic and international human rights law and to support *evidence-based policy development* particularly with regard to advancing the equal participation of *all groups* in Ireland's democratic process. These recommendations made specific reference to "women, persons with disabilities, young people, migrants and people from ethnic minority backgrounds including Travellers and Roma" (IHREC 2019a, p. 12). The dearth of evidence to inform the Commission's work has also been acknowledged as to date there exists no systematic assessment of minoritised women's levels of political engagement and their experiences of candidacy in Ireland.

An erosion of women's rights in some contexts, and the racism and xenophobia evident in the influence of far-right organisations (Lombardo et al 2021; ISD 2021), underlines the necessity of political and institutional support for diverse representation. Other shifts in the policy context, including local government reform (Lloyd 2016) and changes to how the State resources civil society organisations, have altered the terms under which minoritised women engage with local structures (Bennett 2021) and the conditions of local councillors working to support their communities (AILG 2021; Moorhead 2019). Strong and representative local governance is in turn understood as a prerequisite for the high-energy democracy required to secure equal and sustainable societies (Murphy 2019).

Politics, Diversity and Responsiveness

Scholars have referred to the over-representation of men in politics as leading to "Women's Poverty of Representation" (Celis and Childs 2020). Research has established the link between low levels of female representation in decision-making and poor outcomes for women's interests in policy-making (Mackay 2014; Fawcett 2017) and conversely the benefits of more diverse decision-making bodies for better governance and policy outcomes (OECD 2014; Reingold et al 2020) specifically for minority women (Petković and Nodari 2019; Silva and Skulley 2019) and at local level (Stokes 2011; Smith 2014; Holman 2017; Funk et al 2021). Where women, and particularly minoritised women, are unrepresented in decision-making there is a lack of responsiveness of politics to their interests (Crowder-Meyer 2021). This can lead to misrepresentation or a risk that their interests are recast for party political purposes. Such imbalance also

23 As McGinnity argues: "Information on ethnicity must be collected separately from nationality or country of birth because people in ethnic minorities may be Irish nationals (McGinnity et al., 2018), and/or may be born in Ireland (second-generation). The fact is we know relatively little about differences between ethnic groups because ethnicity is very rarely collected from survey or administrative data (Fahey et al., 2019a; IHREC, 2019). Changing this situation is now more urgent than ever" (2020, 102). It is encouraging that Census 2022 is recording ethnicity data and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth have recently launched a National Equality Data Strategy which will inform future equality strategies including the MIS and NSWG (see https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/5a7f4-minister-ogorman-announces-the-development-of-a-national-equality-data-strategy/).

affects how minoritised women feel about democracy and perceptions that politics is not for them are reinforced. Moreover, politics is experienced as something that is done to and not with them (Celis and Childs 2020). In short, the weak representational power of minoritised women means that their specific perspectives and forms of expertise remain marginal to policy debates.

Political literacy is a key element of representational "capacity", as is targeted and relevant training that can change a community leader into an aspirant and ultimately a candidate for political office. Even as candidates, minoritised women disrupt societal expectations about leadership. In other contexts, the election of minoritised women has contributed to breaking down racial, ethnic and gender barriers in electoral politics (Brown 2020). Minoritised women can serve as role models and mentors, helping other minoritised women run for office (Sanbonmatsu 2015) and improving the substantive representation of other underrepresented groups, thereby enhancing the legitimacy of democracy.

While we have gained an understanding of the factors shaping majority-population women's experiences of politics at local and national level in Ireland (Cullen and McGing 2019; Buckley and Galligan 2020; Buckley 2020; McGinn and O'Connor 2020), we lack a systematic assessment of what constrains or enables minoritised women to engage in local politics and ultimately to consider a political role. Calls to reform the conditions of office-holding for all women (Moorhead 2019; AILG 2021b; Oireachtas 2021a; Women for Election 2021; NWC 2021) and recent resourcing of diversity initiatives at local level indicate an impetus to diversify politics.[24] This is aligned with a greater awareness of how sexism and racism in everyday life and social media deter women and especially minoritised women from entering public roles (Michael 2020; Felle et al 2020; NWC 2021; AILG-CMG 2021).

This report builds on these analyses and initiatives while drawing attention *to the specific and persistent barriers faced by racialised ethnic and migrant women in public life.*

A central aim of this report is to use the evidence here to argue for an intersectional approach to actions to increase women's access to politics. This approach begins with the assumption that minoritised women exist within racial, ethnic and gender categories concurrently (Hancock 2007). Rooted in the intellectual history of Black feminism, this approach understands that minoritised women experience their race and gender simultaneously (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991; Lorde 1986). In other words, minoritised women experience structural inequality based on their race and gender as interdependent, interactive and dynamic rather than as independent and static factors (Brown 2014a; Brown 2014b). The experiences of minoritised women are as such mediated by interlocking systems of domination that are constructed by race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality and ethnicity (Collins 1990). These systems of power dictate the allocation of political resources (Brown 2014a, p. 317).

Minoritised women already engage with social movements, political parties and governmental institutions, while navigating their distinct political environments. They have organised to demand their rights, change cultural attitudes, reform laws and policies, and provide vital social services where formal institutions have failed to do so. This research sheds light on the essential political work that minoritised women do at local level as well as the forms of political imagination they hold and what shapes their expectations and motivations about considering a run for political office. In this research we draw out the enabling and constraining factors that shape the pathways to political candidacy for minoritised women in Ireland.

24 https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/d6da1-minister-burke-allocates-150000-to-political-parties-to-increase-female-participation-in-the-next-local-elections/.

Methodology

Women from specific racialised and ethnic minority communities may share some common experiences that shape their ideas about politics and their interest in and/or motivation to access political office. However, it is also clear that racialised and/or ethnic minority women are not a homogenous group. Ethnicity, racialisation, cultural practices, historical experiences of marginalisation, and legal status create experiences that are unique to different communities of women. Some women participants have been historically excluded and continue to face racism and discrimination while others face discrimination as part of their experience of seeking membership in a new society. Women who identify as belonging to specific ethnic, indigenous, racialised and/or migrant communities are also diverse and there exists intra-group differences that shape women's political agency. As such we acknowledge both inter and intra-group diversity across the sample of women participants, particularly as it relates to how women differentially experience the material consequences of ethnicity, race, class, citizenship and other elements of identity and social group membership.

This research includes three subsamples of minoritised women. Women participants included those involved in local action in their communities who may have considered or will consider running for office (aspirants), unsuccessful candidates for local election, and ethnic and racialised minoritised women who currently hold office. While the sample size is limited, in methodological terms examining the intersection of race, ethnicity and gender is essential and data availability need not be a prohibitive factor in explaining the nuanced experiences of minoritised women candidates (Silva and Skulley 2019).

The aim was to gather as many views as possible, focusing on the experiences and perceptions women hold about politics and, where relevant, covering as many stages in the process of running for office, from initial consideration and potential recruitment, to standing for selection, being selected, and running a campaign. To reach this diverse range of participants we used purposive/opportunity sampling – a non-probability sampling technique based on identifying participants from specified target groups. The project was co-designed with both civil society partners, the NTWF and AkiDwA, who supported the researchers in sampling and with the recruitment of participants with due care to centre women's voices and experiences.

Participants were also selected to reflect regional, urban and rural balance. This aligns with research that established strong regional differences in the proportion of women running as candidates (Buckley 2020) and assessments that underline the particular obstacles facing rural women (Cullen and McGing 2019).[25] Given the diversity of the participants, we do not aim for a direct comparison or typology of community experiences, rather the objective here is to place participant accounts in conversation with each other to allow for the specificities to emerge and common issues to be identified. We draw on a narrative approach, structured around a common set of themes but adapted to allow participants to tell their stories (Frederick 2013). These include accounts of how discrimination is navigated and articulated in the contexts of sexism, racialisation and racial discrimination. In this way diverse narratives reveal patterns that constitute evidence of barriers to resources (material, emotional, informational) required to access political power.

In the data presented we have anonymised the participants unless, as stakeholders, they have agreed to be identified. What we offer in this

25 According to See Her Elected: "Despite increases in the numbers of female TDs and Councillors following recent elections, 78% of TDs and 76% of councillors are still male. What is noteworthy is that the increases gained have been mainly in urban constituencies. The 2019 Local Elections saw women gain 48% of the seats on Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council. In contrast, women's representation on Longford County Council reduced to 5%, Mayo County Council to 6% and Donegal County Council to 11%." https://www.seeherelected.ie/.

research is a composite account of women from different communities communicated through their own words and analysis. Our approach is grounded in feminist research methods that required us to practise self-reflexivity in an ongoing, contextual way and to adopt an intersectional approach that recognised the multiplicative effects of social categories such as ethnicity, religion, race, gender and sexuality on social and political power relations (Collins 1990; Letherby 2011). The research was attentive to the prevalence of ethnicised, gendered and racialised (sexist and racist) discourse at the local and national level as a factor shaping "stereotype" threat that can suppress the interest and motivation of ethnic and racial minority women to be involved in local politics.

As part of the research process, a research advisory group was constituted that supported the researchers in framing the project and provided feedback on its outputs. This group included academics, civil society and directors of both the NTWF and AkiDwA, the civil society partners.[26] A midterm webinar hosted at Maynooth University included candidates and women in leadership training programmes, representatives from political parties and the forthcoming Electoral Commission as well as women participants and experts in minoritised women in politics from the United States and Scotland.

Data was gathered between March and September 2021. It comprised 43 online interviews with racialised, ethnic minoritised and migrant women community leaders, and those with an interest in (aspirants) and who have run for (candidates: successful and unsuccessful) political office; as well as with stakeholders, advocacy organisations and political parties. Ethical approval was granted by Maynooth University. Data collection was scheduled to limit disruption and avoid additional burdens faced by women participants, many of whom were navigating the challenges associated with Covid-19 as community members, service providers and advocates. The pandemic features in the research as a factor that both catalysed but also constrained minoritised women's interest in, capacity for and future plans to run for political office.

Part 2 of the Report provides an extensive discussion of our conceptualisation of minoritised women as political actors that includes a comprehensive account of the research that informed this study. In that overview we include scholarship that applies an intersectional approach to women and politics (Celis et al 2014; Barnes 2019; Bejarno 2020; Brown 2014, 2019; Brown and Dowe 2020; Brown and Gershon 2021; Brown and Casarez 2021; Celis and Childs 2020; Dowe 2020; Gershon et al 2021; Gillespie and Brown 2019; Holman et al 2017; Hussain 2021; Janssen et al. 2021; Lemni and Brown 2019; Mugge and Erzeel 2016; Mugge et al 2019; Ocampo and Ray 2020; Montoya et al 2021; Swain and Lein 2017; Shah et al 2019; Shames 2015; Sanbonmatsu 2015; Sobolewska and Begum 2019; Smooth 2011; Siow and Begum 2021; Tatari and Mencutek 2015). We also theorise minoritised women as political agents, drawing on research on marginalised women as community actors that centres their distinctive approach to politics as solidarity, care and survival outside of formal political contexts (Emejulu and Bassel 2020; Emejulu and Bassel 2021; Emejulu and van der Scheer 2021). Analysis of indigenous women's political activism (Mundim 2021; McMahon and Alcatara 2021) including Traveller (Joyce and Farmar 2000; Joyce 2015; McDonagh 2021) and Roma women (McGarry 2016; Opera 2010; Bačlija and Hače 2012; D'Agostino, S 2016, 2021a, b; Zevnik and Russell 2020, 2021) also features, who are understood to operate under extreme forms of marginalisation while advancing intersectional forms of political mobilisation. A key term in our assessment is that of *ambition from the margins* (Dowe 2020) developed to capture the sense of community that leads Black women to engage in a unique type of political work that includes innovative forms of political engagement despite marginalisation. *Ambition from the margins*

26 Members of the Research Advisory Group: Professor Akwugo Emejulu, University of Warwick; Dr. Sindy Joyce, University of Limerick and Member of the Council of State; Anastasia Crickley, Chairperson of Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre and Former Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; Claire McGing, Political Geographer and EDI Manager at IADT Dún Laoghaire; Maria Joyce (NTWF); Salome Mbugua (AkiDwA).

refers to political candidacy but seeks to delineate this from the experiences of majority-population female candidates. This form of "ambition" has evolved from the experiences of exclusion that created alternative networks and resources and we apply it here to understand the experience of minoritised women in this study.

We also draw on the concepts of political imagination (Browne and Diehl 2019) and political agency (Buckley and Galligan 2019) to reframe female candidacy from an intersectional perspective. We situate the political imagination of minoritised women in tension with a broader dominant political imaginary that reinforces existing ideas, practices, and patterns of political engagement. Using this concept of political imagination allows us to outline minoritised women's diverse ideas, attitudes, experiences, and understandings of politics. In other words, political imagination refers to what politics means to them and how they understand and assess themselves as political actors, how in their view their community and/or social group is perceived in political terms, and what they suggest politics should and could be.

Political Agency is a term used to assess how or the extent to which women feel enabled to make claims upon democratic politics, the State, and political institutions to pursue/secure political outcomes (Buckley and Galligan 2013). In this study we place the concept of political imagination in dialogue with that of political agency. We do this to acknowledge the links between the existing forms of political work done by minoritised women in Ireland and the politicisation they experience through this work that underlines their political imagination. A key way to reframe the candidacy of minoritised women is to highlight the formation of their own distinctive political imagination and how it has shaped their sense of political agency and exclusion, a process that has led some of these women to consider entering public office.

Interviews were coded using an inductive thematic approach drawing from entire transcripts to preserve the totality of participants' testimony. Participants situated their accounts in relational networks that linked them to families, communities, organisations and to places – rural, urban and transnational – revealing the complex ways in which minoritised women develop *political imagination* across their life-course. Interviews were informed by an expansive and grounded definition of political engagement that revealed the meanings that women assigned to familial and community expectations and their long-held commitments to representation and change. What is clear is that minoritised women participants do consider candidacy in *relational terms* and that they hold communal and value driven objectives. Minoritised women operate forms of *collective and careful leadership* in support of their communities that can stand in tension with norms of political leadership, further distancing them from representation and voice in decision-making. They also do not lack confidence or ambition. Rather, they respond rationally to constraints and risks. Working from this understanding resists naturalising the lack of minoritised women in executive positions as "understandable" or that such offices are unobtainable (Sambantou 2015).

We find that stakeholders, including political parties and public officials, endorse diversity in political representation. However, addressing the demands of gender quotas and other pressures to combat gender inequality already stretch institutional resources and capacity. As such, while rhetorical commitments to anti-racism exist, expertise and human capital to realise such commitments are lacking. Training programmes for women in politics feature in the research as agile, with an appetite to acquire expertise and to become more inclusive. However, the advantages gained from training, such as access to networks, do not accrue to all minoritised women equally; this is especially the case for Traveller women. Other findings indicate that the strategies that work well for majority-population women candidates can work well for some minoritised women but may not work as well for minoritised women who are furthest from the political system. Racism and sexism structure minoritised women's everyday lives and impede their efforts to access local

elected office. Enabling minoritised women's participation and representation at the local level requires comprehensive, systematic and resourced interventions that are grounded in anti-racism and that acknowledge the gendered logic of local politics in Ireland. When minoritised women are supported by political parties and other organisations, this gives important signals to the electorate. This can shift the responsibility onto voters to adapt their thinking about ethnicity, gender, race and candidacy, instead of putting the burden on women themselves to adapt to stereotypical norms that primarily serve to reinforce white male privilege in politics (Brown and Gershon 2016; Dittmar 2020; Gershon and Lavariega Monforti 2021).

The aim of this research is to move beyond previous assessments that indicated the barriers and facilitating factors for majority-population women candidates, to build an evidence base of how ethnic and racialised minoritised women understand and experience political engagement at the local level. The evidence compiled in this report is used as a basis to advance recommendations to improve female candidacy within ethnic and/or racialised minority communities. The research also aims to support: civil society partners and collaborators to improve minoritised women's opportunities to influence local governance; training programmes to motivate and encourage minoritised women to become candidates; political parties to engage with minoritised women; and to highlight the racism and sexism that minoritised women experience and the benefits they bring to local politics and policy-making.

Part 3 provides an overview of the international obligations of the State, and recommendations from international human rights bodies, with respect to minoritised women and political participation. It then looks at a range of quota systems, including reserved seats, that are in place in other countries for minoritised groups. Discussions on a diversity quota at the local level in Ireland emerged in 2018 when a Bill was being considered to extend gender quotas to the local level which would include migrants and other minorities including members of the Traveller community (Loughlin 2018). Many of the interviewees were generally in favour of this type of positive action in Ireland but some expressed reservations. The way in which a quota system is designed and implemented is important and can have implications particularly for minoritised women (Htun 2004; Hughes 2011) (see Part 3). The most effective form of quota regime for minoritised women is where gender and ethnic quotas are "nested" (Hughes 2011; Bird 2016), i.e. the gender quota has an ethnic quota embedded within it and/or vice versa. Traveller candidates face a numerical disadvantage over both majority-population candidates and other ethnic minoritised candidates in that Travellers comprise less than 1% of the population of many counties.[27] For this reason, we recommend that the State (perhaps under the Electoral Commission) explore the creation of a Special Electoral District, or reserved constituency, in Council areas (and, indeed, for Dáil and Seanad elections) for Travellers, which has improved representation of indigenous communities in other contexts such as New Zealand, should be explored. Part 3 also contains an overview of local government initiatives in Ireland and the UK, exemplars of training programmes in other countries that are aimed at minoritised women, and an example of a political party gender and diversity action plan. Part 3 concludes with a comprehensive bibliography.

27 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8itd/.

Section 2: "Ambition from the Margins": From Aspirant to Elected Representative

Aspirants

Aspirants are defined as those who have expressed an interest or nascent ambition in a future candidacy. In what follows we detail the assessments that aspirants provided of their own political ambitions and the broader political imaginary they seek to establish. The women interviewed in this group were from a variety of backgrounds, including those seeking asylum and migrant women, from the continent of Africa, Central America and New Zealand. We also include the experiences of one Traveller woman who indicated an interest in a political role yet no expressed desire to become a candidate in the current environment. We include her analysis here to illustrate Traveller women's distinctive experiences and analysis of political agency and the broader political imaginary as it is currently constituted. There are common themes which emerge in the accounts of the women featured here, including their commitments to political and social change and their initiation of intercultural organisations.

One Traveller female participant recounted an early life with strong family support and rich cultural heritage. In similar terms to many of the Traveller women involved in this research, education was a site of early discrimination and exclusion. This participant had gained postgraduate qualifications but recalled being passed over when college application (CAO) forms were distributed in school. She was told *"you won't be needing them"*. This was indicative, she stated, *"of the myth that all Travellers do not value education."* In the end she remarked *"education makes or breaks you."* She acquired educational qualifications and, supported by her partner and family, worked in the Traveller movement and service provision before returning to education and being appointed to positions in international human rights and national public service contexts. Direct experience of policy failures to support Traveller children's education affirmed her assessment of how Traveller identification is a source of discrimination in Ireland. In her view, recognition of Traveller ethnicity was also contingent, "*it is not embedded and can be retracted."* Despite policies such as NTRIS, *"poor outcomes for Traveller children, especially their living conditions, the stigmatisation, the hiding away of Traveller people on halting sites"* all signify resistance to Traveller inclusion. For her, this is reproduced at all levels from policy and institutions to street level bureaucrats. A key element that sustains this is *"a mythology around the deficits of Travellers."* Other mythologies included that Travellers are politically illiterate. In reality, *"Travellers have always been political actors; they played an important role in independence."*

She had been approached by parties in the past and stated, *"I could run to make a point but I know I am not going to get the votes."* She explained that:

> *"the knowledge that the majority of the settled population are not going to vote for you, that the numbers are against them is what deters Travellers from candidacy".*

[Tuam and Longford are the only two towns that have elected Travellers. Longford has the highest population percentage of Travellers at 2.5% (CSO) while Tuam is unique in that it has a high concentration of Travellers in one area.]

While there are a variety of barriers, especially for Traveller women, *"the format of the system is against them".* The legacy of anti-Traveller racism and policies of assimilation were difficult to overcome, however, she noted, *"Young Travellers*

are now challenging racism". But concrete obstacles remain especially for Traveller women such as access to childcare and the financial independence that might enable participation in training. She cautioned against the conflation of Roma, migrant and Traveller issues, "*Travellers have different experiences... they need different strategies ... one size does not fit all".*

Parties had significant work to. They need to build trust and rapport, listen, and use face-to-face engagement when dealing with hard-to-reach communities as *"settled candidates do not generally canvas Traveller communities."* Moreover, it must be made clear that Travellers are not just passionate about Traveller issues, they have a broader stake in Irish society. Quotas, she accepted, were a good idea but would not help Traveller women; other measures were required. Implying that wider societal change was required, including in terms of anti-Traveller racism policies, she concluded that *"Just because we are there it doesn't mean things will change."*

Other aspirants included white migrant women, women of Central American origin and Black African women. This group of women had all participated in training and had all articulated a desire to run for office. Most had higher education and professional experience in their country of origin. Many now experience either unemployment or underemployment, and for some a lack of fit between their credentials and the kinds of employment they are offered (Joseph 2020). All had been involved in some form of activism or advocacy in their earlier lives. More recently in Ireland, they had all initiated some community-based migrant integration and/or intercultural organisation and/or were currently employed in the non-profit or social enterprise sector. All those interviewed declared an intention to run for the next local elections in 2024.

Some women had begun by volunteering for local organisations and through this had assessed the gaps in their view existed for migrants in the area. A strong catalyst for one of the participants was when she started to write letters to TDs and Ministers on issues she felt needed to be changed but:

> *"most of the time ... you don't even get a response, that issue is kind of swept under the carpet. So I just started to say to myself that I think it's so important that I get involved in politics because I need to be there".*

Others experienced social isolation and discrimination which acted as a catalyst to their community work and now to their political ambitions. As one migrant woman detailed,

> *"I wanted to bring two sides together to work to bridge what I saw going on in the migrant community and the processes at the local level".*

Her involvement with a local volunteer group led her to participate in a Public Participation Network (PPN). The PPN structures featured in most aspirant accounts as contexts where they sought to build networks, but where they also witnessed a lack of diversity and low priority for migrant input. All had formed a general sense that migrant integration efforts were lacking at the local level. In response these women initiated asylum seeker supports, women's rights and African-led integration initiatives *"to combat discrimination and empower migrants".*

Some of the women had direct experience of political corruption in their country of origin and were sensitive to what they viewed as exclusionary dynamics in some elements of local governance in Ireland. Others were puzzled at the influence of certain local institutions including the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). Another aspirant had come from a context where indigenous peoples were increasingly celebrated, and found the lack of this confronting, remarking that *"we have a model of political inclusion for [indigenous peoples] – I don't see why here we do not celebrate Traveller indigenous language and provide systems for inclusion".*

Others had attended council meetings and one remarked *"I was so surprised at the lack of diversity ... no-one looked like me in the meeting."* Some of the participants had only recently become aware of

their right to vote and to run for local office. One aspirant commented that she *"was canvassed in the 2019 election but 4 out of the candidates didn't tell me I could vote".* Another aspirant mentioned that it was not until 2017 that she learned of her right to vote.

Training

All those interviewed had taken part in various training initiatives. These included training with Women for Election, See Her Elected (SHE), the National Women's Council, and the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) leadership initiative. Most evaluated these programmes as helpful: *"they gave an understanding of the system".* Mock canvassing or role play was identified by several participants as especially valuable in building confidence but also because *"canvassing is culturally alien for ethnic minority women".* However, for one aspirant some of the training was not inclusive or diverse, she stated: *"don't dump the stuff on us, diversify the room. Let people come with their own perspectives."* A key resource emphasized by all participants was the need for better English language supports for migrant women interested in decision-making roles. Other benefits of training included *"skills like mapping the power in the community and digital media".* Women only and migrant-led training were underlined as important. Overall, there was agreement for the need to do different types of training in order to be fully prepared. Some aspirants were waiting to take part in shadowing and internship programmes with local councillors. One had begun this programme, but it had not worked out due to a 'poor fit' between her and the politician.

Racism and Sexism

All participants in this category referenced racism in their everyday lives. For one aspirant who had lived in the United States, her formative experiences of racism had prepared her for the otherness she experienced in Ireland. She stated, *"racism, sure I am aware of it, and I guess I am prepared to face it."* She had most often experienced misrecognition of her ethnicity and nationality. A white migrant woman spoke of the discomfort she felt when her image was used in a newspaper article about a training programme, rather than the women of colour who had also participated. Of this incident, she stated:

> *"I bet there's a million pictures in that report they could've used that weren't white [women]. You know so it's just this real constant inability to demonstrate, or even celebrate diversity. You know like diversity is a fact, it's the inclusion piece we need to work on."*

Other aspirants that maintained social media accounts had experience of sexist and racist abuse especially if they offered any analysis or critique of Irish society. Another African migrant woman who had recently taken up a public-facing role with a party had *"got nasty comments online."* She commented that some of the media coverage of the Black community was negative:

> *"it is not an easy thing for someone from the Black community given the kind of bad press that we have ... it is not an easy place for them to just boldly come at and say 'I want to participate in politics'."*

In her view it was time to change the narrative, *"we need the Black community to tell their own story."* Several women in this group referred to the emergence of the far right which had created *"a scary situation for the Black community and the Traveller community."* One woman commented that

> *"I worry so much about the rise of far-right activities in Ireland ... this is a huge issue for minority people, for the Black community. ... We're afraid of the attack that will come on us. We're afraid of how we will be seen ... and how we'll be judged ... those are huge issues for myself and for other Black people ... who would be looking to go into politics."*

Political Parties

Some of the aspirants indicated a systematic approach to their future candidacy and talked in terms of building their network for a run in 2024. One aspirant woman of colour had joined a party and indicated her interest in a 2024 candidacy; however, she was told she should wait until 2029. Asked about the decision to join a party, another noted that *"this was related to who did the outreach in a substantive way".* Other women of colour aspirants asserted that they were seeking roles with parties as local area representatives but were wary of being seen as a token. One aspirant remarked that it was important that parties realised:

> *"it is not enough to have one face of an African person ... It's not enough at all. ... there has to be participation in every aspect... let there be enough, enough women, enough Africans, enough Travellers, enough. Just one person is not enough."*

Outreach from a political party was pivotal to some, captured in this comment:

> *"for them to come out against all odds and look for people from our background like that, for me it meant a lot. ... It really means a lot, especially someone coming from an African community, the trust, the acceptance, the full capacity to participate. It was huge, so I really am happy with that."*

Another African woman aspirant who had experience of the Direct Provision system was generally sceptical of parties. She stated:

> *"I don't like the transactional nature of local politics – we need a fresh perspective and I am aware of how some other Black Women who put themselves forward have been treated".*

She continued *"there is always a voice in the back of your mind – are you there to colour their event? You then start to undermine yourself."* Overall, she was critical of how parties vote-seek while continuing to have a poor record on migrant rights. Another aspirant wagered that:

> *"the language of politicians can be derogatory and dehumanising. What you say has consequences – so then you ask yourself do you want to sit with these people".*

She concluded with the statement, "but we have to run for change, or we become part of the problem."

For another African woman aspirant *"It is not easy for someone from the Black community to run for politics especially given the media – Ireland needs to change."* This aspirant currently belonged to a party but explained that *"I tried another party [previously] but found it not a good fit. People wanted to define racism for me."* In her current party there were efforts to implement unconscious bias and anti-racism training, and this had created in her view a more supportive and inclusive atmosphere. All agreed that anti-racism training was key. All participants indicated that parties needed to fully resource migrant women candidates: *"to fund posters and childcare and other expenses up front"*. Others suggested a living wage for candidates during their campaigns. This was important as many migrant and asylum seeker women were lone parents. For others the establishment of a philanthropic fund to help defray such costs should be considered.

Unsuccessful Candidates

In what follows we offer an overview of the experience of minoritised female candidates who were unsuccessful in their bid for local office. We make a distinction here between women candidates from an EU migrant background, a non-EU migrant background and from the Traveller community. Given the small number of women from these communities that have been candidates, we offer a broad composite of their experiences, underlining the similarities and differences.

Regardless of their community or migration origin, women candidates shared some overarching experiences. Most had high levels of education and/or professional experience. Some had found difficulty in securing employment commensurate with their credentials and Traveller women had specific difficulty in this regard. In addition, all women indicated a value-led approach to political office and an interest in 'doing politics differently'. Most women had experience of community or student activist politics.

Political Origins

For some EU migrant women candidates, poor experiences in the labour market and a noticeable absence of migrant voices in their local community had engendered a desire to increase the migrant voice, especially in local politics. For one such candidate, involvement in advocacy on women's issues had also contributed to an interest in seeking change. In terms of political ambition, some candidates had to *"talk themselves into the idea of being a candidate",* while others had a much stronger sense of self-efficacy in seeking a political role. For non-EU migrant candidates who were women of colour, politicisation was linked to experiences during their youth and early career in their country of origin. For example, the experience of seeking asylum and of the Direct Provision system led this non-EU migrant to assert that "*we need a community voice for asylum seekers."* For another non-EU migrant candidate, taking part in a consultative process on direct provision in 2015 convinced them of the importance of representation and participation. All the migrant women candidates had experience working with non-governmental organisations on refugee rights, women's rights and/or in initiating intercultural forums or platforms at local level. For non-EU migrants in particular, an impetus for their candidacy was that of *"bridging divides between communities."* Comparing the forms of community work that these candidates engaged in with that of other successful minoritised female and majority-population female candidates is instructive. While it is difficult to generalise, it may be that *not all community work counts the same,* with some forms of community engagement perceived as more valuable than others for promoting local visibility and electability.

Encouragement

Outreach from an individual politician was cited by most minoritised female candidates as an important impetus for their bid. What is interesting to note is that encouragement did not in the main come from a broader party outreach, rather it was reliant on an individual critical actor. For one non-EU migrant candidate, a network of party women had worked together to convince her to consider a candidacy. For others, especially those who ran as an independent, individual sponsorship was key and included many elements that parties might offer, albeit on a more limited scale. These included media training, canvassing support and design of campaign material. This individual-level sponsorship was described as essential especially in accessing the informal rules including 'tricks to manage canvassing'. While most candidates had a relatively short period of involvement in electoral politics, most had already supported their sponsor and/or their respective party in some way during a previous campaign.

Training and Leadership Programmes

Leadership programmes were key for migrant candidates. The Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) leadership and political empowerment programmes were cited as central supports by both EU and non-EU migrant candidates. This programme was identified as important in creating a sense of belonging. Women for Election training was also noted as helpful, in particular for the networking opportunities, media training and for building self-confidence. As one participant described,

> *"knowledge is power. So once you have that knowledge and you are able to apply it and use those tools that you are given it actually gives you more confidence to say I can definitely do this … So sitting down with ICI and … Akidwa … who had organised different kind of workshops and conventions [with] people who were already part of the political system [with whom] we had a conversation. So when you have that kind of conversation it gives you the tools because then you hear of the people who are already within the system."*

Not all the candidates, in particular the non-EU and Traveller candidates, felt they had access to these training opportunities. For some non-EU migrant candidates, the experience of community-based leadership training for women had been isolating and a context in which they experienced racism and exclusion. For other migrant candidates, organisations such as AkiDwA and the SHE programme were instrumental in encouraging their candidacy.

However, there was a strong sense from candidates that political training programmes should include resilience training for women, particularly minoritised women and that they should include training on how to deal with sexism and racism on and offline:

> *"the training should be a way of protecting yourself … mentally, physically as well as spiritually and emotionally. … if you meet [sexism or racism] on the door you know, yes it is going to be hurtful … but then after that how do you deal with it in a way that it doesn't remain with you, then it affects your whole campaign".*

Campaigning

Party political support was a mixed experience for minoritised female candidates. Some candidates from smaller parties, many of whom began their campaigns late, cited few practical supports. For one candidate, this lack of support alongside being placed in a constituency with another 'preferred' candidate led her to suggest, *"they didn't believe in me to win".* Others had more favourable experiences, although all felt they could have been better supported and made more aware of the realities of campaigning. All referenced having few resources, fewer posters than others, a reliance on family and friends, and challenges sourcing childcare during canvassing. For non-EU migrants, campaign teams were small and often made up of other migrants. However, one such candidate stated that as her party had not provided much support, *"without the support of Irish people in the community backing me I couldn't have kept going."* This said, there was no automatic support from their respective migrant community, with one non-EU migrant stating that her community *"didn't see the benefit of my campaign."*

Having too short of a timeline to prepare for the campaign was a common theme leading one candidate to remark, *"if I had more time I could have won!".* Another common theme was how candidates took a different approach, in particular to canvassing. Some rejected the advice of the party or, in the absence of any specific training, decided to *"adopt my own style of canvassing, very direct, spending time talking to each person".* This was very time consuming and challenging especially for those canvassing a large rural area and/or a densely populated urban context. Many used creative strategies to overcome resource deficits such as moving limited posters around an area over time which required significant human capital sourced

from family and friends. All candidates referenced canvassing alone at times, a potentially risky endeavour given the potential for confrontation and abuse that the majority of candidates experienced at some point during their campaigns.

Sexist and Racist Abuse

All minoritised female candidates that did not succeed in their campaigns experienced sexist and racist abuse. For EU migrants, abuse came most often in the form of sexist remarks and for non-EU migrants, abuse and harassment was both sexist and explicitly racist. For one non-EU migrant woman of colour the abuse she received in person and online was sustained and extreme. This included being texted unwanted pictures of a sexualised nature and being propositioned, and characterised and treated as a sex worker while canvassing. She also experienced late night phone calls to her home where she was asked *"how much are you worth"* and was solicited for sex. One such phone call consisted of a man saying:

> *"I kind of like the way you and your friend looked, is there any way we can get a three some and I can get people around the constituency … to vote for you".*

This candidate also experienced receiving dog excrement in her letterbox, the 'egging' of the exterior of her home, racist graffiti in her housing estate and threats against her children's life. She described how she was *"petrified of what will happen. I am petrified for the life of my kids because they have been threatened before".* She was, in her view, targeted specifically by far-right organisations and individuals on social media, where a fake account was made in her name. She did report these incidences to the police; however, the abuse and harassment made her fearful to canvass. She summed up her experiences with the statement that *"after that happened, I was afraid to go out"* and that over time *"it can break you."* She reflected that in hindsight she was placed in a vulnerable position in a 'very white context' and that, although the party she campaigned with was supportive, they should have anticipated what she might face.

Another non-EU migrant candidate recounted the taunts of *"why don't you go back and change your own country"* while canvassing and while in public spaces. One interviewee described how racist and sexist incidents while canvassing:

> *"actually puts the fear of god in me in a way, that I wasn't able to cope and then it gave me a thing of wanting to always have eyes in the back of my head because the canvassing you don't know who is following behind you or who's going to say what or anything like that".*

Another EU migrant candidate remarked that her accent had been a source of humour for some as she canvassed. However, she acknowledged that for female migrant candidates of colour, racism was more proximate and constant. As another non-EU migrant candidate stated, when canvassing, as she approached a house, *"some people would just open the door, it's enough to see your face and shut it again."*

Social Media

Other non-EU migrant candidates referred to ghost accounts on twitter that engaged in consistent abuse. Given the scale of social media abuse, some candidates did not deal with their own social media and had a friend or campaign team member manage and curate their feed. This worked to supress their inclination to rely on social media as a form of communication. This had specific consequences for their candidacy given the pivotal role social media plays in modern political campaigns and its significant capacity to amplify a candidate's profile especially when working within limited media budgets. Managing communications was especially difficult for women of colour candidates where there were tensions between establishing a personal brand, and the use of personal images on posters such as braided hair, as one candidate commented *"you cannot make any mistakes as a Black Woman."*

Media

Traditional media offered varied experiences for candidates which included some local community radio stations providing training or a space for candidates to platform their views. However, others experienced more exclusionary behaviour, including being edited out of a group photo opportunity for all candidates, and more commonly being asked to react to sensationalist or controversial issues associated with their supposed community. This included questions of an Islamophobic nature that linked one candidate's faith to the terrorist organisation ISIS. One candidate told us:

> *"I was preparing for [a radio interview] for a whole week about my policies ... about my vision ... but all the focus was only on me being a Muslim."*

Similarly, a candidate told us that, of a 20-minute newspaper interview about her policies and motivation, she was disappointed when the headline in the newspaper a couple of days later read "Muslim woman running". Another participant's experience with the media was described as implicit media bias when a radio station, immediately after an interview with a migrant woman of colour, ran a segment centring on a negative stereotype of her community. Traveller women candidates overwhelmingly note that when they are interviewed in any media forum they are asked almost exclusively to comment on Traveller "anti-social behaviour" often related to a specific event or negative media representation.

Opposition Candidates

Many migrant candidates detailed the difficulties they experienced with anti-immigrant or anti-Traveller positions taken by other candidates. Some of this was viewed as implicit but calculated to gain votes at the same time as undermining their candidacy. One non-EU migrant woman of colour recounted being coerced into taking photos with other candidates. She described this as "*a photo op to get the migrant vote*". This is pertinent especially in a system where vote transfers play an important role. This candidate was aware of being instrumentalised and did not like it, but she cooperated at times in an attempt to control or redirect the intent to her own benefit. Another female migrant candidate commented that "*local politicians see me as a way to get votes from [her community]*". This was viewed as opportunism.

Voter Registration

The voter registration process and the poor level of awareness of the right to vote amongst minority populations was a theme that came up across all the interviews. This was often viewed as a failure of the State to effectively inform migrants of their right to vote. One interviewee noted how she was told very quickly after moving to Ireland that she did not have the right to work, but that she was not informed of her right to vote. She felt that the information on her right to vote could be incorporated into the same letter informing her that she was not permitted to work if there was political will to do so. Another noted that empowering migrant people to vote *"it's a constant struggle"*, she continued that:

> *"it's not even just African people. A lot of the migrant people from you know Hungary, from Poland, from anywhere, ... did not realise that they could vote, most of them thought they could only vote in the EU elections rather than the local elections. But once you started spreading that message, I can guarantee you most of them would have been very supportive in terms of trying to find somebody of more diversity within the County Council."*

Some candidates included voter registration as part of their canvassing especially in migrant and/or poorer communities. Although accessing enough voter registration forms for distribution was difficult with one non-EU migrant candidate recounting how she was challenged as to why she would need so many forms and for what purpose. This candidate resorted to copying original forms for distribution.

Endings and Beginnings

The count centre experience was generally described as a difficult one, where some parties left their failing candidate without much support. Interviewees recounted the intense exhaustion and emotion but also pride and the loyalty of their friends and supporters. Independent candidates noted that after their loss, but respectable showing, they were approached by a number of political parties. One candidate noted that before the day of the count, political parties:

> *"would not think of contacting me, you are not for them but the day of the count everyone was cheering or smiling for me, welcoming me, inviting me to their table".*

Asked to reflect on the experience overall, many used terms including exhaustion and being emotionally spent. One candidate summed up her experience by outlining the considerable work she had to do to monitor and manage her feelings throughout the campaign. There was apprehension from many participants to report, or even to discuss openly, experiences of racism and sexism during their campaigns. For some participants who are planning to run again, this apprehension persists as they fear how they will be viewed if they raise these issues. For one, it was clear that "*you cannot talk about sexism or racism in public or you lose the vote."* Another described her feelings when she was eliminated at the count centre:

> *"I am feeling oppressed because it wasn't impossible. But I couldn't do it because of the lack of the money or the lack of opportunities and also there is a lot of pain during the registration to run … and the entire process. It was so painful is so painful you know."*

It is notable that most of the disclosure of abuse during campaigns occurred *after the campaign had ended* including in the context of these interviews. At least one candidate became very emotional stating that this was the first time she had allowed herself to reflect on the emotional costs especially the damage of being exposed to racist and sexist abuse. She contended that although her small cadre of campaign team members had tried to shield her from the most explicit forms of abuse, she was aware of the vitriol aimed at her. For another candidate, her party had responded by providing her specific supports and by making her responsible for leading changes in the party structures and culture on diversity and equality. While given her experiences she may be best placed to do this work, this does raise the issue of making minoritised women responsible for delivering diversity.

Despite all of this, most women did express a willingness to run again. One EU migrant candidate – shocked by the reality of politics and disappointed by party dynamics – shifted back to an activist role and declared her need to focus on her family as her children "*were young and mixed race and were facing their own challenges."* She lamented that she was naive about the process in retrospect, especially the reality of party politics. Another candidate indicated that she may run again but as an independent yet underlined the personal development she felt she had garnered from the process. She stated that her candidacy, although unsuccessful, had alerted voters to the fact that someone from direct provision or a former asylum seeker could run for election. This was an important form of symbolic representation. For this candidate, the bottom line was that positive action was required as the barriers for candidates like her were too high. She commented *"Ireland isn't ready for ethnic quotas even though that is what is needed."*

Traveller Women Candidates: Coming Out of the Shade

Female Traveller candidates shared some of these experiences yet had a distinctive path from aspirant to candidate. Traveller women candidates had origin stories of either time spent in the United Kingdom as children and/or having parents that had settled at some point during their lives. They also recounted rich and loving childhoods that included the nomadic tradition and dense and supportive family networks. A common

experience shared by Traveller women throughout this project is a history of trauma – rooted in childhood experiences of education where they were subjected to systemic discrimination. These forms of discrimination were also experienced in retail contexts, where they recounted being monitored or denied entry. Some of these candidates had married into the settled community and expressed feelings of liminality – of at times not being accepted by people in either the Traveller or the settled community and being at times exposed to discrimination from both. These women traced their politicisation back to such experiences and a growing sense of frustration at the stereotypes that persisted in both contexts. Yet they also relayed how sponsorship from individuals, parents, a specific teacher or community worker was critical in shifting their path. Parental interest in politics or support for education of girls was a key element. A return to education and subsequent employment or activism in the Traveller movement or Traveller organisations consolidated their sense of personal efficacy and nascent political ambition. Notably, working in Traveller organisations was considered a 'safe' space for Travellers as employment in settled contexts, even when highly educated, is difficult to access, and even when employed in these contexts, is fraught with pressures to conceal Traveller identity and experiences of discrimination. As one candidate summed up, in many ways *"we stay invisible to stay safe so if we are made visible it has to be in a way that we control."* From this perspective, candidacy of Traveller-identified women is a high-risk venture.

From Aspirant to Candidate

The shift from aspirant to candidate for Traveller women was not a linear evolution but an accumulation over time of frustration with the lack of fit between their life experiences, policy systems and exclusion from and discrimination by the broader society. Female Traveller candidates illustrated elements of *stereotype threat* in weighing up the costs of a public role and the anticipation of experiencing hostility from inside and outside of their community.

Reasons mentioned for finally deciding on a political run (moving from nascent to expressive ambition) were often personal including witnessing the lack of progress from their own experiences of education compared now to how their children were being treated. They also recounted broader issues of social injustice that they felt transcended their own community's experience including the struggles of lone parents to access education and professional advancement. The personal costs of running were also detailed, illustrated by the pleas of one child who feared his mothers' campaign, particularly as a self-identified Traveller, would 'out' him at school.

Candidates also indicated that they could at times "pass" as a non-Traveller which had made certain situations easier to negotiate, although Traveller candidates who participated in this research all identified themselves as Travellers in their election campaign material. One interviewee remarked, *"I decided to run as Traveller identified – though I can pass as settled."* When asked about the complexities of this decision female Traveller candidates were reflective, stating that for too long Travellers had fears of being disciplined by the state but the newest generation of Traveller women were educated and seeking more. Sadly, some young Traveller women teachers looked abroad for opportunities as they found it difficult to access opportunities at home. These accounts reflect an awareness of significant shifts for some Traveller women at the same time as persistent obstacles.

Candidates referenced the power of Traveller women as advocates for their communities and their commitment to gender equality. One candidate recounted how she realised that if she did not run in her area there would be no female candidates. The prospect of an all-male slate going uncontested was, thus, an important part of her decision to run. This was indicative of a broader sensibility amongst many Traveller women who participated in this research to equality, not just

for Travellers, but for all forms of intersectional discrimination.

Candidates referenced both ideas and frameworks of the US civil rights and the Black Lives Matter movement as well as analysis of power and social change associated with emancipatory educative and human rights approaches. This was exemplified in comments that included that for too long:

> *"there has been too much shame, Travellers stand in the shade – get comfortable hiding – we are doomed to be blamed for the things that other people do, it is time we got out into the light."*

Candidacy was not an easy choice and would most likely not secure office, but for these candidates the *symbolism of their run* could not be underestimated. This form of reasoning reflects an *ambition from the margins*, where a strong sense of community responsibility, resistance to historic forms of marginalisation as well as hopeful sentiment about future change combine to crystalise interest and intent.

Traveller candidates did not often reference specific training programmes as part of their journey to candidacy. Other forms of leadership training and direct experience working within community organisations featured in their formation as political agents. The *'network effect'* of training programmes cited for migrant women candidates did not hold for Traveller women, whose networks may be largely based within the Traveller advocacy sector unless they have external contacts through education and employment.

While outreach from parties to the Traveller community is uncommon, some interviewees were approached by parties. However, one woman was advised that although she would make a great candidate, she should wait out the 2019 election until 2024, advice she promptly ignored. One Traveller candidate had run for a political party at both national and local level and suggested that the local was much harder and she had less party-political support. This comment is illustrative of the view of the interviewees from all communities that there is weak demand from political parties for Traveller candidates:

> *"I don't see ... parties going and trying to locate Travellers or Traveller women to become candidates, there is no drive, there is no campaign. Again, with the structure of political parties, it's all embedded. ... It's the same dynamics as it was 100 years ago"*

Female Traveller candidates experienced significant and persistent anti-Traveller racism and sexism. This included poster being destroyed or removed, and graffiti written across their faces on some posters. A strong anti-Traveller sentiment permeated social media as they were subjected to racist and sexist abuse on Twitter and Facebook with one candidate having a false twitter account created in her name. Furthermore, such experiences were also evident in public space where as soon as the campaign was launched:

> *"people ignored me, started to cross the street ... there was a lot of 'who does she think she is' you know personal nastiness."*

Another female Traveller candidate was subjected to hostility from her own family who were unhappy at the attention her candidacy would bring in their view.

Campaigning

Canvassing in Ireland is central to political campaigns and, for majority-population candidates, often involves a kind of openness and trust in the public to be heard. But for Travellers, as one candidate commented, *"Canvassing was challenging, Travellers look at the ground, avoid eye contact, these are defensive measures, used to navigate settled society."* Candidates recalled *"Doors shut, hands pulled back – cleaning their hands – material torn up, like you were wasting their time, ruining their day."* There were some more positive experiences but also resistance. One candidate attended a local meeting about a dispute that involved some local Traveller families. She was pinpointed at the meeting with

settled people looking to her *"to run interference with the Travellers involved, to sort it out."* The meeting became heated, with public pronouncements that were anti-Traveller and deeply racist. Before candidacy she would have been able to lie low in such a context, now the hatred she witnessed at the meeting she felt was directed at her and received no challenge from other attendees. This was deeply shocking.

Other candidates were polite or ignored her as she stated *"people like me don't get elected."* While some of the candidates ran as an independent and others for a political party, all of the candidates characterised parties as having a poor record on Traveller rights. As one candidate remarked:

> *"there are good elements in every party, but there is a history of parties bussing up Travellers to get their votes. Arriving on the site with transport on election day and then not being seen after that."*

This transactional approach to the Traveller community reflects aspects of an instrumental approach that some migrant female candidates also observed. Campaigns were resourced with some party support, yet family, friends and personal resources were also required resulting in limited postering and small canvassing teams. Further, Traveller female candidates were often lone parents, which added additional constraints on both resourcing campaigns and balancing care responsibilities.

Media

Female Traveller candidates commented on being routinely asked only about Traveller 'issues' or controversies in radio and print interviews. This would inevitably end with the assertion that their candidacy was about *"sorting out their community"*. This was viewed as unfair and reductive, illustrated in the comment, "when we run as a Traveller we shouldn't be put out as soldiers to only target Traveller issues." Candidates were clear that they had broader local and community concerns and had campaigned on issues related to public services, climate change and local facilities, yet they were rarely asked about other issues. Overall female Traveller candidates noted that discrimination and racism including sexist treatment was "tough on the mental health." The campaign was punishing, and they were aware that other majority-population female candidates sometimes had a hard time, but that their experiences were markedly different.

Elected Representatives

Given the small number of minoritised women who have been elected, the analysis below provides a composite account with specific identifiable references where permitted. As with unsuccessful candidates there were similarities but also differences observable across this sample of women participants.

The sample here includes EU migrant women, non-EU migrant African women and a Traveller woman. One ethnic minority representative had been co-opted after an unsuccessful bid. She also put herself forward for nomination by her party for a Seanad by-election, supported by civil society organisations, but was unsuccessful. Another was appointed to the Seanad by the Taoiseach. All representatives had higher education, some had careers in media and journalism in their country of origin, others had been employed in community development sectors and private industry. Representatives varied widely by social class background but shared common experiences of politicisation. These included direct experiences of discrimination and/or awareness of local needs gained from participation in local community organisations. Foreign born representatives cited examples of policy and practices from their origin society and/or other time spent living and working in other countries as important in shaping their decision to enter politics. This included a frustration with gaps in Irish policy and politics and/or a wish to continue their previous commitment to public service in Ireland.

Political Self-efficacy

Some interviewees expressed a strong sense of political self-efficacy. As one representative with close ties to the local migrant community stated: "I am a person of influence. I can persuade people." This idea of oneself as an agent of change was also linked to a strong sense of role model status and awareness of setting a precedent with their candidacy to inspire other minoritised women to become leaders. This was especially the case for representatives of colour. Some were less sure of their path initially and indicated that the decision to run had been fraught, their ambition less a long-term goal and more a momentary decision. All representatives reflected on moments of doubt, uncertainty and soul-searching before entering a race. For those with less prior public-facing experience, the process of deciding to run and of campaigning required a "fake it 'till I make it" strategy. Some of the representatives also acknowledged resistance from their own community and efforts to dissuade them from running. However, most reported good familial support that for some was crucial in their decision to launch a campaign. In fact, most were very reliant on family, including children and partners to execute their campaigns, with in some cases extended family members travelling to Ireland for a period of weeks to cover childcare during that time. For some EU migrants, underemployment was a reason to consider a public role alongside a commitment to community-based social change.

African born representatives were embedded in their respective local communities as long-term residents. One stated that her discontent with local integration efforts including migrants' experiences with public services spurred her to contemplate a run. Overall, her aim was to "blend the cultures in the town". Both representatives had a record of involvement in community organisations including the GAA, tidy towns, local business networks and church/parish structures. Other white ethnic identified migrants also had a long-term residence in their constituency and a high level of involvement in local networks. One EU migrant representative, while living in an area for a lengthy period, campaigned and secured her local office in an adjacent area. This was a particular achievement given the difficulties faced by women candidates in illustrating their 'local' credentials and more so for those not of Irish origin. Many of the minoritised female elected representatives initiated development networks for their community and acted as *cultural brokers* prior to candidacy. As part of this some were involved

in local governance infrastructure through the Public Participation Networks. Others pursued intercultural agendas through involvement in local schools, and sporting and recreational clubs. Much of this activity marks a diversification of these spaces and is the site where these women have advanced substantive change.

Male political sponsorship was important for all representatives, and all reported some outreach from parties prior to their candidacy. Some of this was through personal networks or community organisational contacts. Some female elected representatives characterised these approaches as explicit efforts by individual politicians who were "looking to connect to my community." This was not the case for the Traveller representative although her initial sponsor was committed to Traveller rights. She was supported by Traveller organisations, in particular the National Traveller Women's Forum in which she was employed and who facilitated her campaign.

One representative from Eastern Europe had served a long apprenticeship within her party more typical of Irish aspirants with a long-term commitment to the party working in a variety of roles over several years. This candidate had approached her political career in a long-term "strategic and methodical way", working on the ground, 'paying her dues', although it took many years to establish localness and required multiple runs to secure office and now re-election. For another less typical representative *high intensity sponsorship* began after being talent-spotted at a meeting she attended to support another male candidate. This said, she had to be approached several times before she committed. After a period of time she was made a local area representative which she characterised as an "excellent training ground for seeking office."

Campaigns

Elected representatives can be placed on a continuum of those who received little party-political support to those who were well resourced, supported and mentored. This was reflective of different party strategies: short term and opportunist, and longer term where candidates were identified earlier, summed up by different responses: *"I was considered a long shot"* and *"they really wanted me to succeed."* Another representative received minimal support and *"found out later others were more supported."* This translated into some having access to and encouragement from party leadership while others won their seat "despite the lack of party support."

In financial terms, there was a wide variance, yet a common theme for all was using personal funds to initiate and sustain their campaign. Money from a family inheritance was released to support one candidate who could not have launched a bid without it. Another who competed in successive electoral contests (and was successful) saved money over time to fund their participation. This said, some candidates had more significant personal resources. One candidate acknowledged that this had allowed them to employ a large campaign team, including hiring staff to erect posters and those with professional skills to manage aspects of their campaign. This was matched by party political funds and support in expertise, campaign intelligence, public platforming, attendance of party leadership at campaign events, which were all, in her view, helpful to her in winning. For others, more modest resources were accompanied by in-kind and voluntary labour.

All representatives undertook some form of *candidate training* including Women for Election and the SHE Programme. ICI training was also influential for initial individual support and encouragement. Training was evaluated by most as useful, but for working class and Traveller representatives it held less resonance. In this sense, participation in training and leadership initiatives was viewed as at the very least 'planting a seed' although the network effect of participation was

useful for some representatives more than others. As one representative commented, *"at the end of the day you don't have a lot in common with other women in some of these programmes and your networks are predominantly within your own community."*

Being a migrant woman and not considered a local meant that for one representative, *"I was not confident enough to ask others to canvass for me".* She also perceived that despite her successful outcome she had been placed in an unwinnable seat. All representatives indicated that they had broken with convention on canvassing and had established a distinctive personal approach. For some, canvassing was a source of energy and confidence but for most canvassing was also challenging and a context in which they experienced harassment and abuse. Commentary on accents, and questions about citizenship status including *"where are you really from?"* were encountered on doorsteps. Not all experiences were negative. Some representatives made sure that they had well-resourced canvass teams, others were unable to do this and felt vulnerable and exposed at times.

Sexist and Racist Abuse

All representatives acknowledged sexism and racism as a dimension of their experiences in politics. However, some were more explicit than others about the nature of this abuse, naming it as such and its effect on them as politicians. When considering the invitation by a party to run for local office, one representative was approached by another would-be candidate with the comment "do you think you are intelligent enough to run." For this woman of colour, this sexist and racist remark upset her deeply and made her rethink her decision to launch a campaign. Other comments including "Black people want to take our politics now not just our jobs" in turn strengthened her resolve, she stated "If I don't win that man will win." Her strategy was to "look for people who believed I could win." This representative framed her resistance to such abuse as one of building individual self-confidence through personal development and perseverance.

Another representative of colour resented the discussion about her race and ethnicity as she indicated that it always ended in someone defining her as a token. She did recall receiving *"unpleasant emails which were a source of upset".* Her strategy was to outsource her social feeds to be curated and a policy of blocking abusive content. Overall, she commented that "women have to develop a thick skin" and wondered if the abuse was not personal to her but more to the political party affiliation. She also commented that race was an issue for both male and female politicians. Another representative that had run in a Seanad (Senate) race recounted a remark from another politician "*You did well in the Seanad race because of your ethnicity."* Her response was "don't you dare take my hard work away from me."

For white migrant women, social media abuse was cited as a reason to limit its use and/or have someone else curate it to insulate them from worry. These women were aware of criticism of their nationality but suggested that they were less likely than visible migrant or ethnic minority women to experience explicit racism. This said, one representative commented that when canvassing, people sometimes assumed she was Spanish based on her last name but as soon as she began a conversation, they would hear her accent and she could feel a change in their approach towards her.

For another woman of colour representative, while acknowledging racism, she asserted that "I tend not to take it to heart." She adopted a benign approach stating, *"People prefer to hear what is familiar, they can adapt and change."* She also contended that for her party "It would have been easier to support an Irish candidate than to support me." She continued that the party had provided her with some resilience training, and she relied on a basic strategy of blocking and ignoring racist and sexist abuse. All representatives mentioned a focus on voter registration within migrant and ethnic minority communities, where through campaigning they became aware that many people did not know they could vote. They also encountered questions as to why migrants or ethnic minorities were "allowed into local politics."

Doing Politics

Representatives were asked to reflect on their experience of holding office. For one white EU migrant woman a complex set of challenges associated with her 'foreignness', her gender and her social class combined to frustrate her work as a representative. She characterised this as a form of "outsider status" in a stronghold of incumbent councillors that made her day-to-day work difficult. It was, she indicated, hard to read the clientelism and she was often blocked from accessing informal resources. This was also the experience of another white migrant woman who relayed that despite years of service *"it would still take me many phone calls to get the same result as other councillors after one call."* In her view she had to work twice as hard as other councillors.

First-time representatives all commented on the lack of training and orientation. Some remarked that local councillors were not eager to share information and having no natural constituency of migrants meant that, for one representative, she has less capital to leverage. Another white European migrant representative who identified as working class had worked to connect with Traveller and African communities and found less support and interest at council level for her support of these initiatives. This representative was also critical of the lack of power and professionalism in local government compared to her origin country. Another white identified migrant representative recounted how in her first term she was told her voice was too soft and she should shout in council meetings. She also recalled having to figure out for herself basic procedures such as tabling a motion. More recently, elected representatives indicated that they had figured out which council members they might align with, and this helped in accessing information. For another newer representative, *"talking about values not playing party politics"* is how she approaches her council work. She also recounted how her new ideas (including pandemic-related interventions) were at times discounted out of hand rather than taken seriously. One interviewee had proposed a strategy on migrant integration in the Council, which passed. However, she was not invited to attend the launch. While happy that the strategy had been launched, she, felt her exclusion was careless at best. She affirmed good relations generally in the Council but was frustrated at having to work multiple angles at the same time to gain support.

Some representatives were keen to dispute the idea of themselves as token women in their parties. It is possible that placing a focus on racism as a representative was perceived as leaving one open to being viewed as a token or at the very least "not a team player." This aligns with other participant input to this research that suggests that candidates and elected representatives perceive risks associated with raising issues of sexism and racism. Asked about the internal structures within their respective parties, one woman noted that women's networks were useful but not if they are constituted as a 'social club'. Some indicated that women's' caucuses were a nice idea but not useful for their own work. Asked for recommendations, some suggested:

> *"women need strong male mentors and minority candidates need more support in politics like a corporate model. Women can succeed there so why not politics?"*

All those interviewed agreed on the need for gender quotas at the local level and most agreed that there may be a need for ethnic quotas, however, there was less support for the idea of reserved seats.

The single Traveller woman interviewed experienced some common challenges with other representatives but also a *distinctive pathway to office*. This representative had joined a political party in the past yet decided ultimately to run as an independent. In her view the problem was that *"it is often more about the party and the cultures of the parties than it is about equality."* She cited several influential male mentors and sponsors that supported her decision to run for office. Her politicisation was rooted in family circumstances but ultimately came from her frustration with her own experiences of anti-Traveller racism, the lack of progress on Traveller rights and the lack of implementation

of strategies including the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS). The devasting impact of the Carrickmines fire in 2015 was a turning point for her, consolidating her ambition to push for political change. In her view, Traveller issues were often used as a political football with politicians and parties "scoring points". There were also complex dynamics of internal and external oppression in her community, in which there had been some resistance to her candidacy. In this way, she stated, *"hurt comes from my own community but also externally."* She underlined that her original campaign did not attract any media attention outside of her locality. Her strategy was to lay out a clear equality focused agenda, but she did not look for second preference votes as she felt this *"would limit me and I would have had to tailor my image."* Despite working so hard to get elected, she did not win. She commented "I was glad to get the [Taoiseach's] nomination but tried so hard to get it the other way." Campaigning had been exhausting and although she had a good campaign team, she did experience sexist and anti-Traveller racism. She participated in some training but described what was on offer as tokenistic and not inclusive which created a feeling of being spoken down to and of dress codes that were alienating. She remarked:

> *"you feel alone. The language used is also exclusionary. Some people are not as well-educated and English may not be their first language".*

When she was appointed, *"the good media coverage began, not before then."* She continued:

> *"I will say that the media was giving other people the attention and, didn't focus on me once. … But then when you get the seat then, you know, they all want a piece of you."*

She was critical of the negative portrayal of Travellers generally across all media: "the media in general they always stick up the negative stories about Travellers, they never put up any kind of positive stories." She detailed being pulled aside in her first days in the chamber and told by another (male) member:

> *"'aren't you grand now, like you're a good token seat'. I said 'excuse me?'. He goes 'well you're a woman and you're a Traveller'".*

She recounted other incidences of paternalism and alongside more practical sources of exhaustion like the distance between her rural constituency and the Seanad that were challenging. Further, she now occupied a chamber and an office alongside people with stated anti-Traveller positions on the public record. This created a source of stress and required ongoing strategies to manage her emotional and mental health. Social media abuse was a consistent issue, but she stated *"it is not real life. I try and not get caught up with it. I don't to make it the only focus."* While she has led on significant work for Traveller people in Ireland, she also remarked how she had a broader platform that was difficult to get across. This was particularly an issue in media coverage.

She detailed sources of support and encouragement from other female members but remarked that the *"Women's Caucus was not for me as I wouldn't be true in that space."* In other words, such spaces do not always speak to the real issues facing *"women on the ground, from working class areas or from the Traveller community."* She felt that women's movements more generally *"leave the most marginalised women behind".* Overall, she commented that things would not change for her and other Traveller women until Parties committed to being anti-racist. She noted, in similar terms to unsuccessful Traveller candidates, that there was a younger generation of Traveller women who were seeking a political 'voice' yet found it hard to access spaces in broader civil society including the women's movement. The bottom line was that some people have good intentions but:

> *"they make Traveller's out to be thick, there is not enough recognition that we have completely different journeys through life and through politics."*

She rejected the notion that political literacy is an issue. Rather *"many of us have always voted and do know how to vote. However, we've lost hope in our political system."* She noted that gender quotas, while

a good idea for some, had benefitted only white middle class women so far.

She made the point that we should start celebrating Traveller culture:

> *"we never do Traveller cultural training, this is something to be aware of. We always do the inequalities that Travellers are impacted by. We never sit there and say Traveller traditional music, we never speak about the tinsmithing, about the language, we don't use our language. We don't speak around the women within the Traveller community, the women's culture of the beady buttons. We don't speak about the nice stuff about being a Traveller."*

Minoritised Women's Recommendations

All minoritised women participants were asked for recommendations on what should happen to enable their participation and representation in local government. Many interviewees suggested that the registration process be made simpler. It was clear that the requirement to attend a Garda Station in order to register to vote is problematic for minoritised communities, for a variety of reasons, but, with differential impacts on all minoritised groups involved in this research. It was suggested that the requirement for photo identification be changed. Echoing other participants, one migrant candidate stated that when she arrived in Ireland, she received lots of paperwork about the restrictions of her residency but nothing to tell her she had the right to vote. Childcare supports were a frequent request as well as the opportunity to fundraise from friends and family from abroad, or an alternative funding regime given the disadvantage this creates for minoritised communities. Many participants recommended access to emotional and psychological supports particularly after a campaign and especially if they had been unsuccessful. Training on how to deal with sexism and racism on and offline was a frequent request.

Traveller interviewees recommended the creation of a public forum for politicians to come and talk to the Traveller community and supports to enable Traveller and Roma people to know what questions to ask when politicians come to their door. Scholarships, internships and placements in all areas of public life were also a key recommendation, to include political parties, public service, local authorities and radio stations. Traveller-led and migrant-led training were emphasised as essential. Hate crime legislation and a code of practice with sanctions for racist politicians was considered important, as were legislative frameworks to ensure parties diversify candidates, including reserved seats, ethnic quotas and/or using the co-optation process to ensure diverse representation. This could include a Seanad panel for underrepresented groups and one Dáil seat per province for Traveller, Roma and/or Migrant people.

Section 3: Advocacy Organisations and Stakeholders

Contributions were sought from stakeholder organisations, including those representing Traveller, Roma and Migrant women. Other stakeholders that contributed included the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG), the representative organisation for local councillors (see Part 3 on Local Government).

In this section we review the perspectives of advocates and stakeholders on the topic of minoritised women's access to and participation in local politics. Many of the participants are women who belong to minoritised communities and who reflected on their own journeys towards developing a 'political imagination'. Their inputs here align with many of those provided by aspirant, candidate and elected participants. For some, particularly Traveller advocates, their entry point to advocacy included experiences of exclusion and racism in local governance.

Origins and Entry Points

Many Traveller women advocates began their accounts detailing poor experiences of education rooted in discriminatory practices including exclusion from mainstream learning, arbitrary punishment and demeaning treatment. These early experiences were the seed bed for later politicisation. The implications of long-term experiences of discrimination were that Traveller women *"learned to keep our head down."* However, many of these women were politicised by parents or siblings who engaged in voting and local political issues and were part of movements in the late 1970s and 1980s on Traveller rights. Direct exposure to anti-Traveller racism in their local communities was often the catalyst that propelled them towards formal work in the sector. Many of the Traveller women outlined how they began with efforts to intervene for their own children at school and evolved to participate on local accommodation committees to employment in community development spaces such as family resource centres.[28] Other catalysts included *"as a local teenager being barred from discos; followed in shops."* Many Traveller women activists also recounted confronting anti-Traveller racism as part of local political campaigns. These accounts dated from the 1980s and 1990s, however they reflected continuity in accounts from younger Traveller women in more recent times. Traveller women's political imagination emerged then from *"standing up for kids and standing up for ourselves".*

Participants recalled *"the only time we ever saw a politician on a halting site was when the bus arrived to take us to vote."* These experiences are "*where ideas about politicians and politics are formed."* When Traveller women were not included in some local meetings, they attended anyway. This was recounted as a:

> *"frightening experience, we were shaking but we wanted basic facilities for the children, so we turned up, it was a big, long table, they shouted at us and banged the table, the misogyny and the effort to intimidate us was so explicit."*

Another participant recalled a newly elected local representative recounted to her *"us voting for Traveller accommodation is like Turkey's voting for Christmas!"* Attendance at public meetings elicited frustration evident in responses such as:

28 Access to higher education featured in the biographies of many Traveller women as contexts where their sense of themselves as political actors developed further.

"it was about confronting deep racism, this was so clear listening to people talk about you in that way."

For more experienced activists, there was significant frustration at the lack of progress in developing meaningful pathways for Traveller participation in local and national governance. This was despite decades of work invested in accessing important processes and steering groups at national level, as well as the significant contribution of Traveller women's organisations to leadership roles at local, regional and national level in community development and in building Traveller infrastructure. This work was essential to shaping and informing Traveller policy development by the State.

Traveller women advocates also detailed their own initiatives aimed at building leadership skills with Traveller women, sometimes in association with university programmes. Given the complexities of Traveller women's lives, outcomes had been uneven. Access to transport, childcare and gaining the support of male partners to attend all presented challenges for women participants. Even when the programmes met some of these needs, including a remittance for attendance to communicate to the family that the training had value, the context of the programme was still a source of alienation for some participants. Attrition rates were high, with some reporting that the university campus setting of one such programme was intimidating and that they felt overwhelmed and unwelcome. This exemplified the many difficulties encountered in retaining women in training and educational programmes. There was also *"reticence about sending Traveller women into a hostile political arena".* Frustration about the lack of political responsiveness to Traveller exclusion led many advocates to question the idea at all of minoritised women seeking local political office. There was also a sense of a *politics of exhaustion* (Emejulu and Bassel 2020) as activists reflected on the decades of struggle. In this sense the structures of racism and sexism constituted processes that *"demand activists' exhaustion".* Part of this was a 'report fatigue' as one activist commented "*we have research coming out of our ears"* but the fundamentals do not change because there is a lack of implementation.

Other activists detailed what they described as *"deep internalised obstacles"*:

"we have been socialised to avoid attention, something like eye contact, required for canvassing, that is not easy for us to do."

As one participant remarked,

"There are risks when we come out of the shade, for us and for Roma people, we are constantly worried about what will happen when we interact with authorities."

Several women indicated that in their view Traveller culture itself was also changing, and fluid. There were some examples of younger Traveller women accessing opportunities but also some continuity in the existence of paternalism and traditional gender roles. As one activist remarked, *"Young women don't want as big families as before, they want to work".* Some Traveller women who access education and seek employment gravitate towards Traveller organisations and projects *"where they feel safe".*

There were additional risks with supporting politicisation:

"when you bring people to see everything and then they can't do anything about it. It can be disempowering to know it all."

From this perspective politicisation and even candidacy, especially when poorly received, can trigger disempowerment. Even if candidates are successful, "there is a heavy expectation on them to make things better." Other observations included how media only ever asked Traveller candidates about Traveller issues. When participating in media other issues arose: "you are asked on to talk about Traveller pride week, and then after five minutes they make it about a negative story and expect you to be answerable." Negative,

and, in some instances, racist, media portrayal of Travellers more generally was considered an inhibiting factor for potential candidates.

There was the hope expressed that if Traveller women candidates stood then Travellers would vote for them. However, Traveller women interested in politics needed to have the broader community behind them in order to secure a mandate, *"we need votes across society".* It was also emphasised that for Travellers this was a tough ask as *"Irish women politicians are stalked, threatened, magnify that by 100% for Traveller women."* Given the societal discrimination and numerical disadvantage faced by Travellers, it is difficult for many activists to see how a Traveller candidate can command enough votes from the settled community to win a seat in all but a handful of local electoral areas. This was part of the reason why Traveller organisations have consistently made the case for designated seats, a Traveller constituency and/or ethnic quotas at all levels of government as well as a Taoiseach's nominee to the Seanad. Social media abuse of Traveller women, it was suggested, had also worsened since Covid-19. For another advocate,

> *"it is important that we believe we can make a change, but you do start to doubt yourself, how can I run for local public office, if I cannot get served in the local pub?!"*

This had specific impact on younger Traveller women. Participants emphasised the importance of naming Travellers in the expected legislation on hate speech.

Recommendations for change included filing data gaps including using an ethnic identifier, as well as designing training programmes with wrap around supports including transport, childcare and a stipend. A focus on resilience was unhelpful on its own, it was essential to address the low value that some Traveller women placed on themselves. Positive action was required, *"we need to get them through and break the cycle."* However, the idea of capacity-building was viewed as lacking nuance,

> *"Traveller women have led for decades, it important to start from where women are at, not ten steps behind."*

Traveller advocates argued that the process of diversifying training would require a root and branch reconfiguration rather than an add-on approach to diversity. This includes resources and an explicit attention to programme content and delivery to ensure that training is both meaningful and impactful to minoritised women. Increased diversity in training programmes would also benefit majority-population women's understanding of diversity and the lived experiences of minoritised women. Other activists detailed their own role in training other agencies and service providers on Traveller issues. There was a consensus among several participants that Traveller and Roma people should design training materials to give them a stake and *then liaise* with programmes such as Women for Election. Training programmes, in turn, should ensure that they are designing and delivering training programmes that address the specific issues of Traveller and Roma women.

Some critique was levelled at majority-population women's organisations and female politicians. As such there was recognition that change was needed within the Traveller community, but *"we need a shift not just from a Traveller's perspective, but from majority women politician's now".* Other advocacy groups were also asked to *"step back and cede spaces to allow Traveller women input especially on issues that affect them."*

Political Parties and Traveller Political Candidacy

Political parties also had a responsibility to act: *"there need to be consequences if parties are not delivering on diversity."* There was a general view that anti-racism training should be mandatory in parties. *"Politicians set the tone, they have massive clout, this sends a message down."* Following on, this activist underlined, *"what politicians don't say also matters,*

the silences count." Overall, most activists believed that there have been no consequences for politicians who endorsed anti-Traveller racism. Political parties, it was suggested, should also offer apprenticeships to Traveller and Roma women. Parties on the left were also characterised as at times 'using' Traveller women. In general, there was a strong agreement that it was crucial to have Traveller women in political office, *"as nothing was automatic, you have to be at every meeting to have a say".* Without the presence of Travellers, their needs would be disregarded. However substantive representation for Travellers was required before broader political interest would occur: *"Travellers would vote if they saw change happening."*

The pandemic was a critical juncture in some ways as advocacy organisations had to pivot to emergency service provision to fill the gaps left by the absence of State services in Traveller-specific accommodation areas. There were some elements of a charity model *"when it is life or death"* being employed, but this was not sustainable and in any case was something that Travellers and Traveller organisations had fought hard to escape. These conditions had strengthened the resolve of some Traveller women that more systemic changes were required.

Roma Women and Political Participation

Roma women participants in this research also detailed experiences of racism, sexism and discrimination. A parallel with Traveller women's accounts was the observation that for many Roma women, concealing their Roma identity became a way to navigate societal exclusion.

Roma women participants were employed in advocacy organisations and had significant professional qualifications and employment histories. However, they indicated that many Roma women and girls worked hard to conceal their identity especially in higher education and employment. In their experience *"they have had bad experiences telling people they are Romanian, that is one thing, but to reveal they are Roma, that is another."* One Roma advocate outlined her extensive career trajectory and her experiences in higher education, where at critical junctures she had encountered a dismissive attitude. She asserted that "if my identity had been known I wouldn't have been able to perform in school."

Roma women recounted incidents of entering shops and having staff follow them or shout out loud *"watch your wallets!"* Stigmatisation was so severe that *"some Roma children ask their parents not to collect them from school."* For Roma children, primary school was often quite a positive experience, yet second level was often isolating with high rates of attrition. One advocate had worked for a number of years to initiate schemes aimed at retention of Roma girls in education and offered family support, however, once she had moved to a different city for employment the programmes dwindled: *"Once I was gone it didn't happen anymore, there was no political support to continue it."* One Roma activist was currently engaged in doctoral research and worked with state agencies in a large city to address supports for the *"Roma that beg in the city to survive."* Roma women did work with Traveller women's organisations to empower marginalised women in their respective communities. Another Roma activist cautioned that the Roma community was diverse, and that some were *"semi-integrated while others were more traditional."* This was important in understanding their relative proximity to and interest in political processes including candidacy.

In broader terms, as one Roma woman activist declared, *"it is important to change the image of Roma people in Ireland."* She had organised local Roma people to collect litter in a local clean-up campaign. It was common for local shops not to allow Roma inside but after the initiative where Roma people removed all the rubbish from a river preventing local flooding, relations improved. However, she emphasised that Roma people had a right to be treated with respect and dignity and should not have to demonstrate their worth in order to be treated as such. Younger Roma were also starting to attend university and gain

postgraduate degrees. Many of these accounts of advancement rested on the power of a single sponsor or advocate to change the course of a Roma woman or girl's future. Another Roma advocate stated, *"Younger Roma women are interested in politics".* However, language barriers inhibited many and with few role models *"it is easier to hide who you are."*

EU initiatives had played a role in helping to raise the issue of Roma women's marginalisation. However, there was resistance from more traditional elements of the Roma community, *"some don't want Roma women involved outside the community."* Suppression and criminalisation of the community and hate crimes against Roma in their countries of origin had created deep mistrust of politicians. The requirement to attend a police station for voter registration also stopped people from voting. State strategies including NTRIS were, in their experiences, poorly applied to Roma people, and there were few if any Roma people employed in schools or as social workers. The pandemic had also worsened conditions for the community especially in terms of poor school attendance.

Training initiatives aimed at Roma women had also been poorly articulated in the past. Often Roma women were added to initiatives targeted at and designed for Traveller women, one advocate noted that *"Roma and Traveller people are very different, we need something of our own."* The bottom line was that "The fear of discrimination stops Roma women from engaging in many initiatives."

There was also to date no state support to engage Roma in politics in Ireland and *"no-one comes to ask for votes."* Politicians need to *"show they care about the community."* Some leftist political parties had recruited Roma people and had helped them with voter registration. However, the community perceived little follow up on their issues and felt used, further distancing them from politics. Recommendations included providing support for women such as childcare and a stipend to attend training. This was important, particularly where their spouses might be sceptical about Roma women attending training programmes: *"for husbands, we need to bring something back to the family."* Other recommendations centred on the political system, with requests for the Electoral Commission to examine the issue of reserved seats or other forms of ethnic quotas. Most felt that without some form of significant intervention, nothing would change.

Advocates for African and Migrant women

African women activists working with African and Migrant women contributed their perspectives. One activist recalled her own pathway into political work on African and migrant women's rights when settling in Ireland and becoming aware of the historical legacy of patriarchal oppression for Irish women. She began working in community development after a period of study, and over time made linkages across different groups of women she worked with, connecting through their shared sources of discrimination. However, she asserted that *"similar issues affect us differently".* Like other female migrant participants in this research, she underlined her initial dismay at the marginalisation of Traveller women and the lack of acceptance of their cultural distinctiveness. She commented, *"they are Irish, but I don't understand this need to make them like everyone else."* Another participant emphasised that any conversation about African, African Irish and migrant women and politics in Ireland had to acknowledge the "diverse realities between different women of colour and those from different migration pathways."

One participant experienced a run for office and detailed how it had taken several years to convince her that the political system was the context to advance African and migrant women's rights. Working "on the ground" on legislation on female genital mutilation alongside a left-wing female politician had given her a sense of her own political agency and the broader possibilities to be leveraged from the political system. She had moved on to work with a migrant rights organisation *"to push migrant women to join local decision-making*

contexts such as school boards of management." She wanted to push the idea that *"if you are not at the table, you become an agenda item."* Several African and migrant activist women outlined the general difficulties that migrant women faced navigating state agencies. This was particularly difficult in the context of citizenship status. These experiences were disempowering for many migrant women and set the tone for their general sense of how the state and by extension the political system operated. Direct provision was also an extreme context of isolation for migrant women, many of whom were lone parents. Several participants also underlined how the Migrant Integration Strategy lacks a gender lens.

Other activists were involved in the Gender, Development, Peace and Security space in Ireland, and this had provided opportunities to influence policy and raise their own political profile. One prominent activist had moved to launch a bid for office, and although she worked hard, she had not succeeded. She detailed contacting many politicians seeking support but did not receive a response from some, while others promised her a second or third preference vote. She characterised the experience overall as a good one which allowed her to create networks with female politicians. As a woman of colour, she was clear that she had experienced a great deal of attack and abuse online, especially during the campaign. She had reported some of it and blocked or ignored the rest.

Another migrant woman activist detailed how the longer-term implications of austerity had undermined the community development sector and those advocating for African and migrant women. Previous funding lines such as the Women's Equality Initiative had been essential in supporting leadership training back in the mid-2000's. Austerity had worsened competitive logics across sectors. More recent rules around procurement and commissioning for organisations also made it increasingly difficult to sustain long term and effective support for minoritised women's leadership training. More emergent issues such as access to housing, healthcare and employment, as well as violence against women, were difficult to confront and all were complicated by the pandemic.

More recently, there were local level initiatives in some county councils on migrant women's leadership. This involved using external training partners and included delivering content on voter literacy, rights and entitlements, and an introduction to the political system. However, there was a view that many training programmes for women in politics *"were detached from reality".* For one participant, *"they should be embedded throughout the electoral cycle and with more effective expectation management."* Some women who had participated in these programmes and had become candidates had high expectations followed by poorer experiences. This included, *"canvassing, it can create fear and trauma, we need to ensure candidates know what to expect."* Operation Black Vote, the UK organisation, was noted as offering guidance at times on strategy. It was also suggested that *"migrant-led training was a good idea."* As one participant contended:

> *"sometimes leadership and training programmes go to the women that are already known and popular – this looks good for your data on success, but you have got to get into the community and do in-reach – go to their own organisations and spaces and you will reach women who are most excluded from the political system."*

Adding to this, she commented,

> *"Popular capable women are ready to run and that is great, but training programmes need to break away from the 'already ready' – that just reinforces the loop within parties who are looking for a particular profile."*

In her view, *"many migrant women just don't see themselves in these leadership, 'capacity building' and training programmes."* She concedes that Some parties have offered placements for migrant women and others have been responsive to issues related to racism and violence against women. However, political parties also need to make it part of their

job to reach out to migrant women. As another participant commented,

> *"gatekeepers can make the situation better or worse, political parties want to maximise seats when they use migrants as running mates but that doesn't always work out for the migrants."*

There was broad support of the gender quota but also a recognition that in elevating minoritised women to political office, there should be an appreciation that those women should be progressive women with human rights and equality to the fore, illustrated by the statement *"what women are we talking about?"*. The Seanad was mentioned as offering an interesting opportunity to include women of migrant background. Seanad reform was discussed with a recommendation on a *"Panel with reserved seats, minimum of three seats, for minorities – it shouldn't be a space for failed TDs or councillors."*

Training Programmes and minoritised women

In this section we review the input of training programmes. We first outline the training programmes that we interviewed.

Women for Election works with political parties and is one of the longest-running training programmes for women, cited as influential in the political candidacy of numerous female politicians. It runs a variety of structured programmes, seminars with invited speakers and events. It is most recently working with the National Traveller Women's Forum to tackle racism while also designing mentoring and training programmes to help empower Traveller women to run for local and national election. It has planned to introduce a 'More Traveller Women' project which is being part-funded by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. It also works with the Immigrant Council of Ireland to jointly deliver anti-racism and intercultural awareness training to women aspiring to run in the next elections.[29]

See Her Elected (SHE) is a collaboration between the Women's Manifesto Project (a Longford Women's Link programme) and 50:50 North West, organisations at grassroots level. It's aim is to address the underrepresentation of women at local level in rural areas. It runs online classes on "demystifying politics", provides resources such as a *Guidebook to Running in the 2024 Local Elections*, public speaking, media training and invited talks. It is an award-winning programme[30] that has evolved to facilitate a wide range of engagement with women to cultivate interest and expertise in politics. It acts as a secretariat to the Midland Women's Caucus.[31]

The Immigrant Council of Ireland runs migrant-focussed leadership training programmes and a dedicated political participation programme. This includes a Migrant-Councillor Internship Scheme which has been recently extended to non-EU/EEA migrants living in Ireland. It also runs political empowerment courses for migrant leaders and a voter literacy and outreach programme.[32]

Representing Women is a programme run by Limerick Women's Network for women to learn more about the system before they commit to public representation roles. It covers topics including personal development, communication strategies, understanding Council structures, environmental impacts affecting women and sustainable development goals.[33]

29 https://www.womenforelection.ie/.
30 https://innovationinpolitics.eu/press-release/see-her-elected-wins-innovation-in-politics-award-for-democracy/
31 https://www.seeherelected.ie/.
32 https://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/training/political-participation.
33 https://nccwn.org/nccwn-events/nccwn-limerick-representing-women-programme/.

Women for Change: A Resource for Women's Groups and Women working for social change and equality was developed by the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) following engagement with women through the Women for Change project. This resource was made possible by the support of the Training Links Fund through the Department of Education and Science. This was developed through a regional programme of leadership facilitation aimed at supporting women and women's groups in local communities to bring about change.[34]

Minceirs Whiden is a Traveller-only organisation with a key objective of the promotion of political participation of Travellers. In the past, it has run Traveller-specific political participation workshops around Ireland and in 2015 it developed a Traveller political participation pack – "Getting Democracy to Work for Travellers". The pack covers a range of issues from registering to vote, the role of Government and other organs of the State to the importance of Traveller visibility in local and national politics. Minceirs Whiden also host regular webinars on Traveller political participation.[35]

The YAMAL Political Leadership Programme is a non-partisan training programme for women, migrants and young people interested in a role in politics conducted online in summer 2021. The program collaborated with training organisations to develop a bespoke training programme including Women for Election, SHE and the ICI. Each participant in the 6-week programme was assigned a mentor who were required to commit to providing three hours of mentoring over the course of the programme. The cost was €100. Other partners included Common Purpose and the Africa Centre.[36]

Overall, we suggest that existing training programmes illustrate creativity, agility, and a growing commitment to diversity. Most take an educative approach with some focused on co-production of content, while others deliver tested expertise for supporting female candidates. All programmes include an element of advocacy on women's' greater access to politics. Some programmes have roots in community development perspectives with a rural focus, others combine aspects of emancipatory principles with more formal training including acting as conduits to political parties. All work in a landscape that includes women party networks, and more recently the formation of women's political caucuses. Training programmes operate in a context of scarce resources, and funding that is linked to electoral cycles and political imperatives. Some programmes are entirely free, others charge fees. All programmes are bipartisan, but they include requirements for participants to subscribe to a values statement; some are explicitly feminist identified. Two programmes have or presently act as a secretariat for women's caucus structures.

Minoritised women participants in this project offered a varied assessment of these programmes, but most saw value in what was offered. In general, women participants suggested that programmes could benefit from community-led steering committees, investment in one-to-one high intensity mentoring and a greater diversity in role models, including minoritised women speakers and trainers. A key value of such programmes included enabling minoritised women to build a network of minoritised women. In addition, programmes should pay attention to language, tone, physical space and dress codes as sources of exclusion. In other words, to *"meet women where they were at"* and provide in an accessible format, knowledge of both formal and informal rules and culture. Further supports deemed crucial included compensation for attendance and childcare, and resilience training on sexism and racism.

Coordinators and advocates from training initiatives generously inputted into the research

34 https://www.nwci.ie/learn/publication/women_for_change_a_resource_for_womens_groups_and_women_working_for_social.
35 https://www.minceirswhiden.ie/political-participation/.
36 https://www.themibinstitute.com/ypl-program.

providing their insights and detailing their programmes. One coordinator commented that for minorities and politics "*If you are not at the table, you are on the menu.*" This trainer underlined how minoritised women are a diverse group and political empowerment programmes should have a long-term goal of creating a leadership network as well as a more proximate goal of changing practices in political parties.

What Can Training Programmes Do?

Coordinators outlined the main objectives of their programmes including what they could and could not do for women participants. "What we can't do is endorse anyone or design materials. What we can do is connect participants with a network – help them with practical skills." She continued. *"We can tell them how to protect their identity and we can work to manage their expectations."* Practical skills were a central element of programmes and for those with migrant participants this included providing intelligence such as *"Irish people like to be asked to vote."* Canvassing role-play was mentioned by many women who had attended programmes as particularly helpful.

Programmes exist on a continuum of those who included minoritised women into existing training (albeit accompanied by sessions on interculturalism and anti-racism) to those offered specifically to migrants (including women), disadvantaged women and/or women in rural contexts. More general leadership programmes drew on expertise of the longest-standing training programmes. While all offered instruction on "how the system works," some experimented with new approaches to canvassing and a focus on self-care in the context of sexist and racist abuse. Other skills included more traditional public speaking and media training such as *"how not to get tripped up in interviews."* This included social and traditional media, although social media was viewed not as effective in rural areas where face-to-face interactions held more currency. Confidence-building, a common element of political leadership programmes for women, features in all programmes. For some, this meant affirming to women that their own knowledge has a value. As one coordinator stated, *"women underestimate their own political knowledge and that their own community leadership is valuable".* Other programmes used outside facilitators in sessions on conventional approaches to confidence-building as well as supports to articulate their vision and values.

Most programmes also focused on demystifying politics. For ground-level organisations and programmes this meant creating a conversational and accessible format, deconstructing political language as well as explaining the mechanics of local and national governance and national policy. Some of this work involved a reliance on external expertise and the use of role models from political life. Programme design differed yet building networks between women was a stated aim of all trainers. As one programme coordinator remarked *"we want to facilitate informal interactions between women".* Other programmes that were explicitly aimed at recruiting disadvantaged women frame this as *"Growing sustainable networks to support women."* All programmes reported being oversubscribed and having to make decisions around admission. One coordinator estimated that about 10% of participants belonged to migrant or Traveller communities. This programme used a governance model that included 'trusted advisors' drawn from diverse backgrounds including Traveller organisations. The objective was to keep in mind *"What does an inclusive county council look like."* Coordinators acknowledged that minoritised women participants faced specific challenges to participation. When delivering the programme remotely, one trainer noted that Traveller women were committed to attending the sessions, but resources often restricted them, *"many were having to attend using the same laptop."* For another coordinator, delivering the programme to a diverse group of women revealed the limits of her own understanding, she stated, *"I am working in community development for a long time, but I recognised we know very little about Traveller culture."*

One training organisation was dedicated to improving Traveller political participation for

women and men and has played a role in many Traveller campaigns at local level. These efforts to inspire Travellers to run for political office, had resulted in *"more Traveller's running in 2019 and generally a higher level of engagement."* This approach to Traveller political participation is rooted in the celebration of Traveller culture, and the formation of an assembly or forum for Traveller people as a coordinator with the programme remarked, *"Some conversations need to happen in a Traveller-only space."* A core objective was to address the reality that *"success for Traveller people comes from hiding their identity, this has been the case especially for politics."* The merit of Traveller-led training was that it enabled participants to embrace their identity as political agents.

Another trainer remarked:

> *"Migrant women – no childcare, sisters, mothers – especially single mothers – they have limited options when trying to attend training and, if they get that far, canvassing."*

The response to this was to offer childcare as part of the programme. On a broader level she remarked *"migrant women find it hard to be visible as political actors."* She continued *"migrants work on Saturdays, they need a good return; training has to matter because migrants cannot dedicate the time."* Other constraints included:

> *"Internal opposition – from communities – where running for local office would for some bring shame on their communities."*

Intercultural and anti-racism training is now an element of most programmes although to date offered as one-off sessions. In one programme an intercultural perspective was mainstreamed in the training curriculum. The content of the curriculum but also the profile of those delivering was discussed with all programme coordinators. One coordinator reflected that there were complexities with delivering training, and the choice of facilitators is important. She noted as the programme became more popular *"we moved away from marginalized women and the facilitators we used were more comfortable with the middle ground."* In her view, Covid-19 and the online provision had expanded access, but to middle class women. She concluded that there was a need for targeted support for disadvantaged women, she posed the question:

> *"if women are not engaging we should be asking not what is wrong with them but what is wrong with us?"*

Another coordinator remarked that there had been a shift towards embracing diversity and movements such as BLM# were important, but there were different experiences for different women. Colourism was an issue and a recognition that:

> *"oppression is felt at different levels and with different strength within different migrant and minority communities."*

Because of this, supports needed to be bespoke relative to the diversity across and within minoritised communities.

Women from excluded communities would, according to another coordinator, "*really activate the imagination – push back against a misrepresentation of public life".* It was noted that women were already in the community doing work; what is required is:

> *"to resuscitate the idea of politics as worthwhile and efficacious for change for women – because the research confirms that women do not regret it – there is value in it."*

However, there was a recognition that this is a complex issue especially in rural areas when trying to get minority women elected where there are to begin with few women on councils. Local politics was also defined as high stakes for minoritised female candidates as clientelism and personalism means "identity is tied to the person."

For another trainer, it was important to not only train women but also advocate for changes in systems of representation *"to avoid trying to assimilate women into a space that wasn't designed for them."*

Running a bipartisan programme was important as collaboration and solidarity across political parties can deliver change for women. Training programmes *"can't be responsible for people's politics."* Rather, working from an intersectional perspective and pushing to diversify those participating was important. This programme had shifted towards using more diverse trainers, and offering scholarships, bursaries and concessions to widen access to its programmes as well as adopting non-exclusionary language. However, there was:

> *"No presumption that everyone who is an ethnic minority will need funding, although they may need non-financial resources."*

Having a diverse board was also important to create a *"broad analysis with a strong will to disrupt gender stereotypes."* In this coordinator's view we have reached a critical point with a:

> *"brewing frustration across female leadership on the pandemic – time is now for change – it took a Minister to get pregnant for us to confront this."*

The intent was to get women in and retain them. As she commented *"This is not a luxury. This is important for everyone's lives – to have women at the table."*

While acknowledging the reality of abuse, especially how it has been amplified on social media, another coordinator questioned whether *"this narrative of politics as toxic and unpleasant as it is maintained – does it serve the purpose of continuing exclusion?"* The way forward involved investing in research and building a pipeline of women across the electoral cycle. This should include resources to support failed candidates, a group that includes an over-representation of minoritised women. Aside from candidates, programmes also support women who occupy elected office providing support in negotiation skills. A key challenge in training is getting participants to understand compromise, *"this is difficult when values are strong but part of the reality of being in a political party."*

Many of the trainers underlined the:

> *"Need to work together – sometimes organisations end up competing against each for funds in silos that are maintained by the funding system, collaboration is recent but important."*

Overall, a strong national strategy with separate funding lines for different kinds of supports was required, with flexibility to match urban and rural areas. This could include a philanthropic space to help support programmes and candidates.

Training Programmes and Political Parties

Coordinators detailed how some parties engaged with them directly while others "use in-house training" asking them to deliver inputs. One coordinator suggested that often "training makes women palatable candidates for parties." Some remarked that at times migrant candidates had been placed in unwinnable seats, where second preference votes worked to secure the preferred candidates seat. In their experience *"If an opportunity for co-option arises, then often the party will not select the unsuccessful migrant candidate."* Looking at international experience suggested to this coordinator that parties have used migrants in other contexts to harvest votes. Political parties needed then to prove that they have a long-term strategy for minority candidates, *"tokenism is not equality"*. The term "performative diversity" was also used to describe a surface level commitment. A popular suggestion was for parties to audit their membership to be transparent about how open they are. In other words, parties were still *"a closed space where it is hard to see what is happening on the inside."*

One participant cited an example where:

> *"an African woman interested in office-holding who worked in a party for four years in different roles – but there was no thought to invest in her as a candidate."*

Parties were characterised as reactive and hesitant to commit resources to more diverse candidates. The problem was that if a candidate loses, *"there is no planning for the next round."* This sent a message to minoritised candidates from parties that because they:

> *"didn't perform – they leave you – when we get near the next election we will need your votes again – but we will leave you until then."*

This created a clash between the insecurity and precarity of minoritised candidates and the hesitancy and calculation of parties.

It was broadly acknowledged, that parties had not been proactive in the local election in 2014. There was also an assertion that *"some women are reluctant; they do not like the risk of being a token or being framed as a poster child."* The decision to run was also understood to have a high cost. Minoritised candidates *"are asked to be much more than their white male counterparts".* It was also noted that incumbent women councillors are in a fragile position that inhibits them from being as supportive as they could to prospective minoritised candidates.

One coordinator commented that *"it was time for a broader conversation about privilege and bullying in parties."* This was followed by the recognition that parties were where women are valued but usually in semi-supportive roles. This broader conversation should also include gender representation on important council committees and potentially term limits. Programmes had lobbied parties directly to ask for extra support for candidates that face additional barriers and did receive support and interest from some. However, one coordinator commented that

> *"we surveyed parties when we were designing the programme but – none of them brought up the extension of the gender quota to the local level."*

There was a sense that the reality is that candidate selection is still *"backroom and hidden."* That for many parties *"geography trumps gender and minorities have not been on their radar."* Even if party operatives were engaging with programmes, local level dynamics meant that candidate selection will seek *"women who are not a threat and male candidates stack membership with their supporters."* Further, some contexts like youth branches "*should be women friendly and diverse but are not always."*

There was also a general acknowledgement that parties are evolving, and all coordinators noted examples of new initiatives and outreach. However, diversity training in political parties needed to be systematic. Programmes that support internship and shadowing initiatives had also faced difficulties finding councillors to participate, partly a consequence of the pandemic. However, *"it is important to hold the line and maintain engagement with political parties."* For instance, on sexist and racist abuse, *"politicians and candidates keep quiet about it – the norm is not to complain."* As such, parties were central actors required to support hate crime legislation and to work for cultural change within their ranks. One programme coordinator suggested that there should be a specific offense for using hate speech if one occupies public office.

Quotas were also viewed by all programme coordinators as important but for some should also apply to cabinets and committee. Yet,

> *"quotas won't stop misogyny and racism. In order to do this we need to support particular types of women not just anyone for the sake of it."*

For one coordinator it was important to make sure that those minoritised candidates selected are themselves diverse and representative. The bottom line for most programmes was that *"we need proper funding to deliver training."*

The community and women's movement sector also provide leadership training for women at local level. This work was focused on equipping women to engage with the structures of local governance. These programmes were a response to the fact that *"the political space wasn't resourced at all on the local level."* One observation made by those involved with these programmes was that in general the sector tends to *"approach migrant women*

and other minority women in the context of rights and entitlements rather than their representational role." While women were involved in local governance, the broader issue was *"When you go to the same people all the time who have the capacity you leave out the marginalised."*

The experience of elaborating a programme across different regions with a diverse group of women was that:

> *"when we offer training we need to make sure that structures then are also receptive – why would we ask women to give up their hard-won time to go on these structures if this is not the case."*

In general, it was noted that for many local authorities, equality was seen as 'women' and it was often not taken seriously. In reality it was usually a junior person that was given the equality brief and it was *"often falling on the women in the council to drive that."* There had been:

> *"little appetite to provide secretariat support in local authorities for women's caucuses – and this has to date not been taken seriously with no resources attached to it."*

In their view, training that had been offered in the past suited women already in politics and this was because the funding was narrowly defined. As such, *"Doing the same thing is going to get the same women – they fit."*

Experience working with minoritised women was that they enacted a collective form of leadership and a distinctive approach to political change. This was not well understood by local political systems. These participants detailed how PPN structures were potentially important spaces for minoritised women's participation. But that the PPNs were often dominated by majority-population women and men that did not understand the 'costs' of participation for minoritised women. As such there were instances where these committees voted against funding supports that can help disadvantaged women to participate such as laptops and childcare expenses. Strategic Policy Committees were also important but with so few women councillors to draw on they also lacked diversity. The SICAP process also had poor levels of engagement. The reality was that many of the strategies meant to improve equality and diversity were poorly articulated locally.

These participants also emphasised how since the economic crisis funding for their work had been cut and/or tied to programme outcomes for labour market inclusion rather than community representation. There was recognition that bodies such as AILG - Association of Irish Local Government were working to promote women's greater participation. However other governance bodies at local level had less interest. While the human rights public sector duty was a potential apparatus to improve diversity and equality in local governance *"there is not a great level of expertise using this and a functional response at best to it."*

When asked about political office, these participants suggested that there should be a multileveled model used, directed at local but also national – TDs and Senators – and MEPs. That training for candidacy should be extended to new councillors specifically for *"negotiation for important committee positions."* Bursaries were also suggested as a potential support for minoritised candidates. Overall it was noted that *"minority women who have made it tend to have other resources."* Traveller women were noted to be particularly poorly served by local governance.

> *"There is a lack of trust because of the mismanagement of local services, we need training in how to engage Traveller women, it is very difficult as they know how much councils have blocked funding for their accommodation needs."*

Political parties were also evaluated as important contexts, where some change was notable. However, the complex task of improving minoritised women's access to politics was beyond party equality officers as they were "too busy." One of these participants reflected on the work of Senator Eileen Flynn, the first Traveller woman appointed to the Seanad, suggesting that her role

was particularly challenging. In her words *"As the first Traveller woman, she is the defender, explainer and provider of solutions."*

The main elements that represent the qualities of training programmes and the perspective of minoritised women participants are summarised here: *Inclusive and responsive training* evolves through forms of co-production where *recognition* of diverse and intersectional realties are embedded in the *vision* of programmes. This should be realised beyond a values statement and reflected in programme *design, physical context, and governance structures. Role models* have been identified as a core element of training that resonates with minoritised women programme participants. The inclusion of *appropriate content, role models and other facilitators* was identified a key to creating a sense of *belonging and identification* as well as *entry points to networks* for minoritised women. Relevance of *content, style and tone of delivery* were also highlighted as central to a sense of connection and community. *Resources* were also noted by all participants as a strong incentive especially for those most distant from the community sector and formal political networks. Such resources in the form of *childcare, transport, a stipend* to attend and/or leave from another role were all noted as valuablein facilitating attendance, participation and reducing rates of attrition. How *racism and sexism*, dynamics that shape minoritised women's lives as well as factors shaping public life, were acknowledged was also a significant factor identified. A *reflexive approach* to racism and sexism, sensitive yet also with practical support for *self-care, resilience* but also advice on *resistance* (including reporting) were deemed as valuable assets.

Section 4: Political Parties and the State

Political Parties

In this section we discuss the interviews conducted with political party equality representatives. We sought interviews with party equality or diversity officers. Some of the parties offered us an official from party HQ but many offered the party's elected spokesperson on equality. We conducted interviews with representatives from Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Sinn Féin, Labour, the Social Democrats and the Green Party. The consensus in the gender and politics literature is that parties historically have under resourced efforts to attract promote and support women, and that women are often placed in "unwinnable seats" to satisfy voluntary or legislative quotas.

In Ireland, research has also confirmed that political parties have waxed and waned in their efforts to attract migrants (Szlovak 2017; Lima 2020), although more recent indications reflect a shift. The interviews show that parties are experiencing a step change in their attitudes to diversifying recruitment arising from a broader cultural shift and a growing appreciation for ethnic and racial diversity in Irish society. This is fuelled by increased visibility of Traveller activist voices, shifts associated with MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements, as well as the growing recognition of racism and sexism in public life. This is reflected in state support for research and initiatives to parties and organisations to improve their efforts in this area. However, Roma representation is not as yet a priority. This is indicative of how marginalised groups are perceived in the political context through a service provision frame rather than a representational lens.

The interview data illustrates the aspirations of the parties to do better and reflects future thinking on what they would like to do and see with respect to diversifying their candidates and elected representatives. Parties are thus in a process of stock-taking, reflection and strategising about how best to respond to bottom-up pressure to diversify and plan forward to the national level 40% gender quota. However, different strategies have emerged.

Candidacy and Recruitment

There was general acknowledgement from all parties about the need to diversify their candidate pools. As one party representative commented:

> *"we need to resource a specific officer in parties to recruit women and more diverse candidates, this could be challenging for small parties. But the key is ensuring it is an identifiable role in the party to reach out to local offices and organisations. It is about encouraging women from underrepresented communities; it is not just gender that is holding them back."*

Although, one party representative also expressed fatigue about being made responsible to comment on the low levels of women in politics on such a regular basis. There was a sensitivity to a narrative that women candidates were *"victims in need of extra supports."* However, many of the participants were women politicians who detailed their own experiences of sexism as candidates and elected representatives. When asked about what their respective parties were doing to improve their diversity record, interviewees referenced increases in majority-population female candidates and elected representatives arising from the implementation of the national gender quota. One interviewee stated that to date migrant voters and candidates were "not a priority" for political parties. This indicated that while parties are making progress for women's representation, there is a disconnect between this and efforts to promote other aspects of diversity. In some ways this

understanding of equality and diversity reflects a broader compartmentalisation between 'women in politics' and diversity in representation.

Local Politics

Interviewees expressed concerns that selection conventions and membership structures often militated against new aspirants getting onto party tickets. Consistent with earlier research, party interviewees commented on the reality that 'geography trumps gender' in candidate selection processes and Travellers, Roma and migrants appear to be largely invisible in the selection process. Participants also raised concerns about the lack of sufficient support provided to new councillors with one interviewee stating that while supports were improving, they were not consistent and another stating that they were *"not systematised."* This included a lack of orientation and training for newly elected councillors, particularly following an election when important committee positions are being allocated. As one interviewee who had been a councillor remarked, *"I didn't know how to be a councillor."* This said, many political party representatives affirmed the work of the AILG in supporting elected councillors and more recently in advocating for women's councillors including for maternity, on the issue of abuse and on family friendly working conditions.

Research on women and, in particular, on minoritised women confirms that they often require significant encouragement to seek candidacy. While party representatives were generally supportive of minoritised women members of the party, they expressed a reluctance to ask minoritised women to run for office or to join the party. One interviewee said that it simply never occurred to them to ask a minoritised woman while another said that they were wary of asking as they did not want to appear "insensitive or pushy." This interviewee preferred to use "more gentle persuasion" over a period of time rather than an 'aggressive outreach' that might appear superficial and tokenistic:

> *"there is a wariness of being perceived to be politically partisan. … Political parties can't be the only or the first body to be seen to try to engage. You don't want to be browbeating a person to join a particular party if they're active on a particular issue".*

Speaking directly about Traveller women, another interviewee said that they "*hadn't come across a Traveller woman [they] felt could be involved".* In this sense parties place significant emphasis on the supply side dynamics and the difficulties in discovering new diverse talent and cultivating more diverse candidates.

Many of the smaller parties, and at least one of the larger traditional parties, conveyed a sense that older parties with more traditional structures often find it difficult to recruit majority-population women and even more difficult to recruit minoritised women. There was a sense that smaller parties may be in a position to be more agile and inclusive. An interviewee from a smaller party stated that the *"biggest barrier to recruiting minoritised women was the bigger parties."* One interviewee said that TDs, already over-committed, do not have the time to find candidates, indicating that a more centralised party strategy was required. However, all parties agreed that such efforts required resources, expertise, time and commitment. This included the need for a specific budgetary line devoted to the recruitment of minoritised women and that parties should have a specific officer for diversity. Other parties commented that, despite sustained efforts, it was very challenging to recruit migrants to its local area representative program (discussed further below).

Training

According to the interviews, all of the political parties who took part in this study had engaged with Women for Election. Some parties also supplemented Women for Election training with training provided by their sister parties in the European Parliament and with internal party training. The Labour Party provided training via

internal groups within the party (such as Labour Women, Labour Equality) with grants available from the central party funds for such activities. The Green Party, at the time of interview, were in the process of designing a training program for local area representatives and Fianna Fail have provided resilience training and media training internally. One of the interviewees expressed the view that Women for Election training had been in the past perceived as "elitist", despite the fact that the party recommended it. This particular interviewee wondered whether the "right women" were being offered training. Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) training (including unconscious bias and anti-racism training) is acknowledged by all parties as being important for members and staff. Smaller parties were further along in providing this training to staff and members with the Social Democrats, the Green Party and Labour indicating that EDI training programmes were in place. EDI training was available to staff of Fine Gael, but it was not clear if this was extended to elected members. Fianna Fail, at the time of the interview, was planning to provide EDI training. All the interviewees expressed the view that EDI training should be resourced centrally by the Government to elected representatives and party members, particularly those with responsibility for candidate recruitment and selection. The Green Party underlined the precariousness of party funding, particularly for smaller parties as being a potential obstacle to systematising this type of training which was often expensive to source. While parties can make EDI training available to members and staff, it may not be taken up. There may be an argument here to not just fund this type of training centrally, but to make it mandatory, at least for elected politicians, candidates and members of the "selectorate."

Funding

Interviewees agreed that funding is an issue particularly for minoritised women candidates who cannot fundraise for campaigns outside of Ireland and often have more limited fundraising networks than majority-population candidates. There was an acceptance that additional funding is required for minoritised women but also that funding should be made available more generally to women to cover gendered costs such as childcare expenses during the campaign period. Some of the interviewees expressed reservations about whether this could or should be funded from central government and preferred a philanthropic funding arrangement like the Activate Collective[37] in the UK. The Labour Party and the Green Party stated that there were additional funding streams available from their party for minoritised candidates, but this seemed to be an ad hoc arrangement.

State funding for political parties is provided for in the Electoral Act 1997. Section 18 of the Act specifies the activities that State funding can be spent on, including the promotion of the participation of women. While this funding cannot be used for election expenses, it can be used to fund initiatives to attract women members and candidates to the party. In 2020, just 2.55% of the funding received by political parties under the Act was spent on the promotion of participation of women, with some parties not allocating any funding to this activity. We see from Table 1 below that despite the low level of spending on the promotion of participation of women, parties were able to carry forward a significant proportion of their state funding to the following year. We can also see that in years preceding a general election, the proportion of funding brought forward is markedly lower than in other years suggesting that the parties accumulate this money for spending on party promotion in the run up to elections, circumventing the spending rules set out in the 1997 Act. The Standards in Public Office Commission has commented in each of its

37 See the discussion of the Activate Collective below. For more information, visit https://www.timetoactivate.org/.

Reports on Exchequer Funding of Political Parties since 2015[38] that the Act is vague on time limits for the spending of state funding and that this should be addressed, presumably to ensure political parties spend their funding in the year in which it is provided to them. This could facilitate a higher level of spending over a more prolonged period dedicated to specific supports for minoritised women.

Table 1: *Political party spending of State funding on promotion of women under s.18 of Electoral Act 1997*

Year	Promotion of Women %	Balance brought forward %
2020	2.55	42.9
2019	3.56	24.4
2018	3.58	34.57
2017	2.25	34.8
2016	2.98	28.03
2015	3.29	23.9

(Standards in Public Office Commission, Exchequer Funding of Political Parties in 2015–2020[39]).

Other Party Initiatives

Parties are engaging on issues of equality and diversity in a variety of ways. Fine Gael are introducing a local electoral area (LEA) representative scheme with a target of 100 representatives to whom the Party will provide training and exposure to constituents. However, this scheme did not include any formal targets for diversity. The Labour Party has recruited two regional organisers to help to identify candidates to diversify the party. With the exception of Sinn Fein and the Social Democrats, all parties spoke about internal party groups as being important in pushing diversity agendas within the party. Women's networks were important groups within the Labour Party, Green Party, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The importance of internal party groups in increasing the numbers of diverse representatives is confirmed by international literature. In particular when women's sections gain positional power within the party, including sitting in candidate selection committees they can affect substantive changes in gendered opportunities for political participation (Verge 2020).

In Ireland, it is notable that Fine Gael, which had an active Intercultural Group, fielded the most candidates of migrant origin of all the parties at the last local election. However, the Group became less active when its chairperson stepped down shortly after the 2019 local election suggesting a reliance on individual critical actors to drive the diversity agenda rather than a systems level impetus.[40] Although Fianna Fáil's primary goal to date has been to recruit more women, more recently they have established a Disability Network and a LGBTQ+ Network. At the time of interview, they also indicated their plans to develop a Migrant Network. The Labour Party have a history of diverse internal groups, although it is not clear how active these groups are. Labour Women is the most well-known group within the party. Other internal groups include Labour Disability, Labour LGBTQ and Labour Equality. The groups tasked with diversifying the party appear to have in common that they are often led by minoritised members with ambitions to be, or who are already, elected members. The Labour Equality chair is Anne Burke, an African migrant woman who ran in the 2019 local election. The chair of the Fine Gael intercultural group is Meath local councillor, and the first Black Woman to be elected to office in Ireland, Yemi Adenuga while Fianna Fail's Women's Network is chaired by Mayor of Longford County Council, Uruemu Adejinmi. While some networks were more developed than others, many appeared to be dormant. There may be an over reliance on the efforts of individuals to animate and drive such initiatives. There is also

38 Reports available at https://www.sipo.ie/reports-and-publications/state-financing/expenditure-of-exchequer/index.xml.
39 Reports available at https://www.sipo.ie/reports-and-publications/state-financing/expenditure-of-exchequer/index.xml.
40 Szlovak Peter (2017) Exploring the reasons for migrant under-representation in Irish electoral politics: the role of Irish political parties, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 40:5, 851-870, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2016.125948

the risk of ceding responsibility for diversity and inclusion to a network rather than the broader task of embedding a culture of diversity and inclusion at the core of the organisation.

Focus on *The Green Party*

The Green Party was candid about a lack of diversity at all levels of the party and the appetite within the party to address this. The Party initiated a local area representative scheme having identified that men predominated as new appointees. The scheme aims to reach gender parity across LEA representatives and, by contrast with other LEA representative schemes, includes diversity targets. The party aims to have 10% migrant representatives with at least one Traveller representative. It has engaged with the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM), AkiDwA and Women for Election to help it reach these targets. While other parties had established relationships with Traveller rights and migrant rights organisations and worked periodically to advance issues raised by these groups, the Green Party was distinctive in initiating a formal process with a Traveller organisation for the purposes of recruiting Traveller representatives. The party has also introduced an internship scheme for Travellers and migrants. The scheme consists of three programmes: a one-day programme, a one-week programme and a more comprehensive three-month programme. The programmes are managed and were designed by a migrant person, in conjunction with the Trinity College access programme and all pay a living wage. Other parties may have more ad hoc or informal initiatives in place.

Obstacles

Political party interviewees identified obstacles, as they see them, to minority women's access to political office. Many of the obstacles identified were similar to those identified for majority-population women in accessing politics. All party representatives agreed that diversifying candidate pools and party membership was a difficult process where progress was slow and not without contest. One interviewee gave the example of male incumbents frustrating progress. Another referenced the "boys club" culture of politics as a general obstacle to women entering politics. Childcare was mentioned by others as a key deterrent for many women, but particularly for minoritised women who may not have family to lean on in Ireland. Councillors pay was also identified as an obstacle with one interviewee stating that being a councillor is a full-time job and the pay should reflect that. The issue of placing candidates in unwinnable seats was discussed as a further obstacle, one which has been identified in other research (Cullen and McGing 2019; Buckley and Galligan 2020). It was suggested that this phenomenon is difficult to tackle. The *"reactive and unstable"* environment in Irish politics was discussed whereby parties experience periods of growth and degrowth. This can lead to lack of predictability in funds and sudden shifts in priorities that can displace longer term commitments such as diversity. Research indicates that if they *lack core institutional support equality initiatives in parties can be displaced when other priorities emerge* (Verge 2020).

Sexism and Racism

Social media and the rise of the far right was discussed by several participants as a particularly insidious form of discrimination that acted as an obstacle, particularly for minoritised women. One interviewee spoke of the toxic environment for women in politics in which *"comments are frequently made about women's clothing and weight which turns women off."* Another stated that *"there is an element in Ireland that do not want minorities elected."* There was awareness of the role of the far right in orchestrating a hostile climate for minoritised candidates. Restricting levels of abuse while protecting free speech was an important balance to achieve with social media platforms viewed as carrying responsibility in this regard. One specific and highly publicized incidence of racial and sexual abuse experienced by Councillor Hazel Chu

when she was Lord Mayor of Dublin was a key referent.[41] This incident had highlighted the gravity of such abuse and raised broader issues regarding gaps in security.[42] All parties mentioned the role of legislation (including hate crime legislation) to tackle this type of abuse against politicians.

Structural Reforms

Interviewees identified some key structural reforms that they felt their respective parties would support. These included the *introduction of gender quotas at the local level,* however, one interviewee who had looked at this issue in detail, found no obvious sanction for parties which fail to meet a local level quota. They suggested that a more powerful incentive program should be built into legislation to increase diversity at the local level. One interviewee suggested that gender quotas should be applied at all levels and that this was particularly important for the bigger parties. Term limits for councillors to assist in diversifying representatives was put to some of the party interviewees but this was seen as a particularly radical reform that may present its own unforeseen challenges.

None of the political party interviewees suggested ethnic or diversity quotas but when prompted they were generally supportive of the concept. One of the interviewees suggested that quotas have *"never not worked"* and they *should be extended to other discriminated against groups in society,* including Travellers and other ethnic minorities and migrants, and should also apply to public sector jobs. Another expressed the view that *state funding for political parties should be tied more closely to the party's success in diversifying its membership and candidates*. It was also suggested that quotas may be supported at Committee level in the Dáil but when brought to the legislative stage the same members may not support them. This interviewee emphasised the need for accountability and implementation of diversity initiatives. All parties remarked that the nomination of Eileen Flynn to the Seanad is historic for members of the Traveller community. We asked interviewees if the Seanad could be used as a vehicle to diversify politics. Many of the interviews agreed with this concept but one interviewee noted that nominating a handful of diverse candidates to the Seanad cannot be used as a "get out clause" for parties to assert they had "done enough." In this regard, there was a consensus that more systemic change is required, and the Seanad is just one opportunity to diversify politics.

Voter Registration

It was accepted that electoral candidates engage in voter registration whilst canvassing and that this activity was important particularly for minoritised candidates. There was also a general view amongst the parties that the voter registration process was in need of reform. We put to them the difficulty for many minoritised voters of having to attend a garda station in order to register to vote and they agreed that this was an unnecessary impediment to registration. One interviewee stated that the registration process was a *"big obstacle,"* and that registration should be automatic. Another expressed the view from their experience of canvassing that non-Irish voter *"didn't want to know"* and felt that many communities perceived that their views were not relevant. Several participants indicated that more diverse candidates were essential to motivating minoritised voters. Another interviewee felt that the Electoral Commission had a role to play in simplifying the voter registration process and making it more inclusive, a task which it is expected to undertake once it is constituted.

Diverse Representation

41 https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2021/0122/1191430-hazel-chu/.

42 The Green Party had to procure and pay for an international security firm to audit premises and provide private security because it felt that the level of protection available from Dublin City Council was inadequate. As a result, the Green Party have now put in place a social media harassment policy with an escalation process to party HQ. The party has established a direct channel of communication with social media platforms and is attempting to build cross-party support to institutionalise their approach across the political spectrum.

Many of the interviewees acknowledged that *"Traveller women are great advocates"* and recognised that that they are becoming more politicised.[43] However, while diversity appears to be important at least at the HQ level, few of the party representatives we spoke to had any experience of recruiting Traveller candidates.

Parties are aware of minoritised women as constituents that require special measures. Traveller exclusion is seen as an intractable problem in society, yet resolution is not *yet understood to include making a priority of Traveller women's political participation.* Reacting to BLM and calls for an expansion of the gender quota are all more common in party political discourse, yet Traveller political participation *remains the issue hiding in plain sight*. The appointment and presence of Senator Eileen Flynn is a strong signal of the willingness of some political parties to include Travellers, however there is uncertainty as to whether this represents a watershed moment for Traveller political inclusion or whether it marks a more singular response. As such while parties are trying to do more to be more diverse, there is a tendency to equate this primarily with female representation and with a side-bar acknowledgement that disadvantaged women, including Traveller women, migrant women and women with disabilities should be included.

When parties are faced with having to look outside of their traditional recruitment venues, they may seek a central point of contact in an organisation dedicated to advocating for the group they are targeting. Political parties do engage with organisations such as the Immigrant Council of Ireland and the She Programme as well as other local development and leadership initiatives. This indicates a willingness to support more diverse, including migrant women, candidates. Women for Election has been an important hub for parties, playing a crucial role in the run up to the 2016 General Election to assist them in satisfying the requirements of the gender quota. The ICI is functioning as an important space in this regard for migrant candidates.

While Minceir Whiden has worked to create a forum for potential Traveller community political candidates, it is evident that supports for a "*conduit"* between the political parties and prospective female Traveller candidates may be required. Such a context will require resourcing by the State in order to diversify public representatives. Other action may be required such *as sanctioning of racism including anti-Traveller racism within party membership and support for gender quotas and diversity targets at all levels.*

These interviews indicated that political parties are on a nascent, emergent journey to diversify. Interviewees gave a candid account of the constraints that parties face on a structural level to diversify their organisations. Parties want to be more diverse and indicate that they are focused on equality, but they struggle to operationalise and systematise diversity. There are gaps in their capacity, and in some areas a lack of capacity, to diversify, particularly candidacy, to the extent that they may wish to. However, there was an evident spirit of engagement with equality especially on the issue of improving women's representation. However, this in itself, specifically the requirements of the national gender quota, is already challenging for parties to satisfy. Furthermore, there was a consensus that the central organisation – Party HQ – could only get the party so far and that local party organisations needed to embrace change and evolve. Party leaders are crucial in this regard to "bring people along". Political parties are contexts with competing priorities. The big question for the political parties is: Where does diversity and inclusion sit amongst these competing priorities? And what concrete actions will they take to realise it?

The State and Minoritised Women

43 Traveller women would say that they have always been politicised but it is only now that political parties are beginning to take notice.

Analysis suggests that policymakers often compartmentalise gender equality and what is termed broadly as diversity in terms of responsibility and approach. In other words, gender equality is often treated in a separate and unrelated way to race and ethnicity especially when these are understood through a 'migration' and 'integration' frame. Language and framing of issues are a key indication of how the state and other stakeholders understand and respond to the intersectional realities of minoritised women's lives.

The government departments that have relevance for this study include the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY); Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH); Department of Rural and Community Development; and the Department of Justice. The newly formed Electoral Commission also has a potentially significant role in addressing the recommendations of this research. Public officials and politicians from DCEDIY and DHLGH contributed to this research providing valuable and considered input on their roles and the challenges they perceive as most pressing in supporting minoritised women as political actors at the local level.

Public officials indicated their strong commitment to addressing gaps in supports and in acquiring new knowledge and a more holistic approach. They were specifically interested in gaining an understanding of how minoritised women assess the barriers they face in participating at the local level. However, it is also clear that despite the good faith intentions of many public officials to offer responsive and relevant interventions, the legacy of the placement of policy areas and older ideas about 'women' and 'minorities' as subjects of policy constrain the capacity of public officials to respond.

When asked about policy, most officials refer to national strategies and programmes. Remedies or interventions for majority-population women interested in politics were often cited alongside programmes aimed at supporting Traveller, Roma and Migrant women in employment or leadership. The latter were in evidence across different departments but to date limited in scope.

Given the broad brief of these departments, many areas of relevance were identified as having a direct or indirect bearing on minoritised women's access to local politics but were outside the remit of the respective department. Gender-based violence was acknowledged to be *"more on the agenda of recent times."* There was also the view that:

> *"instead of saying, women's representation, or something like that we have to look at thematic areas that are really common, housing for example, which is a huge issue for Travellers, but I think it's an issue increasingly for migrant populations as well."*

Nevertheless, it was also agreed that the issue of leadership for minoritised women *"had been of less focus but there is a sense that the time is right now."*

Compartmentalisation and Fragmentation

There was a broad acknowledgement of the need for *"more coordination across policy units and departments."* Officials observed that the implementation of programmes aimed to address minoritised women's complex needs can originate in one context but with potential relevance for another policy unit. Interdepartmental working groups were noted as one way forward. For example, the migrant integration strategy (articulated at local level) was directed by the Department of Justice while other initiatives from local government to support diversity in politics were under DHLGH. However,

> *"Justice doesn't consult with Local government about the strategy, it just directs the local authorities to implement it."*

National strategies such as the National Strategy for Women and Girls was also located in DECDIY alongside other initiatives to support women's

leadership. For example, dormant account funding was used to

> *"develop projects for employment activation for women coming in under the Irish refugee Protection Program, or specifically targeting Syrian women, but also African women as well, and their children. So, it's women and girls. So, this was coming under the migrant integration strategy, although it probably could have also been with a national strategy for women and girls."*

There were also references to projects that had taken a regional approach to:

> *"the political participation amongst migrants in general, not specifically targeting women yet, I think the thinking at the outset was just reaching minority groups and various ethnicities and promoting citizenship and political activation."*

This was characterised as having good take up *"in the first two years of the strategy, and it had tailored off by 2019."* As such there were several piecemeal efforts being made to address issues of social exclusion and integration, some had a specific gender focus, others a broader migrant remit. However, it was less clear how much knowledge or exchange there was between departments about such initiatives.

It was stated that all national strategies were up for review. Strategies had been developed *"historically, with different teams working on them, they were developed very differently, and then they didn't have that read across"*. Several officials indicated there were plans to take a *new approach* to national strategies while continuing a commitment to those affected by them to be consulted in their development. The term intersectionality was used by several officials, it was admitted to being a new term for many and it was referenced in a variety of ways but without a consistent sense of how the term is understood and applied. Scale was also an issue with challenges identified to implementation between the national and local level,

> *"the migrant integration strategy, from the outset, had a good focus on local authorities, because of that idea that preparation has to come from the local area, however in the strategy for women and girls, it is more national."*

An optimistic tone was struck about the plans to reset government strategies including the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) which would adopt a more integrated approach, with the qualification that *"coordination between departments is a challenge."* As one official commented:

> *"Now, as you know, with all the strategies, actual responsibility for local elections, lie within another department. So, we have that coordination role, but the actual actions do lie elsewhere. So that is a challenge for us to be honest, because we can do what we can do. But we do not always own the actual policy of it. And that is not to say that our colleagues are not influenced by us, and we cannot work with them. But obviously, they have their own priorities as well."*

There was a general sense of lots of moving parts that needed to be in better alignment,

> *"these initiatives aren't ours, and they're the departments and agencies, and they will have to engage, and they'll have to say what they can use it's really quite complicated. It all depends on really good engagements from the different departments and agencies who are actually delivering and then the consultation with the people on the ground."*

Having different strategies, departments and units that *"report into one another"* also presented logistical challenges that created *"a huge burden for our teams, and in other departments as well, it's an endless round."* Yet it was also recognised that

"at the same time, we still need to recognise that, I know civil society really values the steering committees, because it gives them an opportunity to put their views forward and to meet with the minister."

There was an appetite to make reporting more meaningful but the decision to adopt a more integrated rather than standalone approaches were difficult calls to make.

"There's been talk about how to combine our approaches how we can reduce the burden on the actions on local authorities or whoever needs to report on it we are having this with the anti-racism committee, because I can see, everything we do is intersectional."

However, it was also noted that EU and UN responsibilities meant that we also have a standalone national action plan against racism.

"It's also a message to society, while perhaps individuals on the ground would like greater synergy, groups and communities do want a standalone strategy, they want standalone units within departments to cater for their needs. So, there is a balancing act."

There was also a recognition that *"equality is supposed to be mainstreamed. But we do need to build capacity in the different departments around that."* Expertise was essential, however:

"Because you know, the way the civil service works, that someone is in a position for a few years, and then they develop fantastic expertise, and then they get a promotion or they move, so it is important that it's not all invested in that one person."

This was also the case for the public sector duty where it was suggested that more expertise was needed at the local level to respond to this.

Barriers to local politics

Addressing barriers for minoritised women to local politics, another official remarked,

"you need to work it out from the two ends, it's the women themselves, and then working with the broader organisation around them. The confidence building on the one hand, and that's for the women themselves, getting the confidence and feeling that they can go forward, particularly in local elections. But I think then the other side of it is working with the organisations or how you build capacity and going out to the different Councils, the attitudes, trying to bring people in and recognising the value that the different voices will bring into it."

The NTRIS was described as including a focus on leadership and capacity building for Traveller women. Under its remit were efforts to build capacity but also an assertion that there are many factors at play including poor educational outcomes and

"the feeling of discrimination and the lack of understanding maybe with, the broader settled community, and the negative media and that people have certain stereotypes. So it's trying to go beyond that."

Attitudinal racism was acknowledged if not named as such, structural racism featured more directly in discussions on migrant integration.

The work of individual women was highlighted as key and there was an appreciation of the 'capacity' and eruditeness of specific minoritised women who contributed to national debates and policy consultations. As one official commented

"There are really good, strong women doing really good work at the local level. And I suppose it's hard to just bring that a little bit further. To get those types of women to go towards the local elections."

Role models were referenced as very important including Senator Eileen Flynn. But there was a recognition that

"obviously it is not going to happen overnight, but we need to be developing the pathway towards it. And we will need to look at the intersectionalities."

Cultural change was referenced in terms of broader society but also at community level with regard to earlier marriage and a lack of further education and employment. This was

"that is something that the NGOs are, are working on, and, you know, and a lot of these groups will possibly only listen to their own and the changes within their own community."

Women in Politics – A Rising Tide...

Some officials made a connection to the broader debate on maternity leave and work life conflict experienced by female councillors. Such issues were viewed as especially challenging for Traveller women as families were such an important part of their lives. There was a sense that if the broader challenges facing majority-population women in politics were addressed this would also improve the situation for minoritised women. Heavy workloads, lack of access to maternity leave and to family friendly working hours were all flagged. It was also noted that *"*

And then of course, with migrant women or Traveller women, there's the additional piece around the fact that they might be a bit more visible because they're a person of colour or something like that."

There was a general overview of other work on gender equality including women in decision-making and on the gender pay gap and a sense that since Covid 19 "there is shift because I think there's a lot more recognition of the fact that there's a lot of migrant women working in very frontline roles." It was noted that the economic value of care work is now part of broader debates at EU level and this is an issue "where migrant women particularly have a voice, because they're so very represented in that."

Non-elected roles were underlined as important contexts for minoritised women to cultivate their capacity and interest in a political role. This was captured in suggestions that:

"we might see more migrant women where they have been involved in unions, and maybe they feel a little bit more comfortable with running for office...the non-elected positions where someone becomes involved in the campaign or becomes involved in a committee or something and then feels that okay, I have been listened to, and I can take my voice further."

Participation was then understood as a process that might evolve in a more organic way rather than focus purely on political parties recruiting candidates or the idea of individual women having pressure placed upon them. This is communicated in the comment

"And I think that's a really important piece is that someone comes naturally to it, rather than I suppose, get picked or something like that? Because you might not actually want it."

Sexism and Racism – Media and Society

Most discussion of racism and sexism were located in broader society and most evident in traditional and social media. For officials working most directly on Traveller and Roma issues, one of the main obstacles in their view, was how national media and the majority-population view Travellers and other minoritised populations. This was characterised as "*through a criminal or discrimination lens."* It was also noted *"There is no outcry by the public or politicians about these representations. Positive media is required."* Media representations as well as social media abuse was viewed as holding women back, *"they know how they will be portrayed."* It was contended that *"It is brave for any politician to put themselves forward but especially for Traveller women."* There was also the view that the sexism

and racism on social media *"can be monopolised and used in such a way that you can create a lot of voices that could intimidate a person, even though that might not be the public sentiment."* It was also asserted that it was important that Traveller women if seeking public office *"think about the settled community if they are elected and communicate this when they can."* Initiatives such as Traveller pride were recognised as giving opportunities to the community to communicate a more positive perspective.

Local Government and Governance

Potential areas for progress included the inputs of the 'gender subgroup' of the Moorhead Report on the Role & Remuneration of Local Authority Elected Members. These included the 'non-pay' recommendations to modernise the role described as *"this is not just about maternity leave; it is also about administrative support and remote voting."* Such changes were important *"to remove the pressure they (women) may feel."* The training subgroup of Moorhead was also referenced as having a remit to examine issues including anti-racism, gender unconscious bias and dignity in the workplace.

Women's caucuses and Migrant Integration Forums were assessed in positive terms. Women's caucuses were highlighted as a particularly significant development. Notably, the assumption that caucuses would deliver greater diversity is a claim that is contested by many minoritised women participants.

The issue of diversity in local government was one assigned to the political process: *"we need candidates that are diverse."* There was mild critique of political parties and their approach to minoritised candidates, it was *"not ideal for them to be added to the ticket at the end."* There was also a recognition that parties needed to support minoritised candidates earlier in the process and to also boost awareness of voter registration. Future plans included *"the need for an incentivisation scheme for parties to engage more women candidates."* This would include changing the previous scheme for 2024: "parties must put in a specific proposal how they will engage women and how they will increase that year on year." Overall, it was suggested that increasing the number of diverse candidates would go a long way towards addressing minoritised women's lack of representation.

Several officials remarked that building trust between political parties and minoritised women was key,

> *"Trust in the community is key, what are they going to do for Travellers and Roma? And what have they done? They need training on how they reach out to these communities."*

Existing efforts to recognise Traveller culture in the school curriculum and projects with the National Museum on Traveller artifacts, and history and culture were noted as positive developments. It was also noted that Roma women were also disconnected from authorities. It was important to address this lack of trust and feeling of exclusion *"to create that feeling of being valued."*

Local authorities were named as needing to change to reflect society, as one official stated they are a *"few years behind the private sector."* Officials emphasised the good will that had been demonstrated initially from local authorities regarding the migrant integration strategy. Another issue raised with officials was how to address the poor experiences of minoritised women of networks such as the PPN and/or local accommodation committees. Training for local officials was mentioned as a key element including gender unconscious bias or anti-racism training. However, in terms of implementing this, local officials had attended meetings, yet had also expressed the view that they *"felt there was too much training. Their members were already oversubscribed with their other roles."* A kind of training fatigue was evident. There was the suggestion that ample resources had been provided and opportunities for training, but that outcomes were not as good as they should be,

"it wasn't for a want of putting money at these things or time, it was really thinking, how do we get those quality networks and access to power?"

Spatial diversity was identified as a key barrier to change, particularly in terms of urban and rural context. *"Different local authorities and PPNs have different priorities and the challenges differ across local contexts."* It was suggested that it was hard when working at the national level to have sight of this. Accommodation committees were singled out as an example:

"they're very different experiences in different places, and particularly for Travellers, because there are big Traveller communities in some places, and hardly any Travellers in other places. So do you need a different approach across councils, I think that that can be really a challenge for us, because we are at the national level, and we do not necessarily have that local knowledge. And, then again, it is not always us, someone will suggest it is DRCD, or is this local government?"

Yet local authorities were where implementation happened *"really they are key deliverers, on the integration piece."* Overall working on the national level meant

"we can support initiatives, and we can fund initiatives, but who is best placed to actually do the work sometimes can be difficult to identify? Is it local authorities or is it local groups? You know, and is it always the same?"

Positive Actions

Some officials noted their reservations about positive actions,

"Positive discrimination, I suppose could be looked at but then you've got to be very careful then of people saying it's tokenism. Some of the groups don't want that too either."

Another official stated

"I have a worry about positive discrimination or quotas for anyone. They may make people not wish to run. I think it's better to do that background, which we're talking about of awareness raising, enabling and role models."

Quotas were viewed as risky: *"They may trigger a backlash and make others think, did you get there on your own merit? Or just because you were this?".*

Following on it was stated:

"We have so many minorities and so many voices and areas, if you start to have a quota for one, where do you end it? So I think it is that enabling piece is what we need and removing barriers the social media bit, which is huge and how we will address that."

Other officials disagreed and suggested that gender quotas at local level were something that the *"Electoral Commission will probably have to have a look at."* Although there was hope for the *"national quotas to wash down to the local level."* Reserved seats were also mentioned as an interesting option by officials working directly with Traveller and Roma issues. These could also play a role but this it was felt that could also be short lived. What was required was wider community involvement. "We need settled people to vote for Travellers. One bad experience in an election puts them further on the margins."

Travellers were characterised as highly skilled in crisis contexts and excellent advocates for their own communities, this had been brought into sharp relief during the pandemic. As another official commented "*Irish Travellers are leading the way in Europe on Traveller and Roma issues."* However, they continued *"If they seek funding, they never fight for themselves just for the community, they never factor themselves in – they don't value their time."* For one official the dangers for them included *"you cannot shield anyone from backlash in politics, it is very hard for Traveller women, like a double-edged sword."* If elected then there are big expectations that would be very difficult to satisfy.

Childcare expenses or financial supports or special measures such as ethnic quotas or diversity targets were not referenced directly. Others commented that special funds to cover campaign costs including childcare for minoritised female candidates might be problematic,

> *"I don't think you could really say something for subsidised childcare or something for a specific cohort of candidates. I think you would run into a lot of problems with that, because it is an issue for all candidates. So, from an equality perspective, but also from a practical perspective, I think you could really alienate people with that."*

Instead it was proposed this might be a job for parties that could create funding to support particular candidates. "They could have a budget available for someone in the position to use, as they see fit."

Data Gaps

Data gaps were also referenced, *"the Franchise section didn't have the stats on female candidates, we had to rely on an academic who collects that data."* While there was acknowledgment that some ethnic data collection will occur in the new census and there was good awareness in the CSO, it was also felt that

> *"it's that space outside of CSO. There is a lot of data that is gathered by other departments, not ourselves, because we really do not provide services. So that is a disadvantage for us, because we cannot collect it ourselves. But there is much more consciousness of that question."*

Data was essential as *"we will really need it if we want to make our strategies or future strategies more measurable."* EU pressures were also noted as part of EU action plans to look at disaggregated data methods and means to acquire data. The Fundamental Rights Authority (FRA) were credited with having done a lot of work on data protection and guidelines. There were also references to an ethnic identity monitor and equality data auditing. Pressure for this was noted as *"mainly coming from the voices of the Traveller community. And the good work that Pavee point have done in that area."* To have data on intersectionality was considered then a priority although extremely complicated to execute.

The minister responsible for the soon to be established Electoral Commission also contributed to this research. This contribution emphasized an ongoing priority to invest in voter literacy using a consistent and targeted approach. There was a broad acknowledgement of how Traveller people in particular *"had a distrust of the electoral process as a result of being let down persistently."* There was also a pledge to pursue a "rights-based approach" to how Travellers engage with the political system. Other initiatives being considered included revising the voting age to 16 and a commitment for the *"incentivisation scheme (for political parties) to be tweaked for 2024."* In response to findings that requiring an attendance at a police station for voter registration acted as a form of voter suppression, the minister indicated that there were concrete plan to place voter registration online. Overall, it was stated that an important objective was to "promote the best of the political system to new communities." In response to the issue of minoritised women's representation, the minister commented:

> *"We need to draw on more strategic and specific targets and work with DCEDIY and on the issue and this should include broader issues of data collection."*

It was commented that in his experience, *"Traveller women's presence at local government meetings stops councillors from getting away with bad behaviour."* In terms of other actions, it was remarked that *"political parties should be looking for women and looking in the right places."* There were also reference to initiatives during the Heritage week that showcased Traveller culture as positive developments in addressing societal anti-Traveller racism.

Section 5: Conclusion

This research highlights minoritised women's' experiences and analyses of local government in Ireland. Given the diversity of women participants what we present is a range of differentiated experiences, however, we also identify common themes. In our analysis we draw on the concepts of political imagination and political agency to understand how minoritised women make sense of themselves as political actors, their communities as a setting for politicisation and the role of local government as a context to pursue change. In this research we interviewed minoritised women aspirants, candidates, and elected representatives. They all share a commitment to social change, albeit from a variety of perspectives. There are differences between these groups of women, some women have adapted to the political system in key ways, adopting strategies that enabled them to secure office. However, all women participants maintain a critical sensibility about public life and an expressed commitment to *'do politics differently.'* All have experienced racism and sexism, for many this was a motivating factor in considering a political role. For elected representatives, especially the 'first' of their community to occupy public office, their presence can be understood as offering an important form of symbolic representation and on those grounds a *disruption of 'politics as usual'.*

Women participants in this research share experiences of exclusion from the majority-population political imaginary and engage in political work based on building community spaces and supports through activism and care. This work looks different for Traveller, Roma and migrant women, reflecting the intersection between their gender, ethnicity, race, citizenship status and social class. Yet in all these accounts we find women searching for empowerment and solidarity and seeking to advance their political imagination and exercise their political agency vis-à-vis their communities, the state and broader society. For some women with long experience of ground level activism, local politics offers little promise of personal, professional and community advancement. However, for most participants local political office signified an important context to break into the formal political system to leverage change and promote the visibility and rights of their respective communities and pursue broader societal change.

Women who do choose to run for office make strategic considerations about their candidacies based on the political opportunity structure before them, this is especially the case for minoritised women. They are *aware of the potential costs to candidacy,* including the ways in which candidacy or office holding may affect their roles and responsibilities outside of political life. This includes for some the risk of a loss of community if they advance to public office, at the same as a lack of inclusion in their new public role. The pressure to adapt to accepted norms of gender and/or candidacy, the anticipation of greater scrutiny, and the evidence of institutional racism and sexism can deter many who may otherwise pursue political office (Ditmar 2015, p. 763; Schneider and Holman 2016; Murray et al 2019). For minoritised women a decision not to run for office can be linked to self-protective forms of self-segregation that include an avoidance of situations where racism could arise such as public-facing decision-making roles. Deterrence though does not mean the absence of interest in political office. While many women evaluated their prospects of securing office as low, they reasoned that the symbolic effect of their candidacies justified their decision to run. This illustrates what Sanbonmatsu and Carroll (2017) suggest is a relationally embedded model of ambition. Women's candidacies also emerge then, in part, from perceptions that costs of not running are too high to stay on the sidelines (Dittmar 2020b). For Traveller women lifelong experiences of anti-Traveller racism have shaped their political calculus in significant ways.

Migrant women including those who have sought asylum also reference the influence of institutional racism as an influential factor in seeking a role in politics. For other migrant women, witnessing the challenges migrants face accessing public services and integrating into local communities influenced their decision to pursue a political role.

While all these women exercise aspects of *"ambition from the margins"*,[6] women from different ethnic and racial groups also advanced distinctive forms of *political imagination* and different interpretations of *political self-efficacy*. These differences shape their sense of political agency, and their linked fate with their own community. This sense of a linked fate was strongest for Traveller and Roma women whose decision to pursue office was in part to highlight the trauma and racial discrimination they and their communities experience. For migrant women of colour their sense of identification was rooted in their experiences of hypervisibility, gendered racism and, for some, their citizenship status. White migrant women also experienced being 'othered' as women and as migrants denied access to assets essential for local political office including the currency bestowed by localness and a familiarity with Irish political culture.

In general women participants expressed their intent to represent not just their own community but also the broader community. Some of these women worked as '*cultural brokers*' initiating local intercultural and/or migrant organisations and community fora. All were deeply involved in community organisations, *but not all community activity counts the same*. For Traveller and some Black Women community activism was more likely to be in service of their own communities with less involvement in majority-population community organisations. Much of this kind of work is *less recognised as leadership or political work and is not usually where political parties look to when recruiting candidates.* On this basis this work held *less political capital and less value* in establishing networks and gaining access to resources including important if less tangible forms of 'positive visibility'.

For several participants attempts to enter the institutional contexts of candidacy (political parties, training, fund raising, campaigning, media) *forced them to navigate unfamiliar formal and informal rules and spaces that they experienced as exclusionary*. Stereotypes, the lack of role models and being the 'first' to run exacerbated these dynamics. In this sense they were 'space invaders' and without sponsorship and support some were relegated to the margins of these spaces and processes. For a small group of women, the experience of party politics *confirmed a lack of fit and suppressed their interest and motivation to run*. This was for some a source of affirmation that their subject position (who they are) and their way of doing politics (their political imagination) was too different from the formal political imaginary.

All of these women operate in contexts of *racialised and gendered institutions*. These include political parties where organisational arrangements are biased towards certain kinds of masculinity, including recruitment practices, the gendered division of labour and ideas of gender appropriate behaviour (Lovenduski 2005, p. 52–55) all of which also reflect normative whiteness (Lentin 2016). Parties demonstrated intent to 'diversify' and improve outreach to minoritised aspirants and some had active internal networks, training and external supports to satisfy this goal. Individual politicians and party officials voiced strong commitments to anti-racist practices and a high level of awareness of the systemic nature of racism in Irish society. However, diversity and anti-racism has not as yet become a core organisational capacity of parties and for some satisfying existing gender quota requirements is an ongoing challenge that supersedes efforts to attract more diverse candidates.

What we know already is that the best kind of encouragement comes from party leaders. Whereas discouragement often comes from gatekeepers in party organisations, other office holders', family and friends especially for minoritised women (Ditmar 2016). Elected representatives are distinctive in some regards including that many were *'asked' several times by parties to consider a run*.

Most received *significant party support, high intensity mentoring and sponsorship*. Some though not all had access to resources, and several had a history of party service. Where migrant women reported being sought by parties *"looking to connect to my community' this was not the case for the Travellers confirming weak demand for their votes and candidacy from political parties."*

Some candidates and elected representatives did report being under-supported by parties. *Hesitancy or a lack of tangible support by parties can also dampen the interest of aspirants* and candidates who may rationally select out of the candidate pool (Ocampo and Ray 2020, p. 754-757). *When minoritised women are supported by parties and other organisations through endorsements and other forms of investment this gives important signals to the electorate.*

Training programmes featured across all groups of women, although it is clear that the *network effect* of participation was useful for some more than others and was least useful for Traveller women. Participation in programmes was especially helpful to migrant women and there is evidence that existing programmes are evolving to include the multiple, diverse, and intersecting needs of minoritised women. Although we caution against making training programmes alone responsible for the diversification of local politics, as this requires a whole of system approach.

All detailed the centrality of *supportive familial and friendship networks*. For many these networks lay outside of political affiliations, for others former friendships translated into current political supporters. For some opposition or disinterest from their community supressed their motivation to contend and/or ability to succeed. Many EU migrant women acknowledged the *benefits that whiteness* provided them *in contrast to the hyper-visibility experienced by both Traveller women and women of colour*.

For candidates and elected representatives, campaigning itself can be seen as an intersectional institution (Siow and Begum 2021) where the intersection of candidates' identities are weighted against the societal value placed on gender, race, ethnicity, class and ablebodiness (ILMI 2022). For Traveller, Roma and Black women racialised identities carry specific penalties although all migrant women experience forms of sexualised and racist abuse. This abuse occurred on and offline and included in-person racist and sexist harassment, abuse and intimidation. Concerns were also raised about the links between such abuse and stereotypical representations of minorities in traditional media.

While all women participants acknowledged they had experienced racism and sexism, some downplayed these experiences and their effects. There is apprehension about raising issues of sexism and racism because of the *political costs of doing so.* There is also a lack of clarity about where to report such issues.

A common strategy was to 'block' or ignore social media abuse, or, if possible, to delegate its management to a colleague or friend. Of course, these strategies did not always work as harassment also took place face-to-face or at private residences. All participants registered the emotional and psychological 'toll' or 'cost' of contemplating or competing for a political role as a woman, as a carer and as a minority. In line with previous research (Cullen and McGing 2019; Lima 2020), despite these experiences and events, *most participants remained interested in pursuing a local political role.*

The state and governmental departments play *an important role in supporting and scaffolding minoritised women's access to public life.* National strategies including NTRIS, Migrant Integration Strategy (MIS), National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG) and the forthcoming Anti-Racism Strategy set the terms under which public officials and policy makers work to enable the political inclusion of minoritised women. To date *compartmentalisation*, in particular a tendency to separate gender equality from diversity initiatives has left minoritised women subjects of specific interventions without a comprehensive approach to their political exclusion. Officials offered candid accounts of their efforts to support minoritised

women and their *interest in acquiring expertise and input to create more integrated responses* and better outcomes.

There are a number of risks associated with adopting the frame of *diversity* to address the challenges face by racialised and minoritised women (Lentin 2016). In some contexts, the term obscures the role of racialisation or is used as an umbrella term to capture other sources of discrimination. Research indicates that political institutions respond to racism by illustrating 'positive examples' of 'diversity' or statements and statutes that support inclusion (Ahrens at al 2022). However, they may disregard the broader implications, practices and cultures that sustain structural racism. This is evident in Continental Europe where terms such as migrant status, ethnic origin and diversity are used without a broad acknowledgement of racism as an everyday and often implicit element of social practice and political organisation. In such an environment, racialised people carry the burden of calling out racist acts, *a burden shouldered disproportionately by minoritised women* (Emejulu and Bassel 2021; Joseph 2020). When racialisation is discussed, it can be understood as a problem *'over there' that occurs online or in far-right movements and organisations and as such is exceptional* (Lentin 2016). While the incidence of far-right activity is evident in Ireland (ISD 2021), the linking of racism to external actors may work as a form of *deflection that can distance* political actors from the realities of *already existing* racist attitudes that combine with sexism and misogyny to limit minoritised women's' access to public life.

Increasing the number of women in local politics in Ireland is now a well-recognised goal of parties, civil society organisations and the state. Securing this change will require subverting gendered institutional logics such as women's unequal access to resources, and the multiple male biases entrenched in the daily functioning of parties and politics especially at the local level. It also requires identifying where *resistance to such changes occur and building support and institutional capacity to shift existing practices.* Combating the underrepresentation of minoritised women in politics requires commitments that will benefit all women and men, however, it also requires *specific and targeted measures* that may *include achieving gender-balanced electoral lists through gender and ethnic quotas; inclusive training and mentoring programmes; zero-tolerance to sexism and racism (and other forms of discrimination) with clear channels to report sexual and racial harassment or hate speech and targeted funding for minoritised women candidates, minoritised women's associations and networks.*

Based on this research we make recommendations for action by the state, political parties, local authorities, the Electoral Commission, civil society and training programmes (see executive summary). We also endorse the recommendations made by the Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament (Oireachtas 2021a), The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, (Leadership in Politics, Public life and the Workplace) the Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community (Oireachtas 2021b), the Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on Travellers Towards a More Equitable Ireland Post-Recognition (Oireachtas 2020), the Independent Review of the Role and Remuneration of Local Authority Elected Members (Moorhead Report) (Moorhead 2019), UN, EU and CoE treaty monitoring bodies' recommendations on political participation of minoritised women, and those made by Women for Election, the National Women's Council and the AILG and we urge the State to implement them.

Part 2:
Overview of Literature

Understanding Minoritised Women as Political Actors

Terms and Concepts

Gender and politics research has explored candidate emergence, recruitment, political ambition, candidate pools and training programmes. Some of this work has examined how politics works as a set of institutions (Lowndes 2019) where gender shapes the formal and informal "rules of the game" in political institutions and candidate recruitment in political parties (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016).[44] This focus includes analysing how formal and informal rules work in politics and the way in which people act towards one another which may reinforce gender and ethnic/racial stereotypes. As Miller (2020, 3) argues, looking at politics this way helps to "surface 'hidden aspects' of institutional arenas that can help investigate informal institutions that work alongside democratic practices." In other words, the rules and the design of institutions have been written and practised by those who dominate politics to reflect their experiences and priorities. It follows then those who have been excluded from politics must navigate these rules as well as informal rules that also exist. In this process they can be made to feel like "space invaders" or as out of place (Puwar 2004). Another understanding of politics is how political institutions can create people as "subjects," shaping their identities and placing them into categories that are gendered and racialised. This approach helps us to understand that through the process of engaging with politics, people have different meanings and values attached to their appearance and their behaviours that can result in their "subject position" being valued and/or rejected in ways that can encourage or discourage participation. This is not to say that political actors have no power to resist these categorisations.

These approaches can highlight the unequal social locations and relations of political actors but they have been mostly applied to majority-population women's experience of politics. More recently it has been acknowledged that intersectional considerations are necessary for a complete understanding of power dynamics in political institutions (Matthews 2019, p. 6; Celis and Childs 2020; Lowndes 2019).

Intersectionality and Political Institutions

A growing number of intersectional studies of gendered political institutions have revealed the complex relations of power in politics and the experiences of differently situated women as aspirants, candidates and office-holders (Brown 2014a; Brown 2014b; Shames 2015; Swain and Lien 2017; Barnes and Holman 2019; Silva and Sukley 2019; Matthews 2019). Some of these analyses are informed by Black feminist and critical race theory (Crenshaw 1991). We draw on these studies as well as research that situates minoritised women as experiencing "ethnicisation" and/or racialisation as they work as political actors outside of representational politics within families and communities especially at the local level (Emejulu and Sobande 2019; Emejulu and Bassel 2021). Minoritised women often have high levels of political engagement expressed in the form of regularly voting at elections, joining cultural associations and social movements, as well as organising and participating in direct actions such as demonstrations and rallies (Petković and Nodari 2019).

44 Feminist institutionalism (FI) is an important and diverse body of work in political science that inspires continuing reflection about how gender is not something that women bring to institutional settings; rather, institutions are gendering – that is, they bring gendered actors into being. FI has developed a sophisticated and more inclusive conception of institutions, analysing rules, practices, norms and narratives (Miller 2020).

Minoritised Women as Political Agents

Centring minoritised women's distinctive approach to politics reveals the perils that such women face as they work to create spaces for alternative political action and solidarity (Emejulu and Bassel 2020). These forms of political work are part of everyday actions to survive conditions of educational disadvantage, labour market exclusion, economic deprivation, insecure housing and, for some, uncertain citizenship status (Emejulu and Bassel 2021). Minoritised women are then political actors that respond to their marginalisation by working to maintain their communities. For some, this has involved community activism in more formal terms that has led to interest in electoral politics. Yet stereotypes, the lack of role models, sexual and racial harassment and discrimination work to suppress such interest and motivation. It is also evident that they experience *weak demand for candidacy* from political parties (Brown and Dowe 2020).

Local Political Leadership

The scale used in this work is the *local*, understood as most proximate to women's lives and where acts of everyday political engagement occur often in less visible ways. How the local is viewed as a site of gendered and racialised power is important as in the Irish context (Buckley 2020; Cullen and McGing 2019) and in other studies (Lowndes 2005), the evocation of "locals" and "outsiders" is understood to play a role in how women candidates may be undermined in local selection processes and as candidates (Lowndes 2005). A study on what happens locally yields finer identification of the dynamic between local and national party elites and potential candidates that are central to whether aspirants from minoritised backgrounds become viable candidates (Ocampo and Ray 2020). In Swain and Lien's research, school boards (of management) were populated by minoritised women in larger numbers than other offices, due in part to how the latter were perceived as inaccessible and shaped by "old boys' networks" (2017, p. 134-135). This reflects the ways in which women may exercise political participation in local positions that are crucial for the functioning of communities. However, their access to decision-making contexts with positional and active power – both being requirements for influence – may remain limited. In sum minoritised women work as political actors operating at times in parallel with political institutions or most often outside of political decision-making as they exercise *distinctive forms of political imagination*.

Political Imagination of Minoritised Women

We situate the *political imagination* (Browne and Diehl 2019) of minoritised women in tension with a *dominant political imaginary* that reinforces existing ideas, practices and patterns of political engagement. Using this concept of political imagination allows us to outline minoritised women's diverse ideas, attitudes, experiences and understandings of politics. Political imagination refers to what politics means to them and how they understand and assess themselves as political actors, how in their view their community and/or social group is perceived in political terms, and what they suggest politics should and could be.

A political imagination is formed in the context of a broader political imaginary. The political imaginary is then how the political is imagined. This may include political institutions and actors and the political culture as factors that shape how political principles are shared or how institutions are legitimised. A dominant political imaginary is often a hierarchical one that maintains the overrepresentation of specific groups in political office. However, alternative political imaginaries do exist and can initiate a transformation of politics. Borrowing from Black feminist critiques (Lorde 1988) and work on indigenous knowledges, we argue that minoritised women possess *distinctive political imaginaries* that pose questions to 'politics as usual'. Centring these alternative ways of thinking about and doing politics allows us to rethink the often-unrecognised constraints that condition

access to political power and that maintain exclusionary practices.

Political agency is a term used to assess how or the extent to which women feel enabled to make claims upon democratic politics, the State, and political institutions to pursue/secure political outcomes (Buckley and Galligan 2013). In this study we place the concept of political imagination in dialogue with that of political agency. We do this to acknowledge the links between the existing forms of political work done by minoritised women in Ireland and the politicisation they experience through this work that underlines their political imagination. A way to reframe the candidacy of minoritised women is to highlight the formation of their own distinctive political imagination and how it has shaped their sense of political agency and experiences of exclusion that have led some of these women to consider public office.

Why Does Underrepresentation of Minoritised Women Matter?

Diversity in the characteristics of political leaders increases the quality of policy-making, perceptions of legitimacy, and accountability to constituents. Yet, increasing leaders' diversity proves one of the most difficult challenges facing modern democracy (Barnes and Holman 2020). In the United States, with a significant minority population and despite recent high-profile appointments, minoritised women continue to be grossly underrepresented in political decision-making (Dittmar 2021). In some European nations there has been marked improvement in women's and minority representation especially where there is implementation of quotas (Hughes 2011). When minoritised women secure office the intersection of their gender and racial/ethnic status can be viewed then as an electoral asset rather than as a hurdle to overcome in their campaign (Brown and Gershon 2016; Ditmar 2020a).

Research has provided evidence of substantive impacts made by minoritised women in power (Brown and Gershon 2016; Hardy-Fanta et al 2016; Funk and Molina 2021; Balaguer-Coll 2021). In other words, minoritised women politicians diversify the range of interests that feature in politics. Legislative diversity is particularly important when legislatures address issues that have not previously been part of the legislative agenda and issues affecting groups whose identities cut across party-political, class and social divides (Brown 2014). Moreover, evidence from Latin America indicates legislators with different backgrounds – be it race, ethnicity, class, or gender – are more likely to prioritise a wider range of policy interests (Bejarano 2013; Clayton, O'Brien, and Piscopo 2019).

The presence of historically underrepresented groups in political office (descriptive representation) can also have a *symbolic impact* (symbolic representation) that changes the attitudes and even the behaviour of those groups. Political engagement can be shaped by a lack of knowledge within especially migrant communities about the right to vote in local elections, the mechanics of voter registration and the processes and competences of local government (Lima 2020). Some communities also come from contexts where party politics has a poor reputation with high levels of corruption and with low knowledge that compounds low voter turnout (Mc Gregor et al 2017). From another perspective, the absence of descriptive representation may contribute to a sense of *political alienation* and inefficacy, that may suppress democratic engagement and voter turnout. Thus, perceptions of representation are not only a significant component of democratic inclusion but are also an important consideration for political parties in mobilising the electorate more broadly (Montoya et al 2021).

The election of minoritised women contributes then to the overall status of minoritised office-holders and female office-holders, and their rise can help to break down ethnic, racial and gender barriers in electoral politics (Hardy-Fanta et al 2016; Sanbonmatsu 2015). Parliamentary systems that aspire towards inclusive, egalitarian and responsive governance are deemed best placed to address a range of social inequalities (Celis and Childs 2020).

What Do We Know About Minoritised Women's Participation in Politics?

Where ethnic and/or racialised minority women's experience of politics is studied, it has often focused on their experiences compared to ethnic and/or racialised minority men (Celis et al 2015; Mugge 2016; Mugge and Erzeel 2016a; Mugge and Erzeel 2016b; Jansen et al 2021). Ethnic minority women are argued to be of specific value to political parties in allowing them to satisfy demands for equality and diversity. Their inclusion may nominally satisfy gender quotas and, where they exist, ethnic or diversity targets at the same time. This strategy is argued to be the least costly to parties eager to maintain seats and the least "threatening" to incumbent white male politicians (Mugge et al 2019).

Tatari and Mencutek's (2015) study of female Muslim councillors in London underlines the unique and valuable contribution that minoritised women politicians make in politics. This is based in part on how they work as effective advocates for other ethnic groups and to build cross-group coalitions better than men, bringing more legislative support to women. This includes how minoritised women have more "opportunities to soften their race or ethnicity by being viewed as women, mothers, and community advocates in ways that limit race-based white backlash" (Fraga et al 2005, p. 2). Notably, despite the value and insights such multiple and intersecting identities bring, they are also a source of disadvantage, stereotyping and differential treatment (Tatari and Mencutek 2015, p. 434).[45] A recent study of ethnic minority women in local politics across the United Kingdom confirms this, finding that while some minority women leveraged advantages from their multiple identities, many faced forms of gendered racism that impacted on their candidacies, campaigns and length of service in office (Sobolewska and Begum 2020). The challenges that ethnic and racial minoritised women candidates face in the United Kingdom include opposition from within their respective communities (Hussain 2021).

Women of colour in the United States have made some recent gains in candidacy and access to political office, exemplified by the recent female-majority New York City Council,[46] chaired for the first time by an African-American woman, and the much-lauded vice-presidential appointment of Kamala Harris in 2021. However, they are still significantly underrepresented in American politics (Dittmar 2021; CAWP 2020).[47] Indigenous women including Native-American women have had less success, illustrated by the fact that the first Native-American woman, Deb Haaland, was appointed to cabinet in 2021.[48] Other prominent appointments in 2021 include Mary Simon, an Inuk from northern Quebec, as Canada's first indigenous governor general. Yet at the same time another prominent indigenous female politician, Ms. Wilson-Raybould, resigned her cabinet position citing a toxic and exclusionary political culture.[49] Maori and other indigenous women in New Zealand have fared better with a longer history of political inclusion, most recently securing cabinet and high-level appointments including that of Nanaia Mahuta to the role of Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2020, the nation's first indigenous woman to hold the position.[50]

Analysis of minoritised, immigrant and native political participation more broadly in the United States reveals a highly complex picture of intra

45 Identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by intersecting and socially constructed dimensions, and as a result they are dynamic, contextual and relational. Moreover, the theory of relational autonomy proposes that individuals may not have complete autonomy to emphasise one identity marker over others in all situations (Meyers 2000). Intersecting identities take quite different forms depending on the context, and minoritised women politicians experience their multiple identities in relational ways where some elements of their identity are highlighted at different times by different groups.

46 https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/nyregion/adrienne-adams-city-council-speaker.html.

47 In fact, most women of colour in the United States sit in the less powerful House of Representatives rather than in the Senate.

48 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56421097.

49 https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/09/world/canada/canada-indigenous-women.html.

50 https://www.ipu.org/news/case-studies/2021-03/women-in-politics-in-new-zealand-heres-what-they-are-doing-right.

and inter-racial and ethnic group participation that is gendered in important ways (Brown 2014). Specific immigrant, racial and ethnic groups can have distinctive forms of political engagement. For example, a focus on interconnectedness characterises Latina political participation in ways that fuses grassroots and electoral politics (Montoya et al 2001). When looking at gender as a factor across racial groups, historically Black Women score higher in political participation and politicisation than white women(Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001, cited in Brown 2014). Looking across all minoritised groups revealed that *financial means*, *workplace skills* and *mobilisation by membership organisations* (all factors that were influenced by gender) were significant predictors of political participation (Brown 2014).

For those who have been historically forced to operate further outside the system and have fewer resources available to them, non-traditional participation is more common (Brown 2014, p. 323). *A sense of linked fate*, whether one thinks of one's fate as linked to that of one's ethnic and/or racialised group, also shapes the forms of non-traditional politics found in minoritised communities, although linked fate does not impact all minoritised women in the same way (Brown 2014, p. 338; Berajano et al 2020). Historical trauma, cultural representations, and legal and social discrimination are factors that shape how both race/ethnicity and gender operate in tandem to influence how minoritised women participate in politics. In sum, the resources, motivations and opportunities necessary for *political agency* are shaped by the intersection of gender, race and ethnicity for minoritised women.

The political activism of indigenous women[51] has also been studied for its innovative forms of engagement. Research reveals the ways in which indigenous women reimagine politics through a culturally specific vocabulary of *sovereignty* and *self-determination* (Mundim 2021). Indigenous women's practices and subjectivities can offer important insights into political reform in their focus on non-hierarchical organisational structures and efforts to transform private issues such as mothering and care work into public politics (Mugge et al 2019).

Roma[52] women's access to political office has emerged as a subset of initiatives at EU level under the rubric of the EU Roma Framework (D'Agostino 2016). This recognition of the need to include Roma women within decision-making contexts emerged as part of European Parliament initiatives on "the situation of Roma women" in 2006. These initiatives were also a result of the advocacy work of Western and Eastern European Romani women activists at both the national and European levels. However, despite subsequent reports by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency in 2013 and efforts to "gender" broader EU Roma integration policies/frameworks, the gender dimension has remained weak (D'Agostino 2016). The Council of Europe (CoE) maintains leadership on these issues with International Romani Women Conferences and the Strategy on the Advancement of Romani Women and Girls (2014-2020). The CoE Sixth International Roma Women Conference was devoted to "Women and Political Representation: The Case of Roma and Traveller Women" and concluded with a series of recommendations to encourage Roma and Traveller women to enter politics[53] accompanied by a pledge for political parties to address their

51 Indigenous communities have become laboratories for institutional innovation, combining western democratic structures with indigenous traditions, practices and norms (McMahon and Alcantara 2021).

52 Roma political identity and societal representations have been studied. Societal representations of Roma maintain the symbolic and physical boundaries between Roma and the majority and maintain a relationship which is based on control, oppression and exclusion. Despite politicisation of the Roma community across Europe, it is argued that Roma communities do not participate in the public representation of their political identity which means that dominant discourses continue to centre on the supposed "difference" of Roma communities (McGarry 2014). Others have argued that the racialisation of Roma people in Europe and the top-down approach to Roma governance has stalled the capacity of Roma to organise politically and stratifies this diverse community further (Zevnik and Russell 2021).

53 https://rm.coe.int/recommendations-from-the-6th-international-roma-women-conference/16807c0e28.

lack of representation.[54] Roma women experience extreme forms of deprivation and marginalisation and despite the election of Romani politician Soraya Post to the European Parliament (2014-2019), they remain largely unrepresented in political office. While they have benefitted from international and transnational organisations in their efforts to gender Roma policies and politics, especially through the CoE, they continue to struggle to assert their political agency (D'Agostino 2021b, p. 230). Yet research underlines how Roma women are politicised and are involved in forms of intersectional mobilisation in Europe (D'Agostino 2021a).

A proliferation of reports[55] has established the systemic discrimination and social exclusion experienced by Travellers (for example, FRA 2019, 2020; Oireachtas 2021b), illustrated by data showing that only 3% live past 65yrs; 11% of all deaths are by suicide, 7 times higher than the majority population; 80%+ are unemployed; and only 1% reach third-level education. Despite the recognition of Travellers as a distinct ethnic group by the Irish State in 2017, endemic anti-Traveller racism and marginalisation continue (IHREC 2021a, 2021b). Sociological accounts of the lived realities of anti-Traveller racism underline the range of tactics and agency that young Traveller's use to negotiate ethnicised and racialised boundaries (Joyce 2015). While Traveller health inequalities, and most recently their high rates of suicide (McKey et al 2020; Quirke et al 2020) and experiences of social disadvantage (Watson et al 2017; McGinnity et al 2017) in education[56] (Boyle et al 2018; Devine and McGillicuddy 2019; Quinlan 2021; Kavanagh and Dupont 2021) and racism (Michael 2020) have been mapped, there is little research on their relationship to politics. Autobiographies of Nan Joyce (1985, 2000), the first Traveller women to stand for election in 1982, offer some insights. These works outlined how Nan Joyce used her symbolic power to resist the explicit racism of other local electoral candidates and campaigned on a platform for the recognition of Traveller ethnic identity, human rights of Traveller people and in solidarity with poor and working-class communities. Nan Joyce's campaign was indicative of a tradition of Traveller activism and political resistance in the 1980s that has evolved in vibrant ways that now include the youngest generations of Travellers. More recently, in 2021, Dr. Rosaleen McDonagh's (Traveller, playwright, academic, social worker, feminist, member of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, member of Aosdána and disability activist) memoir *Unsettled* details her own political candidacy for the Seanad in 2002 and in two successive although ultimately unsuccessful bids. She outlines the racism, misogyny and ableism that she experienced as a candidate, yet also the solidarity between her and other female candidates (2021, pp. 75-77). Notable political appointments of Traveller women have garnered much attention as significant firsts in Irish public and political life. Dr. Sindy Joyce, an Irish Traveller human rights activist and academic sociologist, was the first Traveller woman appointed to the Council of State in 2019. Eileen Flynn, an Irish independent politician, who has served as a Senator since June 2020 after being nominated by the Taoiseach, remains the only Traveller women to hold public office in Ireland.

Recent initiatives developed by the Traveller Movement (TM)[57] in the United Kingdom, including #operationtravellervote alongside political

54 https://rm.coe.int/pledge-on-political-representation-of-roma-women-/168076252b.

55 As the 2021 Final Report of the Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community states: "The Programme for Government contains eight commitments which include the Traveller community by name, across mental health, drug use, health, housing and education. NTRIS includes 149 actions across a range of areas. The Expert Review Group on Traveller Accommodation published their report in July 2019 and the Ombudsman for Children published a report in 2021 on the conditions faced by children on one halting site. Despite these and other initiatives, Travellers do not report improvements to conditions on the ground. It is the view of this Committee that improving the quality of life for Travellers is not solely an issue of policy but is also an issue of implementation and oversight" (Oireachtas 2021b, 19).

56 https://www.thejournal.ie/tough-start-pt-3-traveller-children-education-5574141-Oct2021/

57 The broader term of "Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller" is used in this context to include a variety of communities.

literacy initiatives, aim to increase political engagement.[58] In Ireland, Traveller political engagement is also supported by Minceirs Whiden,[59] a Traveller-led organisation that works to develop a political platform for the Traveller community. This organisation works through regional meetings and an assembly structure to politicise Travellers and promote a range of Traveller rights issues. Their work includes Traveller-specific voter education packs and Traveller-specific political participation workshops. They also encourage and support Traveller political engagement and candidacy for political office, both at a local and national level. Among their demands is the allocation of a Seanad seat to the Traveller community.

Traveller women advocates have worked to highlight the distinctive experiences of Traveller women in Ireland and the lack of policy response that takes this specificity into account, including their lack of access to political participation. Traveller women are present in a range of Traveller rights organisations including Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, the Galway Traveller Movement, the Irish Traveller Movement and the Cork Traveller Visibility Movement. The National Traveller Women's Forum is the specific organisational representation of Traveller women in Ireland. Traveller women are noted to play central roles as advocates for their communities in health and education and have invested significant time and resources as participants in local decision-making contexts such as accommodation committees (ITM and NTWF 2013; 2020).

What Do We Know About Gender and Political Competition?

How gender affects political competition is well established, with the barriers for women running for political office understood as higher than those for men (Dittmar 2015; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015; Kenny and Verge 2016). This is often understood with a pipeline analogy that includes supply and demand-side factors at play.[60] *Supply-side factors* are understood to include the gendered division of labour in societal terms (care responsibilities). These factors shape women's access to resources, including time, money and experience, and influence women's motivation, ambition and interest in politics, alongside their own strategic calculations of their potential and the costs of running. *Demand-side factors* are factors outside of women themselves and include electoral systems, party-political culture and ideology, and understandings of voter demand that shape the processes, both formal and informal, of how candidates are selected.

Once applicants come forward, their selection as candidates hinges in large part on the preferences of political elites and their ideas about what makes a good candidate. Selection processes are shaped by conscious and unconscious forms of gender bias and other forms of bias rooted in ideas about what makes the ideal candidate, whose traits have been historically privileged and stereotypically white and male. These biases are embedded in political institutional rules and party-political norms and practices (both formal and informal) that shape the procedures and culture in which party decision-making takes place (Kenny and Verge 2016). The interaction of these factors is generally assumed to account for why women are both fewer in number in seeking selection and less likely to be selected as legislative candidates (Krook 2010). These processes shape minoritised women candidates' uneven access to resources, alongside *super surveillance* of their performance. On the *supply side* minoritised women may face more intense familial obligations and have less access to financial resources to cover care obligations (Farris and Holman 2014). Scholars have also demonstrated that minoritised women candidates face unique stereotypes because of their

58 The TM also run a Women's Empowerment Network to advance gender equality issues. https://travellermovement.org.uk/women-empowerment-network/.

59 https://www.minceirswhiden.ie/.

60 The pipeline analogy is limited in important ways, but it provides a schema to make sense of the interaction of different factors that supress candidacy.

race-gendered identities that lead voters to make assessments of their perceived traits and leadership abilities (Hicks 2017; Lemi and Brown 2019). When in office, minoritised women experience isolation and feelings of being out of place (Puwar 2004). *Demand-side* dynamics such as elite disinterest, bias and institutional barriers create additional challenges for minoritised women. In this way the conditions that encourage women in general to consider a political role may not then necessarily apply to minoritised women (Sliva and Skulley 2019).

Why Would Minoritised Women Seek Political Office? Motivations, Deterrence and Political Calculations

Women who do choose to run for office make strategic considerations about their candidacies based on the political opportunity structure before them. The pressure to adapt to accepted norms of gender and/or candidacy, the anticipation of greater scrutiny, and the evidence of institutional racism and sexism are factors unattractive to many who may otherwise pursue political office (Ditmar 2015, p. 763; Schneider and Holman 2016; Murray et al 2019). Research on both deterrents to and motivations for candidacy has already revealed differences among women by race and/or ethnicity, illuminating the importance of evaluating intersectional dynamics in evaluations of candidate emergence (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Sanbonmatsu 2015; Shames 2017; Swain and Lien 2017; Holman and Schneider 2018). In the United States, "candidate deterrence" has a disproportionate impact on women and especially women of colour (Shames 2015). For many, candidacy was viewed as risky and office-holding ill-suited to generate solutions for the problems they cared about. Evidence suggests that many who would make good representatives are deterred from running by perceptions of such extensive costs and low rewards. Those for whom this is not the case, for whom the rewards appear stronger than the costs, may be unrepresentative or atypical as a group (Shames 2015, p. 554). Critical race perspectives reveal how the experience of racism in particular creates ongoing anticipation or expectation of future racist experiences (Shames 2015, p. 557). This can instigate self-protective forms of self-segregation that include an avoidance of situations where racism could arise such as in public-facing decision-making roles (Steele and Aronson 1995, p. 401, cited in Schneider and Holman 2016).

Deterrence Does Not Mean a Lack of Interest in Politics

An aversion to running may be fully rational, based on perceptions of high costs and low rewards involved in candidacies. However, these rational decisions reflect a *system-level irrationality* of continuing unrepresentative government that silences the "different voice" emerging from ethnic, racial and gender diversity (Shames 2015). Aversion to running for office, particularly if differentially distributed across politically relevant groups, can then constitute a serious problem for democracy. However, viewing candidates only as rational actors who strategically initiate candidacy only when their prospects of winning are high misses the complex reasoning that minoritised women who have little chance of securing office may still proceed with their candidacies (Hardy-Fanta et al 2016; Shah et al 2019).

Supply-side Dynamics: What Do We Know About Ambition, Confidence, and Self-efficacy?

A focus on ambition or self-efficacy can help us understand how the political system continues to repress diverse candidates (Holman and Schneider 2016). Self-confidence is an important psychological asset that promotes political interest, attention, and feelings of personal competence in politics (Wolak 2020). However, we caution here against too much focus on the idea that gender differences in ambition (and those shaped by ethnicity, race or social class) re*sult from differences in socialised personality traits or perceptions of campaigning*. Rather individual-level "nascent

ambition", a professed desire to hold office, moves to "expressive ambition"—actually competing in an election (Fox and Lawless 2005) within a *set of structural barriers*. These include income, motherhood, lone-parental status, and household composition which all may suppress candidate emergence (Bernhard, Shames and Teele 2021). Notably, recruitment does not happen in a vacuum. Often, the people recruited by political party operatives are already known by the party and already have the type of "nascent political ambition" that led them to be visible to recruiters in the first place (Shames et al 2020, p. 4).

Sanbonmatsu and Carroll (2017) argue fo*r a relationally embedded model of ambition* to replace traditional models wherein candidacy is self-initiated based on a long-standing interest in politics. Taking this approach to political ambition places the focus on the interaction between individual decision-making and external factors. However, it also recognises the unlikely or less typical candidates from outside of political dynasties. Women's candidacies can also emerge then, in part, from perceptions th*at costs of not running are too high to stay on the sidelines* (Dittmar 2020b). Such critical events, or more accurately the accumulation of crises and the emotions they stir, can act as tipping points in some women's calculus, whereby the costs of not running are made stark (Dittmar 2020b).

Minoritised Women and "Ambition From the Margins"

Dowe (2020, 697) explores how and why Black Women decide to run for office and engage politically, introducing the concept of *ambition from the margins*. This concept captures the sense of community that leads Black Women to engage in a unique type of political work. She defines the long history of Black Women's politicisation as a form of *radical imagination* that included innovative forms of political engagement despite *marginalisation*. Black Women's ambition is shaped by political socialisation, networks, and gendered and racial identity forged through organisations and communities. *Ambition from the margins* has evolved from the experiences of exclusion that created alternative networks and resources.

Other research that explored the emergence of immigrant candidates found that differences in political ambition, interest and efficacy did not explain immigrants' underrepresentation. Instead, the major hurdles lie in securing a candidate nomination and being placed on an electable list position. The researchers concluded that there is a sufficient supply of potential immigrant candidates, but immigrants' ambition is thwarted by political elites (Dancyier et al 2021). Re-election concerns, party solidarity, masculinist bonding, and other disincentives are already strongly in play as barriers for women in general to access candidacy. As Hawkesworth (2020) and Restrepo Sanin (2020) argue, the democratic state is structured, legally and practically, to keep women from public office, regardless of individual incentives.

What Do We Know About the Candidacy of Minoritised Women?

Gendered factors that undermine female candidacy interact in intersectional ways with racial and ethnic minority status (Ocampo 2018; Ocampo and Ray 2020). For example, migrant and ethnic minority and racialised women candidates lack support systems that can include extended family networks for canvassing, for childcare and financial resources to travel to cities for training. Overall migrant networks are smaller and less deep (Sanbonmatsu 2015) and ethnic minority and racialised women experience systemic social and economic exclusion.

The relationship between the race and ethnicity of a candidate and the likelihood that their "own community" will vote for them is also a complex one shaped by factors including whether voting at the local level in Ireland means rescinding a vote at home (such as is the case for the Polish community) (Fanning 2018; Goodyear-Grant and Tolley

2019). Fundraising is then also a particular challenge as migrants and ethnic minority groups are not homogenous communities and they can be fragmented and may not provide the necessary support. Advice to migrant candidates from support organisations detailed in previous research included efforts to manage expectations: "You will be up against people who went to school, worked in the area all their lives and are in the GAA, that will give them 400 or 500 votes to begin with that you won't have to rely on" (Cullen and McGing 2019). A recommendation from that work included that, given the obstacles that minoritised women face, parties could use their brand to compensate for the lack of networks. Candidates also have a higher bar to mobilise local party members (who are predominantly from the majority population) for canvassing as people will drift towards supporting those they know best or have established friendships and networks with, often underlining their shared racial and ethnic status (Tolley 2019).

Candidate Emergence: Parties are Key

The structures and procedures of political parties can support or hinder minoritised women's participation in politics, because of how they recruit, train, appoint and promote candidates who run for office (Ocampo and Ray 2020). Extensive research affirms that recruitment processes have been disadvantageous to women and especially minoritised women as elites typically recruit from circles that have a limited presence of such candidates (Crowder-Meyer 2013). Parties are central to shifting the dynamics of recruitment and campaign support for underrepresented groups. Party and local partisan networks have considerable power to endorse a potential candidate and are a key resource in the *pre-emergence* stage of candidacy. Visible minority women experience more prejudice in the candidate recruitment process than both white women and visible minority men (Mugge and Emejulu 2018). More generally they feel ignored within transactional party politics that values their "community" votes but not their leadership (Gillespie and Brown 2019). Political parties can also devalue the electoral strength and viability of minoritised female candidates. This can be expressed by parties as a form of hesitancy when a minoritised woman aspirant indicates her interest in candidacy (Dowe 2020).

The likelihood that a minoritised woman would enter a pool of candidates is then shaped in important ways *by how parties behave*. Of course, this support also matters for the eventual success of candidates once they are on the ballot. Research on Latino candidates in the United States confirms that even when endorsed to run, they are under-supported by party elites in comparison to non-Latinos. Latino candidates perceive this difference and rationally select out of the candidate pool (Ocampo and Ray 2020, pp. 754-757). In this way the limited presence of minoritised groups in candidate pools could be mitigated, in part, if potential candidates perceive they can win buoyed by expressed support through endorsements and other forms of investment. When minoritised women are supported by parties and other organisations this gives important signals to the electorate (Ocampo and Ray 2020, pp. 754-757). This can shift the responsibility onto voters to adapt their thinking about gender, race, ethnicity, and candidacy, instead of putting the burden on women themselves to adapt to stereotypical norms that primarily serve to reinforce white male privilege in politics (Brown and Gershon 2016; Dittmar 2020a; Gershon and Lavariega Monforti 2021).

Campaigning for Office

Bernhard et al's (2020) research found that when they did run for office, minoritised women often face higher barriers than other candidates. The research suggests that when minoritised women end up running, party support can be poor, and they still have to do a lot of the work themselves (Bernhard et al 2020). Because of this, some minoritised women interested in running for office often view political parties as a hindrance rather than a help (Sanbonmatsu 2015; Brown and Dowe 2020; Dowe 2020). Minoritised women aspirants may then choose to go the independent

route particularly if they find a lack of affinity between their values and those of political parties. While independent politicians are an important element of Irish politics, having a party machine behind a candidate is considered very important. Analysis of the 2019 local elections emphasises the significance of "local visibility" in candidate recruitment practices. This is often manifested through holding a position of responsibility in a civil society, community or local sporting organisation (Cullen and McGing 2019, p. 13), which is an effective means for developing a local base and network of potential supporters. This may help compensate for a lack of political party support but it may prove difficult for minoritised women not included in mainstream civil society, sport and/or business organisations.

Analysis of independent female politicians in Ireland suggest that they often have experience of local political office, have high levels of name recognition and local visibility (Buckley 2020, p. 356).[61] These assets are not as available to, and if they are, do not work in the same way for, minoritised women. Overall, Buckley concludes that although women are prepared to go it alone, the independent route is no more advantageous and no less gendered for women than the party rout. So, rather than seeing the independent route as an alternative or easier way for minoritised women to access politics, she contends that it is shaped by similar conventional candidate recruitment channels (Buckley 2020, p. 365) that further disadvantage minoritised candidates.

Notwithstanding the recent gains by minoritised women in contexts like the United States, discriminatory practices within legislatures, institutional unresponsiveness and biases of their colleagues may hamper minoritised women's' access to *active and positional power* (Brown and Gershon 2021). Assessments of voting record, committee appointments and speeches made by minoritised women politicians indicate that they do support the interests of minoritised people when in office (Mugge et al 2019). Although this is a complex issue, as minoritised women are often placed on committees or in roles where they are expected to represent the interests of minorities and/or made responsible to advance equality and diversity agendas.

Piscopo (2019) suggests *procedural changes* such as lowering candidate filing fees for women and giving women preferred access to public funding for campaigns, and pressuring political parties to abide by gender and ethnic quotas among their own leadership and governing boards can enable important changes in the pipeline. Other suggestions are to include within the selectorate more diversity in those responsible for selecting candidates and for parties to take risks – to look beyond "the usual suspects" and broaden their sense of who a "good candidate" is. An important suggestion is to allow the use of campaign funds for campaign-related childcare expenses. Electoral reforms may advance progress where candidate recruitment programmes cannot. For instance, recent rulings by the Federal Election Commission in favour of Liubia Shirley and M.J. Hegar, two Congressional candidates and mothers, now enable candidates for federal elections in the United States to use campaign funds to subsidise election-related childcare.[62]

This review of supply and demand-side interactions is provided as a guide for the research we include. A complex interaction of factors shapes how applicants are discouraged from coming forward by perceptions of prejudice on the part of political elites, while at the same time small pools of certain kinds of aspirant may lead elites to assume that members of those groups are not interested or worthy of nomination as political candidates. Formal and informal rules of candidate recruitment that are gendered, raced and

61 Research indicates that gender quotas and the strength of women's political networks can mobilise women not just running in parties but also outside of them. The single transferable vote (PR-STV) electoral system, that supports candidate-centric voting behaviour and a political culture of personalism and localism, results in more independent candidates and politicians (Buckley 2020,356).

62 https://www.fec.gov/updates/ao-2019-13/

classed (and ableist) repress f*emale candidacy in all its diversity.* This is particularly evident when we review other elements that affect minoritised women's access to politics. These include training programmes, media representation and violence against women in politics.

What Can Training Programmes do to Support Minoritised Women's Access to Politics?

Research suggests that training programmes can work to demystify running for office and boost women's confidence. They can also act to increase the supply of candidates even in contexts where party leaders shape demand. They offer important branding functions by signalling aspirants' quality and preparedness to parties. In substantive terms they provide women with information, technical skills and access to networks (Piscopo 2019). They can also advocate for diverse representation and to reframe candidacy in ways that support minoritised and underrepresented women. However, even with innovative and agile training programmes, system-level obstacles including formal and informal practices can persist even as talent pools expand and diversify (Piscopo 2019).

How training programmes are organised matters for all women but in particular for minoritised women. There are dangers that when programmes emphasise the need for women's participation for better policy-making and higher-quality democracy, candidate training can c*reate unrealistic expectations* and undue pressure about women's potential to transform politics. Other risks i*nclude placing too much focus and an over-reliance on training programmes to diversify politic*s. This can also reinforce the idea that generating a well-prepared, qualified and diverse candidate pool is a problem women themselves must fix. Whereas research indicates that making politics representative and responsive requires the collective work of all political actors, not just to recruit new faces but to upend practices that make political careers exclusionary and unappealing (Piscopo 2019).

Creating a campaign training programme that addresses intersectional issues and differences among minoritised women is challenging (Kreitzer and Osborn 2019). Assessment of how minoritised women view training programmes reveals how they value when race/ethnicity is discussed as *a structural inequality* and as a basis for unifying and mobilising communities. They also value the opportunity to discuss when women face opposition from within their own community (Sanbonmatsu 2015; Sweet Cushman 2019). This included maintaining a balance between relevant and representative trainers as well as role models that do not minimise the structural constraints of candidacy for minoritised women (Sweet Cushman 2019; Kreitzer and Osbron 2019; Bernhard 2020).

When participants of a range of programmes directed to minoritised women were surveyed for their views, they suggested that resources should be put towards initiatives like financing campaigns and childcare, instead of "asking women seven times". This research also established that systemic "pipeline" fragility was a result, in part, of an over-reliance on informal institutions to increase diverse representation (Bernhard 2020). How *much responsibility we can place on training programmes* is an important issue. Women candidate training groups exist outside the formal political party and nomination structure. Recent analysis of participants and programme staff in training programmes in the United States (Bernhard 2020) suggests that most of the effective interventions to support women are undertaken by training staff and allies, *putting immense burden on such programmes rather than on parties.*

There is also research to suggest that voters tend to hold minoritised women to a different standard than white male candidates. Minoritised women in particular face much higher levels of abuse and resistance than their white and male counterparts when they exercise their right to participate in public spaces (Dhrodia 2018).

Media Representation and Minoritised Women

Women politicians receive more attention in relation to their appearance and personal life and more negative coverage than their male counterparts (Van der Pas and Aaldering 2020). Global research indicates that the higher the level of media sexism, the lower the share of women candidates (Haraldsson and Wängnerud, 2019). Minoritised women overall experience less media coverage than majority-population women candidates (Shah et al 2019). However, analysis of media coverage of the candidacy of first minority female candidates found that the novelty of their racialised identity is likely to make their gender even more visible than that of a white female candidate in ways that can be disadvantageous (Ward 2016). Media coverage and parties do tend to use intersectional identity *as a novel hook*, while minoritised female candidates in majority white contexts often work to play down race and/or gender and focus on their capabilities to lead and make decisions. As Ward argues: "For the first minoritised women to seek or secure elected office their identity continues to be the site of intersectional assumptions...that can result in enhanced scrutiny and interrogation of her identity and its relationship to her politics." For Ward (2016) this is the source of specific difficulty for minoritised women as this hypervisibility becomes a double-edged sword. Minoritised politicians also face pressures to conform to Western European ideals of femininity understood in class, racialised and ethnic terms. Criticism of clothing, earrings, hair (Lemi and Brown 2019) and other aspects of their physical appearance alongside other microaggressions can supress minoritised women's political ambition (Lemi and Brown 2020).

The media reporting of minoritised groups is particularly important in shaping how they are viewed by the public. The Press Council of Ireland's Code of Conduct prohibits the (printed) press from publishing "material intended or likely to cause grave offence or stir up hatred against an individual or group on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, colour, ethnic origin, membership of the travelling community, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, illness or age".[63] Similarly, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland's Media Plurality Policy aims "to promote a plurality of voices, viewpoints, outlets and sources in Irish media".[64] However, the implementation of these policies has not been satisfactory to minoritised groups. At the dialogue session for the Future of Media Commission (FoMC),[65] Tommy Hamzat, Founder of *Black Irish Media*, stated that "we need to bring [diverse] groups into the media and let them tell their stories the way they want to. At the end of the day, positive representation goes a long way".[66] In its submission to the FoMC, the Irish Traveller Movement recommended a series of measures that should be undertaken to include the visibility, and improve the reporting, of Travellers in Irish media (ITM 2021).

Violence Against Women in Politics

The gendered dimensions of violence and harassment directed against politicians are well established (Krook 2020; Krook and Sanín 2020) and include physical, psychological, sexual, economic and semiotic violence. Psychological violence, which aims to harm the target's mental state and emotional well-being, has been found to be the most common form of violence against women in politics in several contexts and occurs most on social media (Erikson et al 2021). This violence targets minoritised women in ways that increase their marginalisation from politics (Krook and

63 Press Council of Ireland Code of Conduct, Principle 8, available at https://www.presscouncil.ie/code-of-practice.
64 https://www.bai.ie/en/broadcasting/regulation/.
65 https://futureofmediacommission.ie/.
66 Future of Media Commission, Thematic Dialogue #6, Thursday 15 April 2021, Panel 2.

Sanín 2020).[67] Anecdotal evidence from minoritised women candidates that ran in the 2019 local elections indicate they experienced significant sexual and racist harassment (Cullen and McGing 2019). Analysis of harassment of women candidates in the UK reveals that, in both its motives and outcomes, it has forced women to modify their campaign activities in ways that diminish their chances of winning, and that Black and minority ethnic women are disproportionately targeted compared with white women (Collingnon, Campbell and Rudig 2022). This has created a climate of fear especially for women when campaigning. Such harassment is considered to be a deliberate attempt to place a barrier to more diverse political representation (Erikson et al 2021; Dhrodia 2018).

Abuse targeted at women candidates is aimed at supressing women's full political participation as women (Collingnon, Campbell and Rudig 2022, p. 2). These dynamics are also evident in the Irish context, where surveys and individual testimony revealed pervasive social media abuse of female politicians including threats of violence, sexual assault and rape (Felle at al 2019; McGing 2021; NWC 2021). The Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) surveyed local councillors in 2021 and found almost three quarters of those who responded had experienced threats, harassment and intimidation. More than half of the respondents were female, and sexual and racist abuse feature in councillors' accounts of a range of online and offline threats and incidents (AILG-CMG 2021). Richardson's (2022) analysis found female local councillors received 8 times as many abusive tweets per followers compared to their male counterparts, while female senators received 3 times as many abusive tweets per followers than their male counterparts.

Minoritised Women, Local Political Inclusion and Covid-19

As a number of emerging analyses show, the Covid-19 pandemic seems to be decreasing women's financial stability and increasing their shares of unpaid domestic and care work, (Wenham, Smith and Morgan 2020; Cullen and Murphy 2020). Times of change — such as that prompted by the pandemic — also increase opportunities for informal practices to flourish (Waylen 2014). Together, these dynamics suggest that the Covid-19 pandemic may be detrimental to women's electoral prospects. More specifically, by affecting individuals' household responsibilities, financial resources, and emotional stability, the pandemic could impose higher personal costs of running for office, demotivating women's candidacies (Gatto and Thome 2020).

Women (and especially minoritised women) remain unrepresented or underrepresented in pandemic-related decision-making (Enright et al 2020; Hennessy 2021; Joseph 2021). Minoritised women community leaders and care workers are also in the frontline of pandemic crisis management. Analysis also suggests that minoritised women enact significant forms of political activism and agency in working to help their communities survive crisis conditions. Yet these forms of micro-level political actions are often discounted, and minority women's political work goes unseen or is viewed as disengagement from politics (Emejulu and Bassel 2019). Forms of political exhaustion (Emejulu and Bassel 2020) may also exist, where the crisis further supresses the capacity of potential minoritised aspirants or candidates to engage in planning for campaigns for political office.

67 Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo (2020) identify three key dimensions—motives, forms and impacts—in which violence against politicians can be gendered. "Gendered motives" implies that women, non-normative men, transgender individuals, and other groups are targeted for gendered reasons, such as policing politics as a (hegemonic) male space. "Gendered forms" denotes the use of gendered means of attack, such as sexualised harassment, whereas "gendered impacts" refers to the subjective meaning ascribed to political violence by both the targets and the audience of violence.

What Do We Already Know About Diversity and Local Politics in Ireland?

Women accounted for 21% of councillors elected in the 2014 local elections and this figure increased only marginally to 24% in 2019 (226 women councillors) (Cullen and McGing 2019). At least 69 co-options have occurred since the 2019 local elections and women have filled 37 of these vacancies (56%) (Kavanagh 2020). These changes have brought the number of women local office-holders up to 241, or 25% of all councillors. This is below the EU average of 32% for women's representation in local and municipal councils. There is also a notable urban-rural divide in the likelihood of women being selected and elected for local office in Ireland, with councils representing urban and suburban communities generally more gender-balanced than predominately rural areas. As a result, substantial variations exist in the number and proportion of women councillors across the 31 local authorities, from one woman representative on Offaly County Council, to Dublin City Council and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council where parity has almost been reached (McGing 2021).

Local selection processes have been identified as clientelist and resistant to change. Previous research established that candidate recruitment norms, including previous political experience, local political activism, incumbency and familial links, are key to securing local office (Buckley 2020). These forms of capital are gendered and racialised in that women and especially minoritised women often do not have access to such resources. The influence of stereotypes and social conservatism about who is most suited for local political office creates additional challenges to minoritised women candidates (Cullen and McGing 2019). Recruitment networks including the GAA are often not where minoritised women are (Cullen and McGing 2019; Buckley and Keenan 2021).[68] Preliminary research identified how unemployment, low pay, poverty, lack of childcare, rural isolation and lack of community and familial support suppressed minoritised women's interest in and access to political office (Cullen and McGing 2019; McGinn and O'Connor 2020). McGinn and O'Connor's (2020) study of the experiences of women at local and national level within the County of Mayo identified specific barriers for Traveller and migrant women, including low levels of confidence in the possibility of being elected as a public representative. For migrant women, language competencies created difficulties. Poor experiences of participation in Traveller local accommodation committees also act as an inhibiting factor that shapes Traveller women's perceptions about local office (Cullen and McGing 2019). For migrant women, especially those who had campaigned for local office, sexual harassment, racism, shallower networks, gatekeeping of resources and, for some, deficit of meaningful political party support also surfaced as barriers to electability (Cullen and McGing 2019; Buckley and Keenan 2021; McGinn and O'Connor 2020).

Positive Actions for Women in Politics in Ireland

Gender quotas at the national level are credited with creating some elements of change but a reliance by parties on traditional forms of candidate recruitment mean that women who are selected are often incumbent, have previous experience of elected office and familial links (Mariani et al 2020), all resources that are difficult for minoritised women to access. The introduction of gender quotas has feminised Irish politics but has not diversified it. Research indicates the difficulties that arise when new rules are introduced to political systems and the forms of resistance that can emerge (Celis and Lovenduski 2018; Verge 2020).

68 Buckley and Keenan (2021) refer to recruitment, resources and resistance as barriers to women candidates. Family, friends, assistance with care responsibilities, job flexibility, financial supports and personal networks were essential in advancing candidacy.

McGing's (2020, 2021) research with women councillors and other key stakeholders makes the case for the establishment of local or regional caucuses in local government in Ireland. Caucuses are viewed as offering effective support and space for informal mentoring and sharing of information. While there exists a national parliamentary women's caucus and regional and local (formal and informal) caucuses, it is acknowledged that they lack demographic and social diversity. As McGing (2021, p. 7) argues: "Given that membership of a political caucus is normally restricted to elected members, local government caucuses would find it particularly challenging to achieve diversity and intersectionality in light of the narrow profile of the average councillor."

A number of organisations have also advocated for a family-friendly environment in local and national politics (Women for Election 2021; NWC 2021; Oireachtas 2021a; AILG 2021a, 2021b). These calls include recommendations for a standardisation of working conditions for local councillors which enable family and carer responsibilities, including access to maternity and paternity leave, childcare expenses and supports and the use of remote working options. Some of these reports include explicit reference to anti-discrimination initiatives "which help create welcoming, inclusive and safe environments for all women aspiring and/or succeeding to be elected as local Councillors" (Women for Election 2021, p. 4).

Other submissions on the nascent Electoral Commission include recommendations that it adopt as part of its functions a role to oversee the extension of gender quotas to local government elections. The NWC submission suggested that the Commission support specific measures to be put in place to improve the participation of Traveller and Roma women and other ethnic minority women in political and public life as well as develop standards in political discourse that are free from discriminatory rhetoric and hate speech (NWC 2021).

The Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament (FFFIP) report (Oireachtas 2021a) includes a number of goals with relevance for increasing diversity in politics. These include actions on: Elected Members and Diversity, Staff and Diversity, and Organisational Culture and Diversity. The FFFIP recommends that political parties set specific targets for ethnic minority women within political parties' gender quotas and that the Electoral Commission monitor progress of this. Notably the FFFIP suggests that, "[i]f 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" (Oireachtas 2021a, p. 38). In addition, it recommends that the Taoiseach's 11 Seanad nominees include representatives from ethnic minority communities.

Data drives diversity

The importance of *data collection* is a key issue raised, with a recommendation 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 FFFIP also recommends changes to the organisational culture of the Oireachtas to improve inclusivity and diversity. 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.

Ireland still lacks a large representative survey of the migrant and ethnic minority population. Mc Ginnity et al (2020, p. 102) state:

*"Information on ethnicity must be collected separately from nationality or country of birth because people in ethnic minorities may be Irish nationals (McGinnity et al., 2018), and/or may be born in Ireland (second-generation). The fact is we know relatively little about differences between ethnic groups because ethnicity is very rarely collected from survey or administrative data (***Fahey et al. 2019a; IHREC 2019***). Changing this situation is now more urgent than ever."*

Data on refugees is also scant as is systematic, comprehensive and accurate tracking of racist incidents. The concept of *data driving diversity in politics* is not new. Collecting information promotes transparency which in turn drives change. The report of the Centenary Action Group (CAG) in the United Kingdom, *Data Drives Diversity: A simple step towards more transparent politics*, argues that diversity reporting benefits political parties (CAG 2020). In their view, as political parties are the gatekeepers to political representation, they must take responsibility for increasing diversity amongst their pool of possible candidates. Their central recommendation is for monitoring of diversity throughout the recruitment process, rather than solely of those candidates selected for seats.

Publicly available information from all parties would also provide a benchmark as to what could be achieved as well as allowing parties to monitor each other's progress. Including unsuccessful candidates for selection is an important activity because following individuals through the selection process would show how many times it takes for individuals to be selected. They state: "For example, it could be that a large number of Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic women in a party put themselves forward as candidates but very few make it past selection or are placed in winnable seats" (CAG 2020). The UK Electoral Commission is recommended as the site to support parties to provide diversity information to the public against which they can measure party success. Moreover, they note that there is significantly less data available on the protected characteristics of local councillors.[69]

Migrant Political Participation in Ireland

Szlovak (2017) explores the trajectory of migrant involvement in Irish political parties from the point of first engagement to becoming a representative to explain their under-representation in Irish political life. He finds that parties made some efforts to recruit migrants in 2009 but have not made a collective and sustained effort to increase migrant representation at the local level. Overall, it was individual migrants that drove activism in respect of political parties. In Szlovak's (2017) study, Irish politicians perceived migrants, to a large extent, to be a group with little political interest, and were influenced by a potentially negative social climate in the electorate about ethnic minorities which in turn influenced their relationship with migrant communities. Migrant candidates faced similar dynamics experienced by majority-population women candidates in that they were placed in unwinnable seats. An important finding of the study was that structures within parties, such as the intercultural committee or the equality officer position, cannot make a tangible impact on migrant representation *unless migrants are targeted as part of an organisational strategy with support from party leadership*. Overall, political parties were viewed to minimise their risks when running migrant candidates by ensuring that they benefited from their running, whether they succeeded or not (2017 p. 864). More recent shifts reflected in our study indicate that these dynamics may be, albeit slowly, shifting.

Migrants are much less engaged with politics than the native population and were substantially under-represented among voters, candidates and councillors in the recent local elections (McGinnity et al 2020). The research conducted

69 Just 35% of councillors are women and women remain outnumbered three-to-one on 12% of councils. Only 7% of local councillors in the UK are Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME). South Asians make up the highest number of ethnic minority councillors at around 5%, while only 1% of local councillors in the UK are of Black background (CAG 2020, 3).

by the Immigrant Council of Ireland (Lima 2020) among migrant candidates running for the 2019 local elections noted that non-Irish people who registered to vote constituted one-third to half of those eligible depending on the county. Such individuals constituted only 3% of all candidates. Notably, a higher proportion of migrants in the local communities did not translate into a bigger share of migrant candidates. However, the total pool of candidates was male-dominated, yet the proportion of female migrant candidates was higher (35%) as compared to all candidates (28%). All the candidates that were elected to local councils were running from party lists (25 candidates out of the total of 56 were running from party lists). The assessment of parties' engagement in support of migrant candidates varies; in general, the indicating a further need to incorporate migrants in their activities. Lima (2020) proposes reasons why political parties reduced their interest in promoting migrant candidates, including under-representation of migrant voters in the voting register but also under-representation of migrant communities in the party ranks.

Part 3:
International Frameworks and Exemplars

Section 1: International Frameworks

The United Nations

International organisations place moral and persuasive pressure on states and provide fora in which minorities can articulate concerns about the non-compliance of states. The right to equal participation in public life is acknowledged by international and regional human rights treaties to which Ireland is a signatory.[70] This right has been interpreted, and expanded on, to emphasise the particular need to increase the representation of women in all aspects of life (CEDAW 1997).[71] The UN has stated that "societies in which women are excluded from public life and decision-making cannot be described as democratic" (CEDAW 1997, para.14). Article 7 of CEDAW, therefore, requires States to take all appropriate measures, including the introduction of quotas, to ensure the full and effective participation of women in public life (CEDAW 1997, para.15). The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace (Beijing Platform) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 5 – Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment – emphasise the crucial role that gender equality and women's effective participation plays in realising the goals of the SDGs. However, the UN has stated that there is "a lack of political will in the larger society to dismantle structural barriers to the full equal participation of minorities" (UN 2014).

According to the UN Guidance Note on Minorities, states should consider implementing "appropriate measures to promote the participation of under-represented or marginalized groups, including minorities, in electoral processes. This will include measures specific to electoral events, temporary special measures as well as longer-term programs" (UN 2013). States should adopt a gender perspective in all analysis and actions stating that "intersecting forms of discrimination is critical in addressing racial discrimination, minority rights and the situation of minority women and girls" (UN 2013, para.16). The UN is committed to "creating an enabling environment for improving the situation of women and girls everywhere, particularly in rural areas and local communities and among indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities" (UN 2012, para.242). Treaty body recommendations directed to Ireland are clear that additional measures are required to address the underrepresentation of women and minoritised women in public life (CEDAW 2017; CERD 2020). These measures include the introduction of gender quotas at the local level, but also "civic education programmes, mentoring and training programmes, childcare and eldercare, and financial support to women who aspire to decision-making positions, so as to ensure de facto change" (CEDAW 2017). In addition, and in line with the Lund Recommendations,[72] special electoral measures may be required to increase the participation of minoritised women, in particular Traveller, Roma and migrant women.

70 For example, Universal Declaration of Human Rights articles 19, 20 and 21; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights articles 2, 3 and 25; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights article 8; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination article 5(c); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women articles 7 and 8; the International Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families articles 41 and 42; the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities article 2(2); the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples articles 5 and 18; the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action article 22; the Declaration on the Rights to Development articles 1.1, 2 and 8.2; Protocol 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights article 3.

71 See also, for example, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women articles 7 and 8.

72 OSCE Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life (1999).

European Bodies

In Europe, the Council of Europe (CoE)[73] and the European Union (EU),[74] as well as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE),[75] have set standards on the right to participate in public life for women and minorities. These rights are supplemented by recommendations, resolutions, issue-specific treaties and reports to enhance the human rights regime across Europe. The activities of the EU and the CoE have tended to be compartmentalised into instruments dealing with minority rights *or* Traveller and Roma rights *or* women's rights (although there appears to be a shift with attempts by the European Commission to apply a coordinated approach to issues facing minoritised groups evidenced by the most recent action plans on migrant integration, Traveller and Roma inclusion and gender equality).

The CoE and the EU have, where possible, broadly aligned[76] their policy responses in the areas of gender equality (Council of Europe 2018b; European Commission 2020c), Traveller and Roma inclusion (Council of Europe 2020b; European Commission 2020b), and migrant integration (European Commission 2020a). The CoE, in particular, has implemented targeted initiatives to promote the political participation of minoritised groups. For example, the CoE Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at the Local Level (1992) sets standards within CoE States on the rights of migrants to vote and stand in local elections. The CoE Resolution on migration from a gendered perspective calls on governments to specifically target and empower women as key actors for integration. The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life highlights that migrant women may have particular needs to ensure they are equipped to participate in local life, including targeted support structures. Joint Roma initiatives aimed at capacity building, active participation, and good governance and empowerment have been implemented in some States.[77] The CoE Intercultural Cities[78] and EuroCities[79] initiatives encourage the promotion of diversity at the local level while the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR)[80] promotes good practices at the local level to combat racism.

The CoE Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society places a responsibility on political parties to ensure the integration of minoritised members and candidates into the party. It states that political parties have a "special responsibility … to stimulate and support the recruitment of candidates from [minority] groups

73 European Convention on Human Rights; CoE, Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and Explanatory Report (CoE, Strasbourg, February 1995); CoE 1992 Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level; Council of Europe High Level Meeting on Roma, The Strasbourg Declaration on Roma (Strasbourg, 20 October 2010) [available at https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805ce1de].

74 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU article 21; Treaty on European Union article 2; Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union article 10; European Commission, 10 Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU [available at https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/common-basic-principles-immigrant-integration-policy-eu_en]; European Commission, 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion [available at https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/22771].

75 OSCE Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life (1999) and the OSCE Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies (2012). The OSCE has produced a series of useful guides for State agencies aimed at promoting the political participation of women, including minoritised women: see https://www.osce.org/resources/publications/?filters=+im_taxonomy_vid_3:(122)+im_taxonomy_vid_1:(24)&solrsort=score%20desc&rows=10.

76 Council of Europe/European Union, Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union (2007) [available at https://rm.coe.int/16804e437b]. The purpose of the MoU is "to strengthen a common European legal and policy space based on shared values – human rights, democracy and the rule of law" (Council of Europe, European Commission Consultation on the preparation of an Action plan on Integration and Inclusion - Contribution by the Council of Europe [available at https://rm.coe.int/council-of-europe-contribution-action-plan-on-integration-and-inclusio/1680a0522d].

77 ROMACT, ROMED and ROMACTED are joint initiatives by the Council of Europe and the European Commission that aim to support the participation of Roma in local governance structures – see https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/projects-/-programmes.

78 https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/home.

79 https://eurocities.eu/.

80 https://www.eccar.info/.

for political functions as well as membership" (Council of Europe 1998). The ECRI recommends that the "law should provide for an obligation to suppress public financing of organisations which promote racism" and that this law "should include the suppression of public financing of political parties which promote racism" (ECRI 2002, para 6; ECRI 2015).

The flagship EU action plans on Roma and Traveller inclusion, and migrant integration, together with the Gender Equality Action Plan, provide a more structured roadmap for States to improve the participation of minority groups.

EU Action Plans

In 2011 the EU adopted the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020 (European Commission 2011) and in 2016 it adopted the action plan on the integration of third country nationals (European Commission 2016). Member States, including Ireland (Department of Justice and Equality nd, 2017), developed national action plans in line with the EU policy. The plans, particularly the Irish National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS), have been criticised by advocacy groups (IHREC 2021b), human rights monitoring bodies (ECRI 2019) and academics (Popova 2021). The European Commission's monitoring report on NTRIS concluded that "the situation and experiences of Travellers and Roma has not seen any tangible improvements and the inequality gap between Travellers and Roma, and the majority population remains entrenched" (European Commission 2019). It noted a lack of political will and a lack of incentives or sanctions to fully implement the plan. The strategy has also been criticised for its lack of clear targets, outcomes, timeframes and budget allocation, and its failure to implement the whole-of-government approach that it promised (Popova 2021; ECRI 2019; Eurodiaconia 2018).

More broadly, the EU strategy on Roma integration was criticised for its "cursory mention of women" (European Parliament 2015) and its failure to address civil and political rights (see also European Parliament 2019). As well as pressing governments to ensure an "evidence-based policy approach" based on accurate gender disaggregated data, specific recommendations of a European Parliament report includes the promotion of "Romani women's political participation by introducing Romani women's quotas at all governmental levels" (European Parliament 2013). The CoE has made similar recommendations with respect to Ireland:

> *"Traveller communities should be adequately represented in local councils, and the possibility of reserving a specific seat for the Traveller community in the Irish parliament, perhaps in the Seanad, would merit serious consideration." (Council of Europe 2008, p 29)*

The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities similarly calls on the Government to consider

> *"legislative and practical measures to create the necessary conditions for their political participation, including representation at all levels, to more adequately reflect the composition of Irish society" (Council of Europe 2018a).*

On integration and inclusion policy, the European Commission noted that the 2016 EU Action Plan lacked a clear focus on intersectionality and that "stronger action is needed to promote the integration of migrant women" (European Commission 2020a, p 5). The Migrant Integration Strategy (MIS) in Ireland has been criticised for not adequately addressing all forms of racial discrimination and for its ineffective implementation in key areas (CERD 2020). For example, few local authorities (11 out of 30) have active integration strategies, a requirement of the MIS (action 52) (ICI 2020) and few concrete actions under the political participation theme of the strategy could be identified by the Government's monitoring body (Government of Ireland 2019).

Updated EU Action Plans

The most recent action plans and reports of the institutions (Gjermeni 2021) provide a touchstone on European level thinking in the area of intersectional inclusion of minoritised women. The EU Gender Equality Strategy states that all EU policy areas should include a gender perspective and that the Gender Equality Strategy will be implemented intersectionally (European Commission 2020c, p 2). It states that all action plans and strategic frameworks on a range of social issues, including integration and inclusion, and Traveller and Roma inclusion, will be linked to the Gender Equality Strategy and to each other (European Commission 2020c, p 16). This, along with observations made by UN treaty monitoring bodies, reflect the growing realisation that anti-discrimination, inclusion and integration policy must address multiple forms of discrimination, particularly intersectional discrimination faced by minoritised women.

The latest EU strategic plans on migrant integration and inclusion, Traveller and Roma inclusion and gender equality recognise the need to focus resources and special measures on minoritised women in particular. The EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027) places a renewed focus on migrant participation and gender equality. It encourages states to ensure inclusion through "targeted and tailored support", "mainstreaming gender" and that funding models should place "emphasis on long-term integration". Similarly, the third pillar of the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation for 2020-2030 focusses on political participation, particularly for Traveller and Roma Women. The Irish MIS and NTRIS expired at the end of 2021 and there are plans for a follow-on strategy which should reflect the renewed focus on intersectionality, anti-racism and political inclusion that is evident at the EU level.

Section 2: Quota Models

Informal Modes of Representation

The Interparliamentary Union (IPU) reported in 2010 that 40 per cent of respondent countries surveyed had special electoral measures in place for the political representation of minorities, the majority of which were reserved seats (Protsyk 2010). Other special measures such as "exemptions from electoral thresholds, appointments, demarcation of constituency boundaries, quotas, and others" were utilised less frequently (Protsyk 2010). Some countries have introduced more informal forms of minority representation. In Canada, for example, providing indigenous groups with representation through self-governing agreements has been "uneven" at best (Williams and Schertzer 2019). The Sámediggi (Sámi Parliament) in Norway, elected through direct elections in seven constituencies, is another example of a self-governing arrangement. It is primarily advisory in nature, although it does have some policy-making powers in areas that are particularly relevant to the Sámi peoples. However, state recognition and respect for the Sámi peoples and the Sámi Parliament is weak and state control over the functions and powers of the Sámi Parliament creates a tension between the Sámi and the majority population and within the group itself (Williams and Schertzer 2019). Kymlicka (1995) argues that these models of self-government involve a transfer of power from the majority to the minority group but often result in reduced influence of the minority on issues that may affect them in the legacy legislative body. Therefore, a more successful remedy is the introduction of ethnic or diversity quotas, either at a legislative level or internally within parties.

Legislative Quotas

Quotas or reserved seats have proved to be an important tool for increasing the political participation of ethnic minorities in some countries (Tan 2021; Hughes 2011; Bird 2014, 2016; Handley 2020). Remedies for the underrepresentation of women "differ systematically" from those used for ethnic minorities: quotas are common for women whereas ethnic reservations or reserved seats are more common for ethnic minorities (Htun 2004). Although Krook and O'Brien (2010) found that in some cases both ethnic minorities and women receive the same remedies, "contextual factors, rather than group characteristics, influence choices of quota design" (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2014).

Some form of ethnic minority, or diversity, quota system is in use in over 35 countries worldwide (Tan 2021). The implementation of ethnic quotas varies depending on the context with "no two implementations … completely alike" (Vukelic 2012). While the introduction of ethnic minority quotas at least provides descriptive representation, the way in which it is designed can have profound implications for the representation of ethnic minoritised women (Bird 2014). In some circumstances, the presence of ethnic minority quotas and/or gender quotas (either at a legislative or voluntary party level) can provide benefits to minoritised women (Mugge et al 2019). However, in many instances, particularly where the ethnic minority and gender quotas are standalone or "tandem" quotas (Hughes 2011; Bird 2016), minoritised women continue to be at an electoral disadvantage when compared to either majority-population women or ethnic minority men (Hughes 2011; Bird 2016). This reinforces the damaging perception that minority men are better representatives of minorities and that majority-population women are more effective representatives of women (Bird 2014; Bird 2016; Krook and O'Brien 2010).

The Interaction Between Gender and Ethnic Minority Quotas

Scholars have found that in countries where minoritised women have benefitted from standalone gender or ethnic minority quotas, the multiple advantage is not structural, but rather it arises from political parties' vote-seeking and shifting attitudes to gender and diversity (Mugge 2016). Conversely, when gender and ethnic minority quotas are implemented inclusively and intersectionally, they can change perceptions and shape behaviours. While quotas send positive symbols about the group that they are targeting, unless they are nested, they may not send a positive signal of "intersectional inclusiveness" (Bird 2016). Ethnic minority and gender quotas that are "nested", however, have proven more successful in increasing the representation of minoritised women (Bird 2016; Hughes 2011).

District Magnitude

In some jurisdictions, gender and ethnic quotas are described as "partially nested/partially independent" (Bird 2016, p. 291). This is due to the low number of seats reserved for ethnic minority parties which, although subject to gender quota rules, in effect result in the election of as low as one ethnic minority candidate, who is usually male, thus nullifying the effect of the gender quota. Increasing the size of the districts or constituencies so that more seats are allocated to minorities provides better opportunities to minoritised women (where there is also a gender quota in place). Similarly, increasing the numbers of reserved seats allocated to minorities should have a similar effect. An example of the former is New Zealand where single member districts were replaced with mixed-member proportionality in 1996. This resulted in higher numbers of Maori elected to the legislature. This in turn created an environment in which a new party could be formed, the Maori Party, which has managed to capture seats previously held by the Labour Party. The increase in overall representation of Maoris has led to a higher proportion of Maori women elected despite the absence of a gender quota (Bird 2016). Where the reserved seats are higher and also subject to a gender quota, minority women *should* fare better.

Thus, the mechanism through which an ethnic quota is applied produces different "representational dynamics" (Bird 2014, p. 13) depending on the context. Bird (2014) categorised legislative measures into three distinct "families" of ethnic quotas: threshold exemptions for ethnic parties; pan-ethnic party quotas; and special electoral districts. Threshold exemptions are generally not conducive to the election of minoritised women, and tend to lead to co-option of minority representatives by government. While pan-ethnic party quotas can ensure that ethnic candidates are included proportionately, they tend to be dominated by the election of minority men unless an intersectional approach is taken in the design of the quota. When ethnic minority quotas interact with gender quotas, ethnic minority women can experience a "double advantage" electorally, whereby parties are more likely to nominate them because they satisfy both the gender and the ethnic minority quota (Hughes 2011; Mugge 2016; Mugge et al 2019).

Special Electoral Districts

Special electoral districts (SEDs) guarantee political representation by creating a district (constituency) for minority interests. There are two broad categories of SEDs: restricting who can vote in the District, and restricting who can become a candidate in the District. India falls into the latter category. India reserves seats in Parliament for both scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST). While STs tend to be geographically concentrated, SCs are more geographically dispersed and are often in fact in the minority in districts reserved for SC candidates (Handley 2020). For ST reservations, the candidate elected is accountable to the group, which comprises the majority of the electorate. Whereas, for SC reservations, the candidate is in fact accountable to non-SC voters as SCs comprise the minority of the electorate.

There is evidence that this makes a difference. STs have benefited from reductions in poverty, and higher spending on education and welfare whereas, SC communities have not seen similar benefits (Chin and Prakash, 2011; Pande, 2003). Similarly, in Bolivian indigenous districts, voters are not restricted (Williams and Schertzer 2019). Any Bolivian citizen may vote in either the indigenous district or the general electoral district. The districts, therefore, lack "strong institutional mechanisms" to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, and organisations have criticised them, suggesting that they are insufficient to meet the needs and objectives of indigenous peoples (Williams and Schertzer 2019).

Maori SED in New Zealand

The most effective form of this system, in terms of minority representativeness, is where voters are restricted and the SEDs are embedded *within* the regular system. This is the case in New Zealand where special districts for Maori representation are embedded within multi-member-proportional (MMP) districts. Bird summarises the New Zealand example well:

> *"The New Zealand example suggests that where an ethnic community is geographically dispersed, embedding special ethnic districts within a mixed-member system presents several advantages. In addition to ensuring a minimum number of ethnic representatives via reserved seats, the added list procedure facilitates the election of smaller ethnic parties and simultaneously produces a new incentive for vote-seeking mainstream parties to demonstrate that they are ethnically inclusive. Cumulatively, this should result in genuinely more inclusive deliberations on issues that concern ethnic groups." (Bird 2014, p. 23)*

New Zealand has managed to ensure both "inclusivity and accountability" (Handley 2020) by restricting the voters who elect the Maori representative(s). Moreover, it would appear that the introduction of Maori constituencies have increased the saliency of Maori issues within the general political discourse. While the Maori districts comprise a total of seven seats for Maori representatives, 25 Maori MPs were elected in 2020 across the Maori and general constituencies.[81] Maori people opting to vote on the Maori roll is also increasing with every "option"[82] from 163,310 in 1997 to 247,494 in 2018. This increase is not a displacement of Maori from the general to the Maori role as it coincided with a similar increase in the number of Maori registering to vote on the general roll, from 141,229 in 1997 to 224,755 in 2018.[83] This suggests that as more and more Maori MPs are elected to Parliament, voter participation of Maori people also increases. As demonstrated by the case of India, restricting the candidates only produces a responsive and accountable representative of minority groups if the minority population is geographically concentrated. When creating minority districts, the distinction, and the differences in terms of policy outcomes, between descriptive and substantive representation is key. Minority groups are seeking more than simply inclusivity in election processes; they also demand that representatives act in the group's "interests" (broadly defined) and are capable of being held accountable by the group. Where the minority population is geographically dispersed, accountability is more effective when voters are restricted (Handley 2020).

Distinct Remedies for Traveller Women

Ethnic minority women are not a homogenous group and require distinct positive action measures to ensure that they have meaningful access to political office. While nested quotas may be beneficial for some ethnic minority and migrant women, a more substantive system of guaranteed representation may be necessary for Traveller women (Pavee Point/National Traveller Women's Forum

81 https://teara.govt.nz/en/graph/47382/ethnic-diversity-of-mps.

82 Maori people have the option to vote either on the Maori roll or the general roll every five years. Maori seats are calculated proportionately based on the numbers opting to vote on the Maori roll.

83 https://www.elections.nz/democracy-in-nz/what-is-an-electoral-roll/what-is-the-maori-electoral-option/.

2017; CERD 2020; CEDAW 2017). Literature on minority representation often conflates the experiences of indigenous groups with those of other ethnic minorities (Williams and Schertzer 2019). While ethnic minorities (excluding Travellers) and migrants are often seeking inclusion within the existing political system and structures, *Traveller and Roma claims for representation are grounded in the historical and continuing discrimination and marginalisation by society and the State*. The socio-economic marginalisation that Travellers and Roma people experience in Ireland, much like Roma communities across Europe,[84] is deeply engrained in society and in the political system (Zevnik and Russell 2020; Zevnik and Russell 2021; Oireachtas 2021b). Understanding that the claims made from Traveller and Roma people, and those made by other ethnic minority and migrant groups, are different, is important in designing mechanisms to address the various claims. An effective form of political empowerment should address historical discrimination and institutional racism against Travellers by ensuring that Travellers and Traveller culture is both recognised and protected (Williams and Schertzer 2019).[85]

Reserved Seats for Roma in Slovenia

The practice of reserving seats for minorities at the local and national level are "designed to improve political presence of identified groups" (Zevnik and Russell 2020). These practices are often tied to ethnic conflict or addressing distinct forms of marginalisation that often make it impossible for members of a particular group to be electorally successful. Slovenia provides reserved seats for Roma at the local level and evidence has shown that this has resulted in positive change for the Roma peoples (Bačlija and Haček 2012). However, in other jurisdictions the implementation of reserved seats for Roma has not provided Roma with proportional representation and has resulted in no real tangible power or influence being ceded to Roma representatives (Bačlija and Haček 2012). As noted later, the numbers of seats available in a quota or reservation is crucial. It is equally important that the representative is accountable to the group; as discussed above, this can be satisfied more appropriately by the creation of special electoral districts.

Conclusion

While gender quotas contribute to an increase in representation of women generally, they have not been shown to lead to an increase in minoritised women. Similarly, ethnic minority quotas tend to disproportionately benefit minority men. Nested or tandem quotas have been shown to be the most effective form of quota regime to increase the representation of minoritised women in politics. The introduction of an ethnic minority quota in circumstances where a gender quota exists can lead to a "double advantage" for ethnic minority women, who satisfy both the gender and the ethnic minority quota or demands for increased diversity on candidate lists. The most optimum quota regime for minoritised women appears to be one in which gender and ethnic minority quotas are "nested". In other words, where the gender quota has an ethnic minority quota embedded within it and/or vice versa. While either the introduction of a standalone ethnic minority quota accompanied by the expansion of the gender quota to the local level, or the introduction of a nested quota regime at the local level, should increase the numbers of minoritised women selected to contest elections by parties, it is unlikely to have the same effect for Traveller representation. Traveller representation is "an issue hiding in plain sight" for parties which have yet to develop sustainable outreach to Traveller communities. In addition, Travellers face a numerical disadvantage that neither majority-population candidates nor other ethnic minority and migrant groups face that

84 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Roma and Travellers in Six Countries (2020) [available at https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-roma-travellers-six-countries_en.pdf].

85 Such is the trauma inflicted upon Traveller and Roma people across Europe that it has been recommended elsewhere that a truth and reconciliation-style process should begin in some EU countries. Members of the Traveller and Roma community were split on whether this would help or hinder integration and trust; however, it is instructive that such a process is now being discussed at the highest political level (European Parliament 2019).

makes it exceptionally difficult, particularly when we consider the level of discrimination and marginalisation that Travellers face from the settled population, for a Traveller candidate to reach the threshold for election in most LEAs. For this reason, a SED may be a more equitable remedy for

Travellers to ensure that they are represented at all levels of governance. Depending on the numbers of seats allocated to the SED, it is worth considering a "best loser" seat for women if no women reach the threshold for election in the district.

Section 3: Local Council -Representative Bodies

Local Government in Ireland

The Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) is the main representative organisation for local councillors in Ireland. This organisation is a networking, policy development and training resource for the elected members of Ireland's thirty-one Local Authorities. It has developed a platform to support women councillors in the context of modernising working conditions and renumeration of councillors. It also provides a range of technical and expertise-based training opportunities and supports for its members as well as advocating for their interests. This organisation had been through a process of renewal, including surveying members to create a suite of training and orientation supports. Representing a diverse range of constituents was challenging; as one representative commented, *"all politics is local and there will always be a tension between what you can deliver in a training course and demands that specific local dynamics create."*

The AILG surveyed its members in 2018 on their working lives revealing gendered experiences of the councillor role and problems associated with the structure and scheduling of council activities. Recent initiatives including the *"AILG Pathway to the Provision of Maternity Leave for Local Authority Elected Members"*[86] indicate a focus on the retention of female councillors by promoting more family-friendly terms and conditions. Representatives from AILG were clear that being a local councillor had become an increasingly complex, technical and demanding role. While some changes were in process on foot of the Moorhead Report on the Role and Remuneration of Local Authority Elected Members,[87] there was an issue with low levels of female representation and a lack of diversity. Its female former President was clear that it is essential *"to establish a structure and culture of supporting women"*, to include a review of meeting times, family-friendly leave, and the position paper on maternity leave. There was also support for women's caucuses including, given the low percentages of women in some areas, a clustering of regional caucuses. Fundamentally the central issue was *"retention, to create support over time."* Women's, including minoritised women's, access to local office was acknowledged as particularly challenging *"in rural contexts where you had a stronger, more loyal following."* It was suggested that it might be easier to campaign in urban contexts. The shift to remote working due to the Covid-19 pandemic *"may suit some women"*. However, it would not necessarily be accepted as a permanent feature as it had implications for councillors' capacity to access resources. That said, a recent survey has confirmed that the majority of councillors sought to maintain a hybrid model.[88]

The organisation had also surveyed members in 2021 on threats, harassment, and intimidation in public life.[89] The survey results included that almost three quarters of respondents had experienced abuse and intimidation; most were unprepared for these experiences which included threats of physical and sexual violence. Just under half of those who responded indicated they were considering leaving their role as a result and most

86 http://ailg.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AILG-Maternity-Leave-Paper-2021-Final-Version.pdf.
87 http://ailg.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/councillor-review-report-final-moorhead-report.pdf.
88 http://ailg.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AILG-Zoom-Report-on-the-Role-of-Video-Conferncing-in-Supporting-Local-Government-16.11.2021.pdf.
89 http://ailg.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AILG-CMGsurveyreport.pdf.

were unhappy with the protections that were in place. Almost 60% respondents were female, with racist and sexist abuse, including sexual advances by text message, recorded as a common form of intimidation. The AILG had also initiated working groups on diversity on PPNs and Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and it was recognised that these structures of local governance may need to change their standing orders to ensure more diversity. Overall, there was a sense that *"there was a job of work to be done"* to address the imbalance in gender and diversity within local authorities.

Local Government in the United Kingdom

Local government associations across the United Kingdom support councillors and local authorities through training, information sharing and substantive policy development (LGA 2019).[90] These organisations combine the role of representing local councillors as well as the local authority with party-political groups included in their organisational structures. The Local Government Association of England (LGA) counts most of the district, county and metropolitan councils and unitary authorities among its members as well as the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) as an associate member. A core aim of the LGA is to "influence and set the political agenda on the issues that matter to councils" at the national government level. It provides a range of training and leadership programs to councils as well as a hub for information gathering[91] and sharing of best practice[92] between councils. Equality, representation, and diversity are stated as key priorities of Scotland's local government association, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). It is stated that it is committed to "developing the diversity of local elected representatives, addressing barriers, and encouraging and supporting a wider range of people to vote and come forward as candidates, and identifying changes in culture and practices that further open up Scotland's democracy."[93] In this regard, it has produced a joint action plan with the Scottish Government on "Improving the Lives of Gypsy/Travellers: 2019-2021" with specific implementation responsibilities.[94]

The WLGA also provides training and support services for councillors. It recently published a range of actions and commitments to diversify local government in the run up to the local elections in 2022,[95] including encouraging political parties to improve diversity using voluntary quotas and producing a "Diversity Declaration" for local councils to sign. The WLGA "Be a Councillor" website[96] provides -learning tools, advice, videos and case studies about the role of a councillor. The Northern Ireland Local Government Association participated in joint efforts with the other associations. For example, the local government associations of the four UK regions have jointly produced resources on addressing intimidation and discrimination of councillors, including a model Councillor Code of Conduct, a Councillors Guide to Handling Intimidation, and resources on dealing with social media abuse.[97]

Strategic Migration Partnerships

The UK Government has established a fund for Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) at the local level funded by and independent of the Home Office. The role of SMPs is to "coordinate and support delivery of national programmes in asylum and refugee schemes as well as agreed

90 https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/11.152_Equalities_toolkit_v06.pdf.
91 https://lginform.local.gov.uk/.
92 https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies.
93 https://www.cosla.gov.uk/about-cosla/our-approach.
94 https://www.gov.scot/publications/improving-lives-scotlands-gypsy-travellers-2019-2021/pages/1/.
95 http://www.wlga.wales/promoting-diversity-among-councillors.
96 http://www.beacouncillor.wales/.
97 https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/civility-public-life. See also https://www.wlga.wales/social-media-and-online-abuse.

regional and devolved migration priorities".[98] They work at the local and regional level to provide a "strategic leadership, advisory and coordination function on migration" and to ensure "a coordinated approach to migration and the sharing of relevant information and good practice".[99] In addition to having a local coordination and leadership function, SMPs are stated to communicate directly with the Home Office on issues of concern to migrants in the area, in steering group meetings with stakeholders, and are tasked with contributing to national migration policy. Home Office funding is provided via an annual grant and payment is dependent upon the achievement of key performance indicators agreed between the Home Office and the SMP. The 12 SMPs across the UK[100] are administered by local government associations and coordinate the efforts of the local authorities within their area, but also collaborate with each other with the stated aim to improve policy outcomes and share best practice. As part of the SMP, Scotland's COSLA has set up an information hub for migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and Traveller and Roma.[101] COSLA also has a role in the implementation of a range of local initiatives aimed at the integration and inclusion of refugees at the local level through the SMP.[102] One of its stated key priorities is to improve the representation of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma people at the local level.[103]

98 https://smp.eelga.gov.uk/#:~:text=Strategic%20Migration%20Partnerships%20(SMPs)%20are,regional%20and%20devolved%20migration%20priorities.
99 https://smp.eelga.gov.uk/about-us/.
100 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1006473/SMP UKmap.pdf.
101 http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/.
102 http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/uploads/19-12-05%20-%20Scottish%20New%20Scots%20Integration%20Case%20Studies.pdf.
103 http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/our-priorities/current-work/gypsy-travellers.

Section 4: Training Programmes: International Exemplars

Introduction

In this section, we outline some of the training programmes available in other countries that are directed solely or predominantly at minoritised women. The first part outlines some of the main American programmes. *Higher Heights* and *Black Women Organized* target exclusively Black Women while *Ready to Run* has dedicated programmes for African-American women, Asian-American women and Latinas. The programmes are generally designed by and for, or receive substantial input from, members of the ethnic/racial group that they are targeting. Much like the Irish training programmes, they have been agile during the Pandemic and moved many of their courses online. Costs vary for the courses but many offer scholarships on a case-by-case basis. The target of these organisations, though, is generally elite Democratic women (although some make claims that they are non-partisan).

Re:Power USA focusses on the community and grassroots level, and particularly emphasises the need to include women at the intersection of marginalised groups. *New American Leaders* offer training and support services to immigrants in the USA while *Emerge USA* is clear that it is exclusively for Democratic women. What sets the American programmes apart from Irish training organisations is the level of funding available to them for some their partisan links and the linkages they have created with academia through dedicated research centres. Many of the American programmes also have a political action committee affiliated with them so they are in a position not just to train aspirants and candidates, but to actually fund their campaigns.

Political campaign funding is also made available, albeit to a much lesser extent, to British women of colour through the *Activate Collective*. Activate work closely with some of the British training organisations, in particular *Elect Her* with whom it has developed a bespoke training programme for aspirants who wish to apply for campaign funding. A feature of the British programmes that we have seen in Ireland but to a lesser degree is the level of cooperation between the different training bodies. The Fawcett Society has created an a broad coalition of organisations[104] to curate a three-year training programme that utilises the specific expertise of each of the organisations.

Traveller Initiatives in the UK

While it was difficult to find specific political training programmes for Travellers in the UK, several organisations run initiatives to increase the political participation of Travellers. *London Gypsies and Travellers* supports Gypsies and Travellers in London to gain greater influence in decisions that affect their lives and create better opportunities to gain representation. It has created a forum in which Gypsies and Travellers have an opportunity to meet with London Assembly Members to discuss issues facing their communities.[105] A hustings event held by the organisation in March 2021, in which it demanded a voice for Gypsies and Travellers in the London Assembly, was attended by representatives from all the major political

104 https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/fawcett-leads-ground-breaking-campaign-to-transform-womensrepresentation.

105 http://www.londongypsiesandtravellers.org.uk/london-travellers-forum/.

parties.[106] It also produces Traveller manifestos in advance of critical elections in London.[107] The *Traveller Movement UK*, inspired by *Operation Black Vote,* launched *Operation Traveller Vote* in 2014 to help Travellers, Gypsies and Roma to understand and engage more with the political process. The campaign encourages Travellers to register to vote but also provides information on candidates and political parties so that Travellers can make informed decisions.[108] The Scottish Government-funded initiative, "Gypsy/Traveller Women's Voices", launched as part of its "Improving the Lives of Gypsy/Travellers: 2019-2021" plan, aims to bring Gypsy and Traveller women together with the aim of "recognising, enhancing and developing skills and strengths to promote themselves into leading roles within their community at individual, societal and political levels."[109] *Friends, Families and Travellers* (FFT) has a reporting mechanism on its website whereby people can report a politician of any party for the use of anti-Traveller racist language or comments.[110] FFT also acts as the secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma which "provides a forum for parliamentarians concerned about issues facing Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities and seeks to address these issues and challenge inequalities."[111]

Moldova Roma Women's Political Training

Despite facing high levels of marginalisation in Moldova, a training program for Roma women co-hosted and co-funded by UN Women Moldova resulted in the election of the first Roma woman to local office in 2014. In fact, two Roma women were elected in that year. This demonstrates the importance of specific and tailored training programs for marginalised women. In 2019, a similar program resulted in six women being elected. The program, *Roma Women in Politics*, was specifically targeted and tailored to Roma women and focused on capacity building, mentorship, coaching and awareness-raising. It was delivered to 39 Roma women across the country, 15 of whom ran for elected office.[112]

Roma Political Schools

Roma Political Schools were established in 2017 under a joint initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Commission and have now been rolled out in several countries across Europe. The objective of the schools is to "foster the political participation of Roma … [and] bring [them] closer to local, national and European decision-making bodies".[113] The content of the schools, and the trainers and speakers who deliver it, is tailored to the needs of Roma and "strive to create a roadmap and a mentoring scheme for all those participating".[114]

Higher Heights

Higher Heights for America[115] was set up in 2011 with the aim of increasing the political presence of Black Women in elected office through training of candidates and voter participation campaigns.

106 http://www.londongypsiesandtravellers.org.uk/news/2021/04/22/a-mayor-for-all-londoners/.
107 http://www.londongypsiesandtravellers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/London-Gypsy-and-Traveller-Manifesto-for2021-Mayoral-Elections-.pdf.
108 https://travellermovement.org.uk/operation-traveller-vote/
109 https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c06d635506fbe62ec834460/t/5c90dfb0a4222fe60ccb5b2b/1552998326589/Womens+Voices+Launch+Review+v2.pdf.
110 https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/campaigns/challenging-anti-gypsy-language-in-politics/.
111 https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/our-flagship-projects/appg/.
112 Duminica, "Political participation and representation of Roma women in Moldova: CEDAW Shadow Report", January 2020, available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/MDA/INT_CEDAW_CSS_MDA_41093_E.docx.
113 Council of Europe, Roma Political Schools: Promoting Roma Political Participation and Civic Engagement [available at https://rm.coe.int/roma-political-schools-23112021-en/1680a4a2e0].
114 Council of Europe, Roma Political Schools: Promoting Roma Political Participation and Civic Engagement [available at https://rm.coe.int/roma-political-schools-23112021-en/1680a4a2e0].
115 www.higherheightsforamerica.org.

Its #BlackWomenLead program provides training through a toolkit and online political leadership program in which Black Women are given the opportunity to network with fellow members. The program runs a weekly virtual meetup where members can discuss current affairs and advocacy and community work. The #BlackWomenVote[116] initiative is a vote-activation campaign which encourages voters to get informed, engage and to take action. Higher Heights runs a political action committee (PAC)[117] that is dedicated to electing progressive Black Women at all levels of government. The PAC endorses and directly funds its candidates and has worked with prominent women of colour such as Stacey Abrams and Vice President Kamala Harris. The Higher Heights Leadership Fund is "building a national civic engagement infrastructure and network to strengthen Black Women's leadership capacity".[118] It also engages in research and partners with the *Centre for American Women in Politics* and others to produce annual research on Black Women in politics.[119]

Ready to Run Diversity Initiative

Ready to Run is a non-partisan national network of campaign training programs aiming to attract more women of colour into politics in elected office, appointed positions and as campaign managers. They run three separate pre-training programs before participants progress to the Ready to Run campaign training school. The pre-training programs target African-American women (Run Sister Run), Asian-American women (Rising Stars) and Latinas (Elección Latina). The pre-training programs are half-day sessions that target specific issues of interest to the racial identity of the women. The Ready to Run program features sessions on: how to run for office; fundraising and media skills; advice from experts; strategies for positioning oneself; advice on launching a campaign; a better understanding of party politics; and internet strategies for political campaigns.[120] The flagship New Jersey program has trained over 4,000 women.

Black Women Organized for Political Action (BWOPA)

Established in the 1960s, *BWOPA's* mission is to "activate, motivate, promote, support and educate African-American women about the political process" and facilitate and encourage their involvement at all levels of government.[121] They do this through the advocacy and voter activation work of the main organisation, BWOPA; by providing leadership, training and mentoring to African-American women to ensure their participation in electoral politics through their sister program, the *Training Institute for Leadership Enrichment* (TILE);[122] and by providing financial support to candidates through their PAC.[123] TILE's flagship training program, the Dezie Wood Jones Fellowship Initiative, is an intense 13-week program for young leaders aged between 25 and 35 to prepare them for corporate and political leadership roles. TILE also runs a 3-day professional development program for women who are in leadership positions and wish to advance up the career ladder.

Re:Power USA

Re:Power[124] focusses on identifying existing leaders in local communities with an emphasis on women of colour and those who are at the intersection of marginalised groups. Re:Power's leadership team, staff, board and trainers are dominated by

116 www.blackwomenvote.com.
117 www.higherheightsforamericapac.org.
118 www.higherheightsleadershipfund.org/about-us/.
119 www.higherheightsleadershipfund.org/reports/.
120 cawp.rutgers.edu/programs/ready-runr/ready-runr-new-jersey.
121 www.bwopatileleads.org.
122 www.traininginstituteonline.org.
123 www.bwopapac.com.
124 www.repower.org.

women of colour. Their work is rooted in community leadership and activism with a focus on building political power, expanding the definition of justice to include intersectional exclusion and using technology as a tool to "build power with diverse leaders" from the grassroots level.[125] They offer capacity building and training "for the progressive movement" focusing on activism, civic engagement and progressive governance, and claim to offer "a different narrative of who is a leader [and] who participates in politics".[126] They offer campaign support, strategic planning and capacity building for grassroots activism as well as a suite of training programs for candidates running for, or thinking of running for, office. They also run a training program for those in elected office through its Progressive Governance Academy (PGA).[127] The PGA provides technical expertise, training and mentorship for progressive elected officials who align with their values, including at least 40 training sessions every two years.

New American Leaders

New American Leaders (NAL)[128] is a training and advocacy organisation for the political participation and inclusion of immigrants and refugees in the USA. Sixty-five per cent of alumni who ran for office were successful. The training programs that NAL offers are specifically designed by and for "New Americans", defined as first or second-generation immigrants. While anyone can apply regardless of their immigration or citizenship status, priority is given to New Americans. Participants first participate in an introductory course, Ready to Lead, a 3-day course which covers speech writing, grassroots fundraising tactics and messaging techniques, and provides an opportunity to network with other New Americans across the country. While there is a cost to participate, NAL offer scholarships on a case-by-case basis. Successful participants of *Ready to Lead* can apply for the *Ready to Win* program which is aimed at candidates who plan to run for office within two years. There are two "tracks" in the Ready to Win program: the candidate fellowship and campaign leadership track. The candidate fellowship provides participants with media training, speech writing feedback and modules on messaging and connecting with voters. It is a more hands-on program in which participants receive peer mentoring and coaching and are provided with an elected mentor. The campaign leadership track is for women only and provides intensive training on campaign management. From the participants in the "Ready to" programs, NAL selects those with high potential to join the New American Fellows program which provides intense coaching and mentoring with NAL staff and elected officials, as well as monthly training sessions specifically tailored to the cohort.

Emerge America

Emerge America[129] is a women's political training organisation that targets, by contrast with the other training organisations discussed in this section, solely Democratic women. Participants must be members of the Democratic Party and sign up to its party platform. Its signature program consists of a 6-month course with 70 hours of training in total covering public speaking, fundraising, media, networking, campaign strategy, field operations, labour and endorsements, technology and social media, cultural competency and ethical leadership. It also runs introductory shorter courses for women who are unsure if they would like to run. It does not provide campaign funding for alumni and does not provide any scholarship funding to pay for its courses, although participants are permitted to use campaign funding to pay.

125 www.repower.org/values.
126 www.repower.org/our-work-new-2/.
127 www.repower.org/pga/.
128 www.newamericanleaders.org.
129 www.emergeamerica.org.

Operation Black Vote

Operation Black Vote (OBV)[130] focuses "exclusively on the Black democratic deficit in the UK".[131] OBV have partnered with local authorities across the UK to launch unique Civic Leadership Programmes for future leaders who face racial inequalities. The programmes are designed to encourage ethnic minority communities to get more involved in political leadership. OBV has also organised MP shadowing schemes which incorporate "five-star training programmes" for each participant covering public policy, public speaking, media training, advocacy and lobbying.[132] It has developed political partnerships which have led some parties to adopt its "programme of recruitment, retention and promotion" of minority candidates.[133]

Elect Her UK

Elect Her UK offers training and support to women to help "demystify politics" and "support them as they move forward on their political journey".[134] It is a non-partisan organisation which runs free workshops, some of which are tailored to a particular ethnic identity or political ideology/party. It also runs peer support circles where like-minded women meet online every week for 1.5 hours to support each other in their political journey. All of the courses that it offers are free and are grouped into "phases": getting started, getting involved, ready to stand, selection and election and also specific supports designed for women of colour and disabled women.

Equal Power Campaign UK

The Equal Power campaign[135] is an initiative of the Fawcett Society in collaboration with the *Centenary Action Group, Citizens UK, Elect Her, 50:50 Parliament, Glitch* and the *Muslim Women's Network UK* to diversify politics in the UK at all levels. This programme aims to support women, particularly minoritised women, by training them on how to stand as an MP or local councillor, on community activism and on leadership. It includes peer support circles and mentoring opportunities. The training takes place online and is free.

Activate Collective UK

The Activate Collective[136] is a feminist movement that funds the political campaigns of women activists, with a focus on minority women representation. Activate has joined with Elect Her and Glitch to create a training programme "to support a pipeline of politically active women from under-represented groups" which covers activist and candidate training and support, and digital resilience.[137] Funding is available to women who sign up to its statement of principles which includes commitments to equality, inclusion and diversity. It also offers supports beyond financial supports including mental health support and personal development which is tailored to the individual's personal strengths and goals.

Equal Voice Canada Getting to the Gate campaign

Getting to the Gate was an online campaign aimed at women, particularly minoritised women, to increase women in elected office in Canada by providing an online toolkit. The toolkit comprised of

130 www.obv.org.uk.
131 www.pbv.org.uk/about-us/mission.
132 www.obv.org.uk/what-we-do/scheme-programmes-and-campaigns/mp-shadowing-scheme-2019-launch/mp-shadows.
133 www.obv.org.uk/what-we-do/scheme-programmes-and-campaigns.
134 www.elect-her.org.uk/faqs.
135 www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/equal-power.
136 www.timetoactivate.org.
137 www.timetoactivate.org/equip-her.

a Guidebook which outlined the "good, the bad and the ugly" of running for and holding political office in Canada. It was accompanied by an activity booklet to assist aspirants in designing their policy platform.

Migrants Organise

Migrants Organise[138] advocate for inclusion and integration of refugees and migrants in the UK. In 2014 and 2019 they initiated a voter activation campaign for migrant voters, Promote the Migrant Vote. They registered 6,000 voters in the Greater London Area in 2014 and built on this success with a national campaign in 2019 including a voter registration day held at Mosques around the country in collaboration with the Muslim Council of Britain. Migrants Organise caution against the use of generic messaging to migrants and instead advocate for specific messaging that targets issues that affect migrant communities and reaches them through their own community infrastructure. They have provided training to the Immigrant Council of Ireland.

Radical Girlsss

Radical Girlsss is the young women's network of the *European Migrant Women's Network*.[139] It conducted a research study on the enabling and constraining factors for migrant women (who include women seeking asylum, refugee women and immigrant women) in participating in European Union decision-making processes with a focus on young migrant women. The recommendations arising from the research included actions to be taken by governments, NGOs and associations, and civil society and grassroots organisations. It recommended the establishment of quotas and other temporary positive action measures for migrant women but cautioned that in implementing a quota system, contextual factors need to be considered. In addition, it recommended the creation of "favourable and enabling frameworks for young migrant women to participate in activities related to political life" in relation to childcare and financial support to attend meetings. It also recommended comprehensive data collection by all states disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity and legal status along with regular training sessions with civil servants who interact with migrant women. For NGOs it recommended the integration of migrant women in decision-making, the provision of support for migrant women's political participation through capacity-building programmes and accessible guidance on legal procedures, and to actively reach out to migrant women who may be less visible.

138 www.migrantsorganise.org/about-us/.
139 www.migrantwomennetwork.org/radical-girls.

Appendix & Bibliogrpahy

Appendix: Exemplar of Political Party Gender & Diversity Action Plan

Personnel
Encourage more women and minoritised women to run for public office
Provide training for women and minoritised women candidates/public officers
Meet parity at all party and institutional levels (including top positions) (with targets for diversity)
Make women and minoritised women public and party officers visible as well as their contributions
Promote women (men) in traditionally masculinised (feminised) portfolios
Elaborate annual reports on presence of women and minorities in party and public office, including candidate funding with gender breakdown
Set targets for minority, including Traveller, representation (with gender parity)
Policy
Mainstream gender and diversity in all political activities
Gather sex-disaggregated and ethnic identifier data in all areas of party work
Train members and public officers on gender equality, feminism and equality, diversity and inclusion
Carry out awareness-raising campaigns on gender, ethnic and racial inequalities
Incorporate women's rights, gender equality and diversity in party leaders' speeches
Review and expand candidate recruitment processes to engage underrepresented women in particular
Ring-fence funding for women and minoritised women
Introduce Code of Practice with zero tolerance for sexism and racism (including anti-Traveller racism) with sanctions for elected members who breach the Code
Organisational arrangements
Strengthen women's sections and diversity networks
Support women's and diversity networks
Gender auditing of party decision-making processes
Provide childcare and playrooms during meetings and conferences

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Different Paths, Shared Experiences:

Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics in Ireland

National Traveller Women's Forum

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