

Women urged to use vote and make their voices heard in local elections

Only 1% of the 949 county councillors around the country are from a migrant background and yet county councils are supposed to be a microcosm of the society they represent. Currently only 26% of county councillors in Ireland are female.

These were just some of the points raised at a Voter Education Workshop run by Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) in association with See Her Elected, the award-winning government-funded project which supports women from rural areas to become candidates in local elections.

Twenty five women from all over County Roscommon attended the voter education workshop, which was held in The Hub, Castlereagh, last week. Many of the women in attendance were from the Emergency Reception Orientation Centre (EROC) in Ballaghaderreen while others are resident in Frenchpark and Castlereagh. Some local women from Roscommon Women's Network joined women from Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and India to learn more about the Irish voting system.

Some of the women in attendance have lived in County Roscommon for more than 20 years while others are new to the area and were delighted to learn you don't have to be an Irish citizen to vote in the local elections this June. Workshop facilitator Lilianna Fernández explained that all you need is your PPS, Eircode, and date of birth and to be resident in the State and you can vote in the local elections by logging on to www.checktheregister.ie.

Some of the local issues raised from the Ballaghaderreen area included a lack of investment or employment for young people, the lengthy closure of the public library (which recently reopened at a temporary location) and a lack of sport facilities for young people including the on-



Mairead O'Shea, Lilianna Fernandez, and Abeer Al Hamoud at the recent Voter Education Workshop run by Roscommon Women's Network in association with See Her Elected in Castlereagh. Pictures: Liam Reynolds

going closure of the swimming pool.

As a previous trainer and integration officer at the Immigrant Council of Ireland, Lilianna Fernández has delivered training to raise awareness about migrant political rights and supported local authorities in the integration of migrants. Currently, she serves as a mentor for several migrant women running in local elections and is the director of the first National Voter Registration Day in Ireland, a national campaign to encourage minority groups to register to vote before the next local (and European) elections.

Aine Treanor, community development worker with RWN lead out the initiative to help empower women to make more informed decisions in this year's local and European elections.

RWN manager Nora



Princess Moyosade Oyinloya, and Terintope Rasheedat Adeinbigba at the workshop.

Fahy said: "In a year of referendums, local and European elections, and possibly a general election before end of the year, many of the women from diverse communities we work with have highlighted a need and desire to increase their awareness around what's happening in Irish politics. There was great feedback from the women who attended the workshop as it really helped to explain the Irish political system and provided all the information women need to make informed decisions."

Workshop topics included a brief history of voting in Ireland, reasons to vote, types of elections and voting rights, and the services local govern-

ment provides. The workshop answered questions such as what local councillors do and who can become a councillor. It explained the major political parties, the Irish electoral system, how to register to vote, issues related to the local elections in June and how to decide who to vote for.

A video commissioned by See Her Elected, which explains how the PR-STV voting system in Ireland works, also featured as part of the workshop. The video has been translated into Polish, Arabic, and Portuguese. An Arabic translator was also present on the day.

Roscommon woman Mairead O'Shea, communications manager with See Her Elected,



DeleOdeyemi, Aine Treanor, Md Saiful Islam, Lilianna Fernandez, Mohamed Harsi, and Mohd Lutfur Rahman at the Voter Education Workshop.

said the idea underpinning representative democracy is that it produces a county council that looks like the people living in the county.

"If we have a county council where there are not many women and little or no diversity then the council does not look like the society it represents. The council is also missing the lived experience and knowledge of women, those living with a disability, from different walks of life, as well as people who have moved here from somewhere else. All of these different perspectives, knowledge, and expertise could help feed into policy and decision making in Roscommon County Council," she said.



Masuma Mohadi at the recent Education Workshop.



Ibtissam Tizaoui and Ritaj Badaoui at the Voter Education Workshop run by Roscommon Women's Network.