

The Role of Women

Early 20th Century

In 1900, Irish women were generally expected to be homemakers, wives and mothers. It was certainly not the norm for women to compete with men in areas such as education, employment or politics.

No Irish woman had the right to vote or sit in parliament at the start of the century.

The Irish Woman's Franchise League campaigned fervently from 1908 onwards for the vote (suffrage). Women over 30 years of age won the right to vote in 1918.

Some Irish women played important parts in Nationalist movements. Countess Markievicz played a significant role in the 1913 Lockout in Dublin and later in the 1916 Rising in Dublin. She became, in 1918, the first woman to win a seat in parliament at Westminster. She also served as a Dail minister during the War of Independence in Ireland (1919-1921)



Countess Markievicz



Mid 20th Century

After Independence, women again seemed to take the back seat in public life or politics. There were no female ministers in any Irish government from 1922 to 1979

Women were prevented from working in a variety of State jobs, especially if they were married. This notion that a woman's place is in the home was reinforced in de Valera's 1937 Constitution of Ireland.

Education for girls remained very traditional, and it was very unusual for women to become engineers, doctors etc. before the 1960's



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Later 20th Century

From the 1960's on, Irish women became more active in demanding equality. Several women became government ministers, including Maire Geoghegan Quinn, Mary O'Rourke, Gemma Hussey and Niamh Breathnach.



Political success for women also involved the election of Mary Robinson as President in 1990, and in 1997 Mary McAleese became President of Ireland.

Mary Harney as leader of the Progressive Democrats party was appointed as Tanaiste in 1997.



In schools, girls increasingly began to study subjects that were traditionally seen as being only for boys e.g. physics etc.



The 1977 Employment Equality Act helped lessen discrimination at work.

Many women have excelled in the sporting arena such as Sonia O'Sullivan in athletics etc.

Low pay in some jobs, difficulty in reaching the top management positions and the fact that only 10% of TD's elected in the 1997 General Election were women remain a difficulty.