

TWO INNOVATIVE IRISH PROJECTS REACH EU POLITICS AWARDS FINAL

Two Irish projects have reached the final of the European Innovation in Politics Awards, with the WoMeN's Regional Caucus and the Youth Travel Card initiatives selected in the Democracy Category. The eight overall category awards winners will be announced at a gala event on 11 May at the Palace of Culture in Warsaw, Poland.

Every year the Innovation in Politics Awards applaud creative European projects breaking new ground to find innovative solutions for today's challenges. Now in its sixth year, the awards continue to reward initiatives across Europe based on social balance, democracy, and human rights – regardless of party affiliation or level of government.

For the 2023 awards scheme, a total of 337 projects from 26 countries were evaluated by a citizens' jury of over 1,000 Europeans to determine the 80 finalists and winners across eight award categories – Democracy, Climate Protection, Democracy Technologies, Government Improvement, Social Cohesion, Local Development, Education and Party Innovation. The category winners will be announced and presented with their awards on 11 May at Warsaw's Palace of Culture.

WOMEN'S REGIONAL CAUCUS SHE (See Her Elected), the feminist, community led rural initiative supporting women to become county councillors, was Ireland's first award winner in 2021, in the Democracy Category.

The award was presented to SHE's Project Manager Dr Michelle Maher and Minister for Planning and Local Government Peter Burke TD, during a private ceremony in Brussels in early December 2021.

Now in the same category, two Irish projects – WoMeN's Regional Caucus and the Youth Travel Card – have been announced as this year's finalists.

The WoMeN's (Western, Midlands and Northern) Regional Caucus has been shortlisted as a finalist for the prestigious Innovation in Politics Awards in Europe. Caucus Chairperson Cllr Carmel Brady said that under the regional caucus it's the first-time women councillors from neighbouring counties have worked together to bring about change.

"They have created a space to try different work methods instead of adopting conventional ways of conducting politics. In the traditionally male dominated sphere of local politics in Ireland, female councillors inherit time-honoured ways of conducting politics. These are neither family-friendly, nor lend themselves to making politics a particularly appealing career choice for women.

"The innovative activities of the caucus show how female councillors from an entire region working collectively can make a difference for women in local politics, improve policymaking and strengthen local democracy," noted Cllr Brady.

Members of the WoMeN's (Western Midlands and Northern) Regional Caucus marked International Women's Day on 8 March with a complete reversal of the gender balance in several county council chambers throughout the west, midlands and northern regions.

The novel idea of a 'gender reversal' of the council chambers was just one of many ambitious projects that the 42 female county councillors who make up the WoMeN's Regional Caucus actioned this year as part of their programme of work for 2023.

The WoMeN's Regional Caucus covers these councils (number of women councillors): Donegal (4), Leitrim (3), Sligo (3), Mayo (2), Galway County (7), Galway City (5), Roscommon (4) Cavan (4), Monaghan (2), Longford (2), Westmeath (4), Laois (4), Offaly (1). The gender balance of councillors in the counties belonging to the MNW caucus is 42 women and 245 men.

The pilot project is a collaboration between the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) and See Her Elected (SHE). AILG, the representative body for Ireland's city and county councillors and SHE, the feminist, community led rural initiative supporting women to become county councillors now share the administrative, organisational, and secretarial support for the Regional Caucus.



A LEADING PLATFORM FOR INNOVATION
The Innovation in Politics Awards are presented and organised by the Vienna-based Innovation in Politics Institute. Founded in 2017, they have become a leading platform for innovative politicians and citizens to share and exchange ideas on the development and improvement of democracy.

prevent young people from engaging in community and civic life.

Affordability emerged as a major barrier. In July 2021, they proposed a Youth Travel Card for the Irish Government’s National Budget 2022. They proposed a 50% discount on all public-transport systems for all young people, up to the age of 23.

The proposal was accepted and announced by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform during the October 2022 National Budget announcement. The Youth Travel Card is now in place and recognised as a key achievement of including youth voices in public policy making.

This is the first time a proposal from Dáil na nÓg and Comhairle na nÓg has been included in the Government’s National Budget. The Youth Travel Card makes public transport sustainable and affordable to young people in

Ireland, especially in rural Ireland.

Minister O’Gorman comments: “I am delighted to see the hard work and passionate campaigning of Comhairle na nÓg recognised as part of the Innovation in Politics Award.

“Their work in developing and promoting the idea of a Youth Travel Card to both Minister Eamon Ryan and it has

led directly to more affordable public transport for many thousands of young people across Ireland.”

‘SHE’ SUPPORTS WOMEN IN POLITICS

Dr Michelle Maher, SHE’s Programme Manager, who was presented with the Innovation in Politics Award for SHE in 2021, expressed her delight that two Irish projects were in the running in the Democracy category for 2023.

“It is significant that another project supporting women in local government in Ireland has been shortlisted by citizen juries across Europe,” said Dr Maher.

“This award signals strong interest from Europeans in how innovative local government in Ireland can be; in this case a new regional political institution for women in local government created by women in local government,” she noted.

The SHE Project – collaboration between the Women’s Manifesto Project (a Longford Women’s Link programme) and 50:50 North-West, organisations with strong links at grassroots level – offers free online election workshops, resources and Ireland’s first ever ‘See Her Elected Guide to Running in the Local Elections 2024’.



Dublin City University’s School of Law and Government is the Irish partner of the Institute. Its Professor of Public Practice, Deiric Ó Broin said:

“The awards showcase examples of good politics, which is critically important when we see the challenges democracy itself faces and when trust in politics and democratic and inclusive processes are more important than ever.”

YOUTH TRAVEL CARD

The second Irish project selected in the Democracy category is the Youth Travel Card. In 2019, Comhairle na nÓg (local youth councils) voted at the Dáil na nÓg (national youth parliament) to promote sustainable transport, and Minister for Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth progressed this project with Comhairle na nÓg delegates over two years.

Comhairle na nÓg delegates identified the areas young people wanted change, including cycling and public transport.

Minister O’Gorman provided them with guidance and expert advice as the delegates addressed the need for youth access to public transport. They identified barriers to using public transport which



Roderic O’Gorman, Minister for Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth

THE TEN FINALISTS IN DEMOCRACY CATEGORY

- WoMeN’s Regional Caucus, Ireland
- Youth Travel Card, Ireland
- Four Day Week Campaign, United Kingdom
- Improving the Living Environment in Kedainiai District Municipality, Lithuania
- Innovation.linz.at – Citizen Participation Platform, Austria
- Megafon – My Voice for My Neighbourhood, Belgium
- Nothing about youth without youth! Lithuania
- Participatory Methods in the Process of Revitalisation, Poland
- Politik Akademie der Vielfalt (Politics Academy of Diversity), Germany
- Vienna Climate Teams, Austria

