



9 May 2022

[Blog article](#) by Deborah Howe, Senior Policy Officer, Equality Commission NI

NI Assembly Election 2022 Results

The Assembly election results have been historic in a number of respects, not least for the number of women elected. Whilst progress has been slow, we are no longer the region of the UK with the lowest percentage of women in elected positions.

Thirty-two women were elected here, up from 27 elected in 2017. Women now make up 35.5% of those elected to the NI Assembly. This is higher than in the UK Parliament (34.6% women) although still lagging behind the Welsh Assembly (43% women) and the Scottish Parliament (45% women). The election saw some parties running with women comprising 50% of their candidates although others were some way below this.

It was good to hear discussion of the need for more women in politics over the weekend, but there is clearly more work to be done to encourage and support women to stand for election.

An Assembly which is more representative of women in Northern Ireland is of benefit to us all. Decision-making is always better when diverse experiences are at the table. Of course, this diversity does not stop at gender. Our representatives should reflect our society in all ways – whether that is based on race, religion, disability, or gender. It brings with it wider perspectives and life experiences to influence legislation, public policy and overall scrutiny of those areas within the Assembly's competence.

Women need to be encouraged to make political life a career choice. There needs to be a framework of changes put in place to make it possible for women to make this choice.

It is striking that a number of MLAs who were not re-elected noted that this will give them time to spend with their families. The expectation of working long hours without access to appropriate childcare can make political life an impossible aspiration. A Childcare Strategy with the aim of providing flexible, accessible and affordable childcare is a must for families and especially women, including our politicians.

We must also protect women who put themselves forward for high profile positions. Cara Hunter MLA has described the abuse she was subjected to during her campaign as 'horrific'. She is by no means the only female candidate to report this.

A Belfast Telegraph survey reported in 2020 that 70% of women MLAs have had sexist remarks made to their faces, and three-quarters have experienced online sex-based abuse. Arlene Foster and Michelle O'Neill publicly agreed that misogyny exists in Northern Ireland's politics and Diane Dodds and Carla Lockhart have recently been in the news because of the abuse they have experienced, mainly on social media.

Whilst representation of women is slowly improving, there are no MLAs from minority ethnic groups, although they make up around 4% of our population. While people from minority ethnic groups are under-represented in legislatures across the UK, Northern Ireland has the worst record. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee recently noted that many people from minority ethnic communities here feel 'overlooked by politicians and policy makers'.

In general terms, a combination of factors are thought to influence the low number of minority ethnic candidates putting themselves forward, including barriers to a sense of belonging and not feeling able to participate free from discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes. Concerted action is needed to address these barriers by political parties, government departments, and by each of us as members of society.

Find out more about our recommendations on increasing diversity in political representation: [Participation in Public Life - Policy recommendations](#)