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[Blog article](#) by Naomi Roberts, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Women and participation in public life

In this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, diversity on public boards is needed more than ever. It is essential that all members of society have a voice to address the inequalities experienced in areas such as access to childcare, health, education and employment. Action is required both to address key inequalities and to remove the barriers experienced by equality groups to participation in public life.

With this pressing need in mind, in partnership with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, the Women's Resource Development Agency, Reclaim the Agenda and the Women's Policy Group, we hosted a discussion on Monday 19 October, with 16 women who hold or have held a position on the board of a community and voluntary sector organisation. It explored the barriers experienced by women and how they can be overcome.

The women spoke about their experiences and views, including the importance of demystifying the application process, addressing unconscious bias, confidence building and how IT and virtual meetings can be used to avoid the need to travel to Belfast for board meetings.

The partners will now be taking forward the work to support women in starting their journey to the decision-making table, through the creation of toolkits, training and further events. Once there, they can increase the impact of their voice and influence and contribution to the achievement of a more equal society.

The Equality Commission has long advocated diversity in public life to increase the voice and influence of under-represented groups. We will continue to call for an increase in diversity in government public appointments and to ensure early implementation of an action plan to achieve the Executive's 2016 target for gender equality in board and chair public appointments.

Read the Equality Commission's [policy priorities and recommendations for improving participation in public life](#)