

Sharon Donnery: Citizenship, participation and diversity

Remarks by Ms Sharon Donnery, Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland, at the launch of the €15 Silver Proof Commemorative Coin, marking 100 Years since Irish women won the right to vote, Dublin, 27 November 2018.

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Ceann Comhairle, Ministers, Teachtaí Dála, Senators, ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be here at Leinster House today to launch this commemorative coin. The coin was designed by Michael Guilfoyle and marks 100 years since Irish women won the right to vote.

The Central Bank acts as an agent for the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform in issuing all Irish coin – both the circulating coins we use every day and commemorative ones.

Our commemorative coins aim to recognise figures and mark moments of national importance.

Recognising that 100 years have passed since women first gained the right to vote in Ireland most certainly fits these criteria. And this coin is the latest in a series of coins marking centenary events from the Lockout commemorative coin launched in 2013 to the 2016 coin marking the centenary of the Proclamation. In a few short months, we will mark the centenary of another significant event with a coin to commemorate 100 years since the First Dáil.

Today, I would like to discuss three themes that applied to the suffrage movement and which still resonate today: citizenship, participation and diversity.

But first, if I may, a word about coins themselves.

When we use our coins on a daily basis – to buy a cup of coffee, to pay for parking, to contribute to a charitable collection – we rarely dwell on their wider significance.

Throughout history, in addition to their functional role, coins - and currency more broadly - have had important political, social and cultural dimensions.

Politically, for example, currency and coin can act as a “vector for the construction of a ... polity and political community”.¹ Currency and coin can thus play a role for citizenship. Take the role of the euro in building European identity and citizenship, for example.² This is true at national level, too.

For many of us as children, we first came to recognise the emblem of the State, the Harp, because it was on every coin we used growing up. We could touch and feel the emblem – our emblem – in our hands. The same is true of our own children today who still see the Harp on Irish euro coins. While we share a common currency with the other 18 members of the euro zone, the retention of our own emblems on the national side of all euro coins conveys that in a very real sense, coins serve as an essential reminder of our history and identity, and a link between generations.

Citizenship

In thinking about the launch of this coin today I was struck by the words of the first woman ever honoured on a coin in the United States. The dollar coin minted in the late 1970s commemorated

Susan B. Anthony who was a driving force in the suffrage movement in the United States. In 1887, she said “there never will be complete equality until women themselves help to make laws and elect lawmakers.”³

It seems hard to believe now but at that time, there was a fundamental debate about women’s capabilities, competence and state of mind. This is despite the fact that for example, just a few years later in 1903, Marie Curie would be (jointly) awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics – and would win a second Nobel, this time in chemistry, in 1911.

Inconceivable or quaint as that debate may seem now, this is not ancient history. My late grandmother, who was born one hundred and one years ago tomorrow, was born into this society and grew up in a time in which women were thoroughly second-class citizens.

Now it is also important to highlight that progress did not happen in a linear fashion. Rather, as everyone in this room knows all too well, progress has to be constantly fought for, and there are setbacks along the way.

As Countess Constance Markievicz said in 1909:

“All great things are made up of much that is obvious and dull, and much that in the beginning is small, but that will be found to lead out into fields that are broader and full of interest.”⁴

And the 1918 Representation of People Act, important as it was, represented just one step on the road – because only some, rather than all, women were allowed to vote.

It applied in the beginning only to women over the age of 30 who owned a certain amount of property or were university graduates.

This Act was followed by the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act which would allow Countess Markievicz become the first women elected to the UK Parliament, although as we know she never took her seat. It would be 1922, however, before all men and women over the age of 21 could vote when, following the establishment of the Irish Free State, universal adult suffrage was granted.

Which means we can rightly celebrate key moments in history such as women earning the right to vote. But we can never grow complacent that the work is done.

Participation

Which brings me to the issue of participation.

Earning the vote, which Hanna Sheehy Skeffington called the “keystone of citizenship”, has indeed led to “fields that are broader and full of interest”.⁵

Whilst there are many dimensions to the achievements of women, I am sure you will appreciate that as an economist by training and a central banker by profession, I’m fond of using statistics to tell a story.

For economists a key metric is labour force participation.

Just 30 years ago, for example, the labour force participation rate for women in Ireland was 34.4 per cent. This meant that two thirds of the female working age population were not in any way engaged in the labour market.⁶

The comparative figure for men was 70.8 per cent.

This was a staggering difference.

In 2017, the female participation rate stood at 55.7 per cent, above the EU (15) average of 52.5 per cent. The male participation rate was still above the EU average, at 68.6 per cent, and more importantly, the gap between men and women had narrowed to 16.1 percentage points.

Still a large gap I know, but the trend has certainly moved in the right direction.

These numbers may seem abstract, but they have a significant impact on the economy. Economic research has highlighted the importance of the rise in female participation through the late 1990s and early 2000s in Ireland.⁷

It is important that social policies support this. Recent research from the San Francisco Federal Reserve for example, found that altering parental leave policies in the US to encourage female participation to rise to levels observed in neighbouring Canada could add as many as 5 million prime-age workers to its labour force.⁸

Diversity

Of course, women participating in the labour force is one matter, equality of opportunity is another matter again.

In the 'world I work in' we have a long way to go.

In 2017, the Central Bank first published data on the level of gender diversity at senior levels of financial services firms we regulate, and we have committed to publishing these data on an annual basis.⁹

The results were glaring, but unfortunately unsurprising, in that female applicants, for so-called pre-approval control functions, made up just 20 per cent of applications for senior roles since 2012.¹⁰

We expect to see the firms we supervise taking steps to increase diversity levels.

We are focused on this issue not just for diversity's sake, but because of the important and positive effects diversity can bring. And diversity goes beyond the number of women in the workplace, and in leadership. It also means diversity of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, nationality, disability, beliefs and more.

Central banks are evidence-based organisations. And there is a growing body of evidence that shows diversity can guard against groupthink by bringing a heterogeneity of values, beliefs, and attitudes.¹¹ Other studies suggest that a higher female presence in top management could help develop better types of leadership behaviour across organisations.¹² Furthermore, reducing gender differences between management and staff, can enhance worker productivity.¹³ More broadly, research from the IMF shows a positive association between corporate return on assets and the share of women in senior positions.¹⁴

Of course, as a State institution and indeed, if the Central Bank is demanding certain standards of the firms we regulate, we must also lead by example.

When I joined the Central Bank in 1996, it had just under 600 full-time staff, 13 divisions and a senior management team of just eight people. There were no women on the senior management team and not even one woman at head of division level.

Today, the Bank has a much broader mandate and almost 2,000 staff. In terms of gender

diversity our total staff is split 50:50. Our Board, the Central Bank Commission, has ten members of which three, including myself, are female. About 40% of our senior leadership are female and half of our heads of divisions. Earlier this year, we published our first Gender Pay Gap Report as part of our commitment to both transparency and to becoming a more diverse and inclusive workplace.¹⁵ At 2.7 per cent in favour of men, our pay gap is less than the national average of 14 per cent, however, we believe there's room for continued improvement.¹⁶ Our new Strategic Plan for 2019 -2021 reflects that view and includes a commitment to ensure we have a positive culture reflecting our One Bank ethos of working together, our commitment to public service, and to diversity and inclusion.¹⁷

Conclusion

In concluding, I'd like to congratulate the Oireachtas on its extensive commemoration programme to mark the centenary of the women's vote. Progress continues but it doesn't take care of itself. We can draw on the examples of the suffragettes for inspiration as we strive towards full equality today.

They took matters into their own hands and didn't wait for others to advance their goals for them. They showed the strength and courage to follow their convictions, and while they did not witness full equality in their lifetimes, they traversed some of the most difficult parts of the journey. And for that, we remember them and owe them a debt of gratitude. In 1908, the suffragette movement adopted the colour scheme of purple for loyalty and dignity, white for purity and green for hope. Orange was added to represent all Irish women. The four colours represent all suffrage movements. And maybe this coin, which in its design show these colours, can in its own small way represent these values in society.

I'll finish with one final quote, again from Countess Markievicz, giving some general advice for women making their way in the world.

"Take up your responsibilities and be prepared to go your own way depending for safety on your own courage, your own truth and your own common sense, and not on the problematic chivalry of the men you may meet on the way."¹⁸

Thank you for your attention.

¹ See Mbro, G. ed., 2013. *The single currency and European citizenship: unveiling the other side of the coin*. A&C Black pp. 18.

² Ibid., pp. 162.

³ See the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, further information [here](#).

⁴ See Markievicz, C., 1995. Women, Ideals and the Nation. *M. Ward, In Their Own Voice: Women and Irish Nationalism*. Attic Press Ltd.

⁵ The full quote reads, "Until the Parliamentarian and the Sinn Féin woman alike possess the vote, the keystone of citizenship, she will count but little with either party, for it is through the medium of the vote alone that either party can achieve any measure of success." See Sheehy-Skeffington, H., 1995. *Bean na h-Éireann*. *M. Ward, In Their Own Voice: Women and Irish Nationalism*, Attic Press Ltd.

⁶ The Participation Rate is the number of persons in the labour force expressed as a percentage of the total population aged 15 or over. The Labour Force comprises Persons in Employment and Unemployed Persons. Further information from the Central Statistics Office available [here](#).

⁷ See Bercholz, M. and FitzGerald, J., 2016. Recent trends in female labour force participation in Ireland. *Quarterly*

Economic Commentary Autumn 2016. Also see Byrne, S. and O'Brien, MD., 2017. Understanding Irish Labour Force Participation. *The Economic and Social Review*, 48 (1, Spring), pp.27–60.

- ⁸ See Daly, M.C., Pedtke, J.H., Petrosky-Nadeau, N. and Schweinert, A, 2018. Why Aren't US Workers Working?. *Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco Economic Letter*, 2018–24.
- ⁹ See '[The importance of diversity in central banks and supervised entities](#),' address by Sharon Donnery, at the Central Bank of Malta 50th Anniversary Conference, 2018.
- ¹⁰ See Central Bank of Ireland report, 2017, [Gender breakdown of applications received for certain roles in regulated firms: 2012 to 2016](#).
- ¹¹ See Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report, 2012, [Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now](#). Also, see Daily, C.M, Dalton, D.R. and Cannella, AA, 2003. Corporate governance: Decades of dialogue and data. *Academy of management review*, 28(3), pp.371–382. Also, see Robinson, G. and Dechant, K., 1997. Building a business case for diversity. *Academy of Management Executive*, 11, pp. 164–177.
- ¹² See McKinsey & Company report, 2009, Women Matter 3: Women leaders, a competitive edge in and after the crisis for results of a global survey of almost 800 business leaders conducted in September 2009.
- ¹³ See Giuliano, L., Levine, D. I, and Leonard, J. (2006). 'Do Race, Age, and Gender Differences Affect Manager-Employee Relations? An Analysis of Quits, Dismissals, and Promotions at a Large Retail Firm.' UC Berkeley. Institute for Research on Labor and Employment.
- ¹⁴ See Christiansen, H., Lin, H., Pereira J., Topalova, P. and Turk, R., 2016. Gender Diversity in Senior Positions and Firm Performance: Evidence from Europe. *IMF Working Paper*, WP/16/50. For other analysis see The Gadhia Report produced for the UK Treasury entitled '[Empowering Productivity. Harnessing the Talents of Women in Financial Services](#)', which notes that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 per cent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians. The report also notes that in the UK, for every 10 per cent increase in gender diversity, earnings before interest and tax (EBIT) rose by 3.5 per cent.
- ¹⁵ See Central Bank of Ireland [Gender Pay Gap Report 2018](#).
- ¹⁶ See Central Statistics Office report [Women and Men in Ireland 2016](#).
- ¹⁷ See Central Bank of Ireland [Strategic Plan 2019–2021](#).
- ¹⁸ See Markiewicz, C., 1995. Irish Citizen. *M. Ward, In Their Own Voice: Women and Irish Nationalism*. Attic Press Ltd.