

In political decision-making, the under-representation of women remains persistent. Over the past decade, the overall proportion of women in the national parliaments of the EU Member States has only increased by a moderate 6 %, reaching 28 % in 2014. This percentage rate therefore still falls short of reaching the so-called 'critical mass' of one third, which is often associated with being necessary to affect policy and make a change. Thus, further promotion of more gender-equal democratic politics is on the agenda and this task proves to be challenging. To tackle the challenge, some countries have developed innovative approaches and their practices vividly illustrate how to effectively advance the place of women in politics.

Focus on political parties

The prevailing culture within many political parties, as well as the insufficient support given to gender equality issues, presents

Slow progress in advancing the place of women in political decision-making in Member States:

- 2009: Eight Member States had women comprising 30 % or more of parliamentarians.
- 2014: Eleven Member States had women comprising 30 % or more of parliamentarians.
- 2014: Six Member States had fewer than 20 % women-parliamentarians.

clear obstacles for the advancement of women in politics. In this context, initiatives that make parties more female-oriented and representative present valuable examples for those who face similar challenges.

INSPIRING EXPERIENCES

The initiatives and long-standing commitment of the Maltese Labour Party and its women section, which helped enhance the party's policy agenda, break stereotypes and promote women in politics.

Mandatory election quotas in Spain stimulated positive shifts in the culture of political parties and resulted in steady increases in the presence of women among elected politicians.

The Croatian '**pillar of shame**' (**Stup Srama**) campaign stimulates positive changes by attracting public attention to political parties that do not respect the 40 % electoral gender quota.

Successful advocacy actions by Dutch women associations challenging the exclusion of women from politics led to the abolishment of the discriminatory practice of a religious political party (SGP) preventing women from running for political office.

Attract young women

The lack of involvement of young women in politics presents a serious challenge. The under-representation of women in elective office is likely to extend into the future if new generations

of women are not attracted to politics. In order to boost the number of women prepared to stand as election candidates, it is necessary to focus on young women in order to motivate them towards preparing for a political career and to support them through training, consultancy and professional networking.

INSPIRING EXPERIENCES

The nationwide Portuguese project, **Women Can Do It!**, specifically targets young women. Via training toolkits, awareness raising and its slogan, 'Women make democracy better', the project promotes an inclusive political environment for young women.

The **grassroots campaign** by the National Women's Council of Ireland mobilises women, with a focus on young women too, to take political mandate at local level.

The German initiative, **Helene Weber Kolleg**, mobilises women, in particular young women, to take political mandate at local level. The candidates are supported via mentoring programmes, networking and awards.

The Portuguese project, **From Woman to Woman**, aims at educating and raising a new generation of young women motivated to take part in politics, particularly at local level. It empowers young candidates and improves their confidence and skills.

Make politics more participatory, equip women for leadership

The existing division between an 'elitist' political establishment and civil society, resulting in citizens' low interest and participation in politics, presents an unfavourable environment for

enhancing women's role in politics. Similarly, the prevalence of male-dominated political culture and type of leadership creates barriers for women to run for political office. As a response, women should be supported to take leadership positions and be equipped with leadership skills that are relevant for the future.

INSPIRING EXPERIENCES

The **grassroots campaign** launched by the National Women's Council of Ireland empowers women to take an active role in politics at all levels. It also aims at changing the prevailing political culture by building a woman-friendly parliament. In Sweden **strategies to combat domination techniques** were successfully applied to politics. The *Power Handbook* published by the National Federation of Social Democratic Women advises women how to get access to power. Together with numerous films, role plays, exercises and clips it helps to make politics more participatory and democratic.

Political mentoring is becoming increasingly important as a strategy to build women's competence. Several initiatives demonstrate a creative application of this tool:

- the Czech **international mentoring programme** launched by NGO Forum 50 %;
- the German **9-month mentoring scheme** in the context of the Helene Weber Kolleg training initiatives;
- **mentoring and competence development schemes** for Portuguese young women, including from minorities, within the framework of the 'From Woman to Woman' project.

ABOUT THE STUDY

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) commissioned the study 'Women in power and decision-making' in order to review and analyse the implementation of strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action in the area 'Women in power and decision-making in political, economic and social fields' in the EU Member States and to collect good practices in the area of women's political participation. The study was carried out by ÖSB Consulting GmbH in cooperation with Queen's University Belfast and supported by a network of country experts in all 28 Member States.

Further information related to the study is available at <http://eige.europa.eu/good-practices>

ABOUT EIGE

The European Institute for Gender Equality is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policymakers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans and beyond, by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable information on gender equality in Europe.

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