

Women Power Politics – Helene Weber Kolleg



In Germany, it is in local authorities – the over 11,000 municipalities and 295 districts – that women are most noticeable by their absence from political decision-making. Their share of local councils is stuck at around 25%.

The aim of the Helene Weber Kolleg, created in 2011, is to break this stalemate by getting more women into (local) politics, improving their political career opportunities and creating a supporting cooperation network. The Kolleg arose from the campaign Frauen Macht Kommune ('Women Power Municipalities') which was launched in 2008 by the NGO EAF Berlin in cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). The most important activities include:

- The Helene Weber award, worth €10,000, which is given to 15 female politicians (among them one main winner) every turn. So far 45 laureates have been awarded and are forming a national network of female local politicians;

- A nine-month mentoring scheme for women who want to break into local politics. This has so far supported 65 tandems comprising 107 women, who have benefited from activities including shadowing, seminars and networking.
 - Local activities planned and executed by the award winners with their prize money in order to organise activities to promote gender equality in politics.
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The problem is at local level

In Germany, the biggest gap in women's representation in political decision-making is at municipality (Kommune) level, where the number of women has stagnated at about 25% of the total. However there are significant differences between large urban and small rural councils: the rate is between 30% and 40% in the larger towns, but decreases the smaller the municipalities are. There are even some municipalities that have no women councillors at all! The situation in the administrative districts (Kreise) of Germany is even worse: more than 91% of the 295 administrative districts are governed by men and [only 10 % of mayors are women](#). A couple of studies have examined the causes and developed recommendations in order to increase the number of [women in municipal decision-making](#). They show that equal opportunities at regional level, promotion of women in education and employment, and adequate care facilities are key factors for stimulating women to engage in politics. But the efficient organisation of political activities at municipal level, the specific advancement of women and quota regulations are also considered to be helpful.

The Helene Weber Kolleg

The Helene Weber Kolleg arose from the Frauen Macht Kommune (Women Power Municipality) campaign which EAF Berlin started in 2008 in cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). The EAF is an independent non-profit organisation, promoting gender equality. It combines designated scientific expertise with [advisory services and professional development](#).

Set up in 2011, the role of the Helene Weber Kolleg is to mobilise women to stand for election in their cities and promote the activities of women who are already so engaged. Its activities fall under six headings:

- Helene Weber award
- Mentoring
- Local activities
- Travelling exhibition on the 'Mothers of German Basic Law'
- International exchanges
- [Website with online offers](#)

So far, 45 women have been granted the Helene Weber award for outstanding female local politicians who are exercising a voluntary, non-paid political mandate. In turn, they act as role models for more women, motivating them to take a chance in politics. The award was bestowed in 2009 and 2011 and will be again in 2015. The candidates – between 70 and 110 – are put forward by members of the German Bundestag. An independent jury chaired by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth selects the winners on the basis of the individual candidatures. The main winner receives €10,000; all further winners obtain tailored coaching focusing on issues which the winner and her coach select together, for example political advancement, professional career planning, self-management, work-life balance and assertiveness.

By sharing the experiences of politically successful women, the mentoring scheme aims to lead more women towards participating in local politics. Locally elected representatives of all political parties, most of them past winners of the Helene Weber award, accompany women who plan to stand. For nine months, mentor and mentee work together as a tandem. So far, 107 women have formed 65 tandems and have participated in the mentoring programme, which offers activities including shadowing, seminars on professional appearance and presentation, motivation, feedback, networking and gender and politics.

EAF Berlin supports and advises award winners at local level who want to organise actions to promote gender equality, such as seminars on public speaking and appearance and lectures and discussions on municipal politics.

The travelling exhibition acknowledges the four women who enshrined the equality of women and men in the German Basic Law. This exhibition constitutes a very good basis for debate on political participation of women.

Under the aegis of the Helene Weber Kolleg, the Tunisian-German 'Democracy Needs Women' project has supported the political participation of women in Tunisia since the Revolution in 2011. All its activities are advertised on its [website](#). Furthermore, there are international exchanges of local female politicians from Germany and the South Caucasian region (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia).

Consistent support by government

The Helene Weber Kolleg is based on the commitment of the Helene Weber award winners and of numerous female politicians who provide networking, exchange and support to women in local politics. One of the most important success factors is the non-partisan and nationwide nature of the activities. Helene Weber Kolleg has developed a broad network which works as an efficient platform for women in local politics. Experts from the European Academy for Women in Politics and Business provide their expertise in mentoring and campaigning.

The Helene Weber Kolleg creatively combines different tools and thus represents a multi-faceted approach, which is very relevant and transferable also for other countries. The federal government continues to support the Helene Weber Kolleg financially and has mentioned this initiative explicitly in the coalition agreement of 2013.

Contacts/Further Information

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Further information

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