

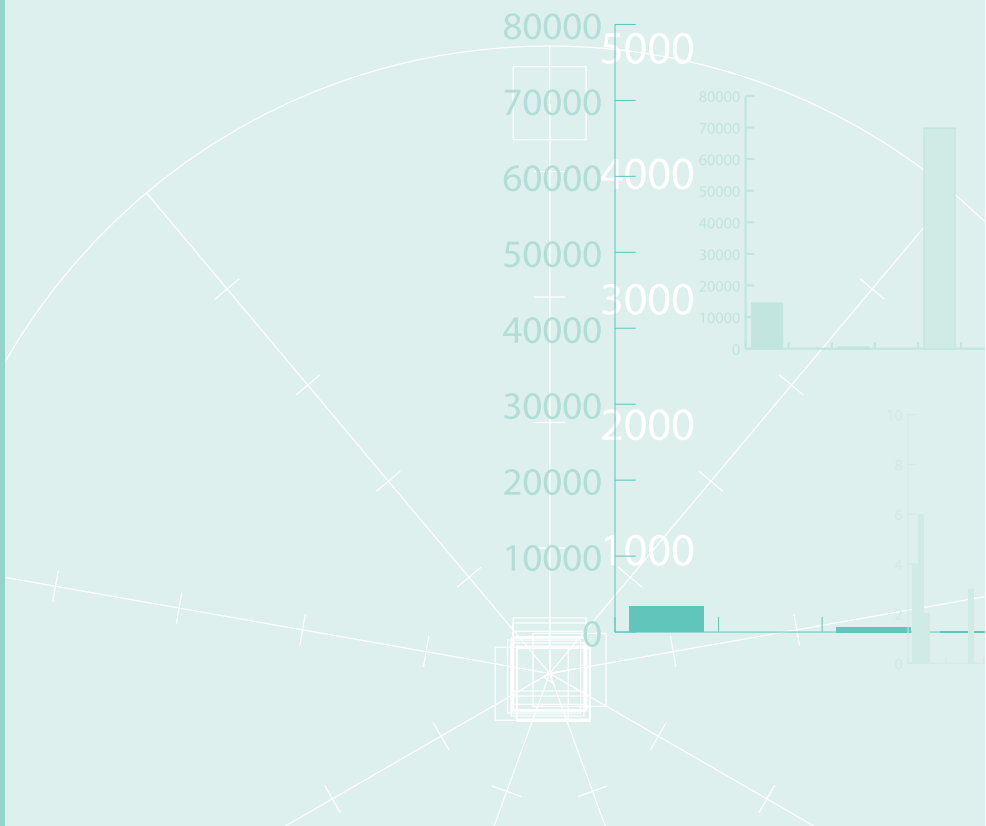


Independent Gender Equality Audit and Fianna Fáil Gender Equality Action Plan

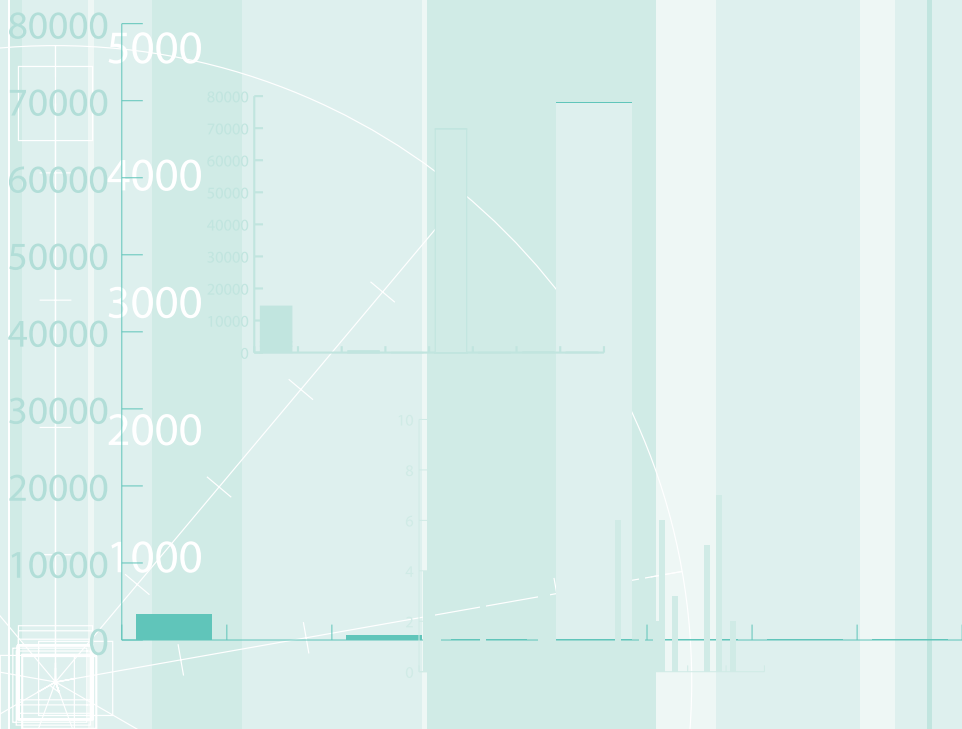
2004 – 2014

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Foreword



Ireland's democracy has deep roots in our society and culture. Politics is important to our people and is a constant topic of public debate and private discussion. It is to politics that people turn to mediate

issues of importance and contention. Yet, approximately one half of our entire population is grossly under-represented at almost every level of the body politic. In 2004, Irish politics is still largely 'a man's world.'

The very significant under-representation of women in political and public life impoverishes our democracy. It constricts the scope, the insight and the effectiveness of our public affairs. When we consider the progress that our country has made, we should consider, not only what has been done, but ask ourselves what else might have been achieved if the life experience and the talents of more women had been included? Irish women remain a largely untapped resource for the future development and fruition of Irish public life. This must change.

Fianna Fáil, The Republican Party, must lead that change. We must look firstly to ourselves and ask frankly why we, Ireland's largest political party, have not succeeded in attracting more women to become party officers and candidates for public office? This important Report has been commissioned by Fianna Fáil to ask this question and related questions about the experience of women within Fianna Fáil. It is intended that it will be the basis for an agreed and concerted

action plan to make our organisation more welcoming and more accessible to women at every level.

The very detailed research that has been undertaken in preparing this Report tells us a lot about our organisation. The networks of family, of work and of sport that support men in politics are less available to women. Fianna Fáil must now reach out and provide the networks of support and encouragement in our organisation that will ensure that more women succeed in politics. In theory, the Irish political playing pitch may be level but, in practice, it is a lot more difficult for women to get on to it.

The recommendations of the Steering Group form a practical action plan and will be considered by the National Executive and Ard Fheis. Aspiration will be translated into action. Positive steps will be taken to ensure effective access for women at every level of Fianna Fáil.

I thank the members of the Fianna Fáil Steering Group and Yvonne Galligan, Karin Gilland, George Lutz and Duncan Sutherland from the *Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics* at Queen's University, Belfast for their excellent research. It is a firm basis for action and progress in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bertie Ahern'.

An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, TD.
Uachtarán Fhianna Fáil

Fianna Fáil Gender Equality Action Plan 2004 – 2014

In 2003 Fianna Fáil decided to carry out a comprehensive Gender Equality Audit. A Steering Group was appointed to oversee the process with independent academic consultants at the Centre for the Advancement of Women in Politics at Queen's University, Belfast. The Steering Group considered the report (which is summarised in the following pages) and believes it to be a very valuable and constructive document. On the basis of the report, the following Gender Equality Action Plan has been formulated and is now being submitted to the Fianna Fáil organisation for formal adoption.

Fianna Fáil Gender Equality Action Plan, 2004-2014

Fianna Fáil will commit to implementing a 10-year action plan, with a 5-year mid-term review, containing a range of measures designed to support women members' participation in organisation and public decision-making.

As a first step, Fianna Fáil will strive to ensure that by 2006 Cumainn delegates to Comhairli Ceantair and to local and general elections candidate Selection Conventions, will comprise at least one woman from each cumann.

Fianna Fáil commits to the aim of having, by 2014, women comprising one-third of all candidates for local and general elections; women comprising one third of all party officers at Cumann, Comhairle Ceanntair and Comhairle Dailcheanntair levels.

In addition, by 2014, Fianna Fáil will seek to substantially increase the proportion of women acting as Constituency Delegates to the Ard Chomhairle (National Executive).

To assist in this action plan Fianna Fáil intends to:

- 1 Establish an Equality Task Force to monitor progress and to oversee the implementation of measures and actions as recommended in the Gender Equality Audit Report to meet the above targets. The Equality Task Force will consist of two Oireachtas members, the General Secretary, Ard Chomhairle National Womens' & Equality Forum Representatives, two members of the National Youth Committee and a member of the Organisational Department in Headquarters.
- 2 Devolve responsibility for gender equality within the Organisation to the Director of Organisation within each CDC. The responsibility of the Director of Organisation will be to carry out a comprehensive gender audit within the constituency on an annual basis, report these findings to the Organisational Department, and facilitate equal opportunities for women within: (a) the CC & CDC officers, (b) as Convention Delegates, (c) membership of the Ard Chomhairle and (d) nominees to candidates selection conventions.
- 3 Review selection rules and procedures to ensure that selection practices achieve to the highest equal opportunity standards.
- 4 The Organisational Department will monitor and co-ordinate all training and support measures for Directors of Organisation on Equality issues.
- 5 The Organisational Department will devise and implement training and support programmes, for example: public speaking, presentation and media skills etc, for women considering going forward for political office.
- 6 The Organisational Department will devise and implement a Mentor Scheme for women wishing to develop political careers.
- 7 The Equality Task Force will report to each Ard Fheis on progress achieved in meeting the above targets.

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The following is an indicative timetable for achievement of these gender equality targets.

Women's participation	Targets (%)				
	04'– 06'	06'– 08'	08'– 10'	10'– 12'	12'– 14'
Delegates:					
To Comhairle Ceantair (from Cumainn) ¹	33%	33%	33%	33%	33%
To Comhairle Dailcheantair (from CC.) ²	16.6%	16.6%	33%	33%	33%
To local and general election Selection Conventions	33%	33%	33%	33%	33%
Officers:					
Cumann	15%	20%	25%	30%	33%
Comhairle Ceantair	15%	20%	25%	30%	33%
Comhairle Dailcheantair	15%	20%	25%	30%	33%
Candidates & Constituency Delegate					
Local Elections			25%		33%
General Elections		20%		30%	
Constituency Delegates to Ard Chomhairle (National Executive) ³	8%	12%	17%	23%	30%
Other			Mid-term Review		Final Review

1 A Cumann sends 3 delegates to a C.C. 2 A CC. sends 6 delegates to a C.D.C. 3 There are 47 Constituency Delegates

Terms of Reference

This Report was commissioned by the Fianna Fáil Equality Audit Steering Group with the following terms of reference:

- 1 To prepare a survey questionnaire for the Equality Audit Steering Group to be administered to a representative sample of women members of Fianna Fáil and a sample of male members. The subjects to be examined are: (a) attitudes to women's representation within the Organisation, (b) identification of barriers to women members' advancement into political office and (c) identification of strategies for overcoming these barriers.

- 2 To analyse the survey results.
- 3 To develop recommendations, in association with the Equality Audit Steering Group, on a range of options for further consideration within the organisation.

Following discussions between the Steering Group and Queen's University Belfast Consultants on the terms of reference, it was agreed that women councillors be included as a specialised group to be surveyed given their unique perspective on office-holding.

Executive Summary

This survey of attitudes towards gender equality in Fianna Fáil was conducted between April and June 2003 among 2000 party members, with a particular focus on women members. With a response rate of 37 per cent to a postal questionnaire, the survey results yielded many interesting insights into the perceptions of ordinary members of women's opportunities for political advancement. The responses were altogether positive in encouraging more Party women to see themselves as potential candidates. In addition, the results clearly indicated a range of supportive measures Party members would be willing to see put in place to make Fianna Fáil a more woman-friendly political organisation. This summary highlights the most significant report findings and recommendations, the details can be found in the body of the report.

Demographics: The family profile of respondents was similar for women and men: the majority were married (66 per cent), with men slightly more likely to be married than women. Respondents had an average age of 53, had an average of 3 children, and generally lived in the constituency of their birth. The most common highest educational qualification was Leaving Certificate (24 per cent), followed by higher education certificate, diploma and technical qualifications (22 per cent). Women held slightly higher educational qualification than men.

In terms of economic circumstances, male members of Fianna Fáil were more likely to be the main income earner – 78 per cent of male respondents identified as such. Households where the female was the main income earner (38 per cent of female respondents) had a lower income level than their male counterparts.

Party Activities: The most frequent Party activities engaged in by members in a typical month were donating money to Party, contact with Party elected representatives and attendance at a Party meeting.

Men were more likely to engage in all three activities than women members.

Attitudes towards women in politics: Attitudes to women in politics in general were highly favourable, and it was clear that respondents recognised that women have an important contribution to make to political life. This was demonstrated by a majority of respondents, women and men, agreeing with all the attitude questions. Of those questions attracting the highest consensus, 83 per cent of women and 73 per cent of men agreed that more women in politics would make Ireland more democratic, while 84 per cent of women and 69 per cent of men agreed that more women in the Dáil would make a difference to the issues debated and decisions taken in that body. Respondents' strongly positive view of women as elected representatives carried over to their clear preference for seeing more women Party candidates come forward: men thought women should constitute 32 per cent of candidates, women put this at a slightly higher proportion of 39 per cent.

Obstacles to women's political participation: Respondents identified a range of structural and attitudinal inhibitors to women's political careers, with women viewing the obstacles as more significant than their male counterparts. Women, for instance, were more inclined than men to think that there was a reluctance within Fianna Fáil to choose women candidates for winnable seats (47 per cent of women, 38 per cent of men). In contrast, male respondents held more strongly to the view that Party women put their families before politics and that this was a major inhibitor to women's political ambitions (37 per cent as against 30 per cent). Women office-holders identified a generally chauvinistic attitude towards women within the Party that inhibited progress towards gender balance in electoral politics. This was expressed as a bias among selection delegates in favour of male candidates

(36 per cent) and because they did not have a network of local connections to call upon (35 per cent). Not surprisingly, women office-holders felt that the dearth of women delegates at selection meetings (84 per cent) constituted a serious obstacle to ensuring equal opportunities for women nominees at conventions.

Encouragements to a political career:

The most important factors encouraging a member to seek a nomination were supports from family and friends (88 per cent) and support from party members (83 per cent), and were equally significant for women and men. However, more men than women rated a family history in politics as encouraging a political career (55 per cent as against 47 per cent), while women valued other forms of political knowledge and experience such as familiarity with selection procedures (73 per cent as against 65 per cent) and involvement in a non-party women's organisation (56 per cent as against 35 per cent). Interestingly, 42 per cent of women office-holders came from political families and appreciated the supportive environment this provided for their careers.

Supportive measures: When asked to identify measures that would improve women members' opportunities for office-holding, considerable favour was given to the drafting of equality guidelines for the selection process (94 per cent women, 89 per cent men). In general, party members were prepared to consider a wide range of reform proposals that gave practical effect to supporting women candidates.

Once the selection hurdles were negotiated, women office-holders identified a lack of training in public speaking and presentation as an

important drawback in campaigning effectively (55 per cent), while experiencing problems in financing a campaign came in a close second (53 per cent). This latter finding is not wholly surprising, as few women in our sample identified as the main income earner, and women's income levels were less than those of male breadwinners. These politically experienced women were particularly sensitive to equality issues and were unanimous in their support of closer contact between party officials and women political hopefuls, media training for upcoming candidates and an equality review of selection rules and procedures.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This survey presents a picture of a Political Organisation that is willing to take a step forward in bringing about gender equality in political life. At present the proportion of women candidates, less than 10 per cent of all party flag-bearers in the 2002 general election, is far below the proportions grass-roots members deem desirable. Indeed, this research highlights the wide acceptance among Fianna Fáil women and men that women should have a more important part in politics. The findings from the research identify a range of obstacles to women's more active political involvement in the party – the lack of a support network for women considering political careers, childcare issues and not being chosen for winnable seats. Office-holding women further highlight a lesser access to campaign funding than is available to their male counterparts, the unsociable working hours of political life and (along with male respondents) suggest that women members give priority to their families. Yet, as the Report indicates, many of these impediments can be overcome – or ameliorated at least – through a commitment to implementing a wide range of measures designed to support women's political careers. For instance, encouraging good contacts and networks within the organisation could counterbalance the current perceived advantage of a family history in politics. Although there is less support for 'hard' measures with the potential to make a more substantial difference to women's presence as elected representatives, some hard measures were acceptable – such as allowing women to campaign across a constituency rather than being restricted to a defined area, a clearer influence of Fianna Fáil Headquarters in the nomination process or a special campaign encouraging votes for Fianna Fáil women.

It is evident that while there is grass-roots support for strategies encouraging gender equality, change must be initiated at leadership level and implemented

throughout the Organisation. The following recommendations arise from the survey findings and, if acted upon, would go a considerable way towards making Fianna Fáil a Political Organisation of equal opportunities for women and men.

- 1 A time-bound action plan led by Fianna Fáil leaders, covering a 10 year period with a major mid-term review, implementing a range of 'hard' and 'soft' measures designed to support women's participation in electoral politics.
- 2 The Party to set rolling targets for gender balance in nominations and candidate selection as an integral part of an action plan, with reviews after each election.
- 3 There is a clear demand from party women for a review of selection convention practices and procedures to eliminate the potential for gender discrimination. Guidelines regarding inappropriate discriminatory comments and observations against female candidates should be drawn up in tandem with this procedural review. All nominees and delegates would be apprised of these guiding principles prior to a selection convention. These reforms would facilitate in making selection rules transparent, combined to form a 'best practice' template to be followed at selection meetings.
- 4 The Party needs to find ways of encouraging women to become more actively involved in party affairs. Participation in party activities, including attendance at meetings and selection conventions, is one aspect of developing a political profile. One measure Fianna Fáil should consider is to require delegates to Comhairle Cheantair and Comhairle Dailcheantair and to selection meetings to comprise at least one woman. Even this small change to prevailing practice would help create a more supportive environment for women within the Party.

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- 5 The representation of women at national leadership level within the Party should be assessed with a view to increasing women's presence on the National Executive and other partywide bodies in proportion to their membership. This measure, as part of an integrated plan for women's political participation, would also assist in changing the party culture to being more woman-friendly while promoting women's party networks and socialising women with electoral potential into decision-making.
- 6 In addition to these measures, the survey analysis suggests that there is considerable scope for Fianna Fáil to devise and implement a wide variety of supportive initiatives. There is an unambiguous demand from women office-holders for regular regional meetings with party officers where senior party officials would listen and act on the needs of women political hopefuls. Indeed, commitment to such an action would help to diffuse the male bias of which party women complain and would also aid women's networking within the Party.
- 7 The issue of networking and building broad party networks as a counter to the perceived dominance of the 'family connection' emerges as a particular concern of women within the party. Taking this view into account calls for the party at all levels to create opportunities for women to expand their organisational networks and to be included in activities inside and beyond their constituencies where they can build networks to foster their political ambitions.
- 8 Fianna Fáil needs to carefully consider the structure within which gender equality is to be achieved. Ideally the objectives set for implementing a Gender Equality Programme, would be delivered in an integrated manner with equal opportunities between women and men forming a key consideration for all organisational processes and activities. In this regard an Equality Task Force should, in association with the Organisational Department at Headquarters take the lead in objective setting and monitoring of gender equality targets.
- 9 Survey respondents indicate that training for women political hopefuls is a priority. While a general training programme for women members is advocated, specific training on public speaking and presentation, and media skills are outstanding demands. These should be given serious consideration by party officers and delivered through the Party. A general training/development programme for women party members, along with specific training on public speaking, presentation, and media skills should be delivered through the Party.
- 10 Many respondents noted the lack of women's party networks and contacts as detracting from their desirability as candidates. In an effort to encourage politically talented women, a mentoring programme holds attractions. This mentoring can be at local, national or other level, as the need arises, where an experienced office-holder nurtures and supports the career of a woman hopeful from another constituency or local authority for a one-year period. Mentoring is a well-established technique in business and other leadership fields and is emerging in political life as a route through which women with political ambitions can clarify their aims and gain advice from more experienced women.

Appendix 1

Steering Committee

Committee Members

Maire Brady, *Chairperson*

Seán Dorgan, *General Secretary*

Dr. Yvonne Galligan

Senator Dr. Martin Mansergh

Averil Power

Sheila Quinn, WRC

Mary White, *Equality Officer*

