



JUST.NOW

April – May 2014 Justice Briefing

Local and EU Elections 2014

**Every election shapes
the quality of life of its citizens.**

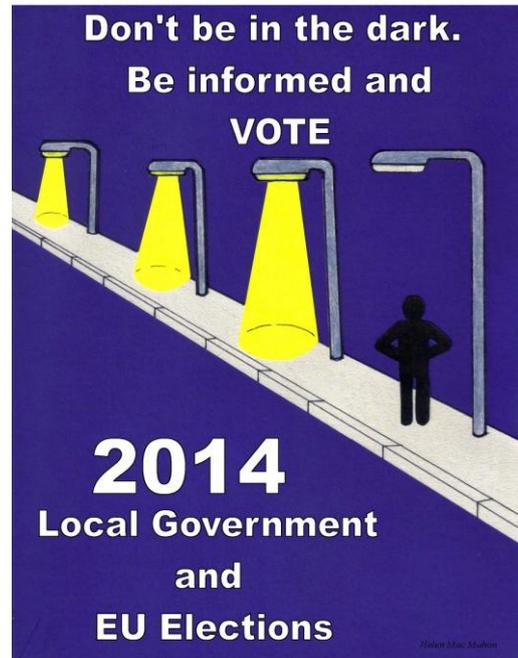
Every election:-

- is a test of our commitment to democratic citizenship
- offers an opportunity to work for the common good
- presents a practical means of contributing to the development of a more just and inclusive society
- gives us the chance to express what we stand for as individuals and as citizens.

Recent changes to the structure of Local Government and European Parliamentary systems make it more important than ever for us to use our **Vote** as our **Voice**. The power of the elected members of Local Authorities have been strengthened and extended in order to make Local Government more effective in serving the needs of the Local Community. The European Parliament has for the first time co-decision powers with the European Council in determining the laws and policies which impact on millions of EU citizens. The reduction in the number of Local Councillors and in Irish MEPs means that the choices made on May 23rd need to be well informed.

Since September 2013 the VPSJ has facilitated workshops in preparation for the 2014 elections in 12 counties. We have worked with diverse groups – adult and community development workers, members of the travelling community, youth groups, foreign nationals and communities in disadvantaged areas. Many of the participants of these workshops will vote for the first time. Others said they will vote this year with greater knowledge and commitment.

This edition of Just. Now focuses on both elections. Our website www.vote.ie gives further information and provides a link to useful resources.



**Active Citizenship/
Voter Education Programme**

Local Government Elections

Local Government Elections

The 2014 Local Government Reform Act sets out the revised roles and functions of Local Government. Prior to the passing of the Act Minister Phil Hogan (2013) stated that the purpose of Local Government Reform is to ensure that local councils deliver better services. The Act makes legal provision for the reforms set out in the Government Action Programme – Putting People First 2013.

Electoral Areas

The number of electoral areas has been reduced to 137 and the elected members of local councils to 949 (only 3 City Councils remain - Dublin, Cork and Galway)

For details of Electoral Boundaries

<http://www.boundarycommittee.ie/reports/2013-Report.pdf>

Municipal Districts - a new system to replace the 80 town councils has been established. Each municipal district will correspond to an electoral area. Councillors will be elected simultaneously to both municipal district and county councils.

Powers of Elected Representatives

The Act rebalances the powers between elected members and executive members who are employed to implement the decisions of the elected members. A new post of CEO will replace the former County or City Manager. The reserved functions of the elected members have been strengthened and expanded.

Role and Function of Elected Representatives

The elected members will perform a substantial range of reserved functions which will include:- Housing and Building; Roads; Transport and Safety; Environmental Protection; Recreational Amenities, Citizens/Community Engagement; Community Development involving establishment of Local Development Committees and General Representational Roles.



Housing Issue - Homeless Nowhere to Live

Using Our Vote to Promote a More Just and Inclusive Community

It is important to examine the track record, goals and values of people we elect. Otherwise we risk electing councillors whose actions will be contrary to our values.

The following are some points which can be put to candidates or used to evaluate their campaign promises:-

Who do they regard as the people with the greatest unmet needs in the area? How would they propose to respond to these needs?

One of the major social problems and a significant cause of the poverty of many people today is the failure of Local Government to build social housing. 90,000 households are on waiting lists for housing. The lack of rent control and the failure to provide affordable housing are causing immense hardship. Local Government is responsible for the provision of social housing.

What is their position on the provision of social housing for homeless people?

How do they propose to meet the needs of young people, older people and those of people with disabilities?

What steps do they plan to take regarding environmental protection?

What is their position on 'Turn off the Red Light' campaign which aims to reduce the trafficking of persons into Ireland for sexual exploitation?

How do they plan to actively and respectfully engage with citizens?

How do they see the role and membership of Local Development Committees?

For a more detailed account of Local Government, New Electoral Boundaries and Local Government Elections go to www.vote.ie

(Government Section and Elections Section)



Environmental Issue - Keep Our World Green

E.U. Elections

EU Parliament

The EU Parliament is the only institution directly elected by EU citizens. The Lisbon Treaty has given more power to the Parliament. From 2014 the Parliament will have co-decision powers with the Council except in the areas of defence and foreign affairs. The EU Parliament has an increasing impact on the daily lives of the 500 million people living in the EU of whom 25% live in poverty. Its decisions will also have a far reaching impact on lives of people living in the developing world.

Following the European Council decision of June 28th 2013 the number of MEPs will be reduced from 766 to 751. Ireland MEP representation is reduced to 11 MEPs

For details of EU Constituencies:-

www.vote.ie (EU Elections section)

For the 2014 Elections the number of EU constituencies in Ireland will be reduced from 4 to 3. The Dublin Constituency, The Midlands Constituency (North -West) and South Constituency.

The Powers of the EU Parliament –

with the European Council makes laws and policies.

- accepts or rejects EU legislation proposed by the Commission
- approves international agreements
- accepts or rejects the budget
- approves the admission of new members
- approves the appointments of the President of the Commission and members of the Commission
- dismisses the Commission
- elects the President of the European Council

The Other Four Main Institutions of the European Union are:-

1. The European Council: This consists of leaders of each country and the President of the European Commission who with the Parliament make all the important policies and decisions.
2. The Council of Ministers: This consists of ministers from the member states with similar responsibilities – e.g. health, environment.
3. The European Commission: At present the Commission consists of at least one representative from each member country. It ensures that European laws and policies are carried out.
4. The European Court of Justice: This consists of one judge from each member state. It is responsible for enforcing European laws.

Irish MEPS

Irish MEPS organise themselves along EU Political Grouping

EU Parliament and EU Political Grouping

Fine Gael	European Peoples Party EPP
Fianna Fail	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats ALDE
Labour	Socialists and Democrats S and D
Socialist Party	European United Left and Nordic GUFNGL

Independent MEPs decide their own alignment

European Committees

Most of the work of Parliament is done through Committees. Irish MEPS have been actively involved in most of these Committees which deal with such key matters as - Foreign Affairs, Human Rights (*including the trafficking of people*), Common Security and Defence Policy, Budgets, Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs (*including poverty*) Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy, Employment and Social Affairs and Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy.

These powers require that we have competent and good people representing us and working for the good of all European citizens. It is essential that we use our vote wisely to elect such people. They will have a say in decisions and policy making that affect our lives and those of our children. Their decisions will also impact on people in the developing world who will experience the outcome of EU policies in trade, environment, migration, human trafficking, overseas development aid etc.



Reflection in Preparation for the Elections of 2014

The happenings of each day are the context in which we seek to live the values of the Gospel. Events such as Elections 2014 present us with an opportunity to actively promote a society which gives priority to the needs of people experiencing poverty, hardship and injustice. The forthcoming Local Government and EU Elections invite us to discern how best to use our vote as a means to lessening the hardship of thousands of people who today struggle with unemployment, homelessness, the impact of climate change and efforts to survive on an inadequate income. On May 23rd we are offered an opportunity 'to love our neighbour as ourselves'.

In Ireland at present 756,600 of the population live in poverty, 179,335 people are unemployed, 90,000 households are on waiting lists for a home.

Local Councillors have responsibility for the provision of the following services:-

Housing and Building, Road Transport and Safety, Environmental Protection, Recreational and Amenities, Development and Incentive Controls, Citizens/Community Engagement, Community Development involving Establishment of Local Development Committees.

- Which Candidates are the most likely to share my concerns for my local area?
- What is their record and intention regarding the dearth of social housing and the lack of rent control?
- What steps do they intend to take regarding local roads, amenities for young people, environmental protection and social issues such as human trafficking?

The European Parliament has co-decision powers with the EU Council in areas such as - elimination of poverty, social exclusion, social and economic rights, austerity versus development policies, environment protection. The number of MEPs from June 2014 will be 751 MEPs - 11 of which are Irish MEPs

- What will the Candidates do to actively promote an EU in which there is a balanced approach to social development, economic development and environmental protection?
- What steps do they plan to take in response to the steady increase in the number of people living in poverty in the EU, the development of racism and a fortress Europe, the abuse of human rights including the trafficking of human beings. How do they see the EU responsibility for the developing world and the need to increase overseas development aid (ODA)?

Prayer for the Elections

Loving and gracious God, we remember that your plan for us is fullness of life lived with love, justice and mercy.

Be with us

the citizens of Ireland and
the citizens of Europe

this year as we work together
in selecting political leaders at
Local and European levels.

Help us keep the common good before us.

Deepen in us the willingness to act in solidarity with people who are economically poor and with women seeking fullness of life in society.

Help us be persistent in testing political remedies against what they will do for people, to people, with people,
and what they will mean for the health of our earth home.

Help us to support one another in exercising our precious responsibilities as citizens in a representative democracy.

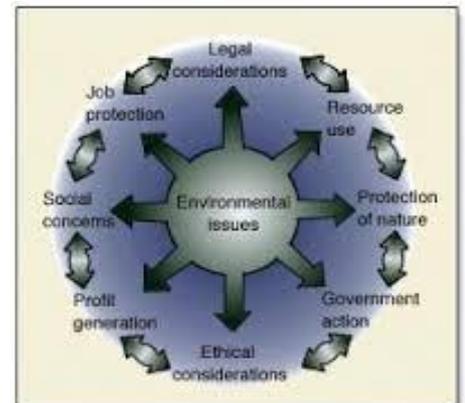
After the elections, strengthen us to continue to work with our leaders, seeking an ever more just society

that acts in harmony and interdependence with all creation.

We ask this in the name of Jesus in union with Your Spirit.

Amen.

Sisters of Mercy Mid-Atlantic Justice Office



Further information:-

www.vote.ie

www.eapn.ie

www.socialjustice.ie

www.ec.europa.eu/ireland

www.europarl.europa.eu

www.debtireland.org

also Websites for Political
Parties and Candidates