

How to promote gender balance in decision-making

Introduction

This 'How to' sheet is designed as a guide for all those involved in organising Monitoring Committees and Project Selection Committees under the six Operational Programmes of the National Development Plan 2000-2006 (NDP). It will also be useful as a guide for promoting gender balance in decision-making generally.

This sheet will focus on gender, as 'gender mainstreaming' has been adopted to promote equality between women and men in the NDP (for further information on the NDP and gender equality see www.ndpgenderequality.ie). 'Gender mainstreaming' refers to the process of incorporating gender equality issues into every stage of the development, implementation and evaluation of mainstream policies.

Please note that whilst this sheet refers specifically to gender equality issues, many of the considerations are transferable to equality issues relating to other grounds. Also, whilst most of the recommendations focus on increasing the participation of women, they apply equally to men where they are under-represented.

Why do we need to promote gender balance in decision-making?

Council regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 states that Monitoring Committees 'shall promote the balanced participation of women and men'. The EU Commission has stated that a percentage of 40% of women in all committees and panels represents a reasonable balance. In 2002, the average representation of women in NDP Monitoring Committees was... [see EOSI CC paper, Sept 02], whilst the average representation of women on state boards was....

[For a detailed account of the current situation of gender imbalance in Irish politics, State Boards, Regional Authorities and National Development Plan Monitoring Committees, see 'Irish Politics: Jobs for the Boys!' (NWC1, 2002)]

Promoting gender balance in decision-making: a checklist for overcoming barriers

Practical barriers

At what times do meetings take place? Could these be varied to encourage the participation of people with responsibility for dependants?

Is childcare provided?

Do meetings take place at venues that are convenient and accessible by public transport?

Economic barriers

Are non-statutory representatives remunerated for their participation?

Can non-statutory representatives claim travel expenses for their attendance?

Institutional barriers

Have you asked nominating organisations to consider the possibility of nominating a woman in place of a man to achieve a better balance of representation?

Have you asked organisations to consider sending a female deputy/alternate in place of a male representative to some meetings, to achieve a better balance of attendance?

If an organisation has nominated two members/advisors/observers then you might strongly recommend that one of these nominees be female and one male.

Have you asked nominating organisations to consider the level/grade of its representative? (Is there a woman in the organisation at a lower level who could fulfil this role?)

Have you asked nominating organisations to consider the possibility of nominating a woman when an existing nominee resigns?

Have you considered bringing in women's or men's groups or equality experts to advise on gender issues, if the committee is imbalanced?

Have you considered seeking out relevant organisations with a contribution to make which are more representative of women?

Are there transparent criteria for decision-making positions?

Representation on committees tends to reflect the gender profiles of organisations represented. It may therefore be appropriate for organisations to look at employment issues such as family friendly employment policies and recruitment and promotion procedures, in order to address the underlying problems.

Cultural barriers

Is the language of meetings accessible? Are terms explained? Is a glossary provided?

Is the atmosphere of meetings friendly and encouraging, or is it exclusive and potentially off-putting?

Do all representatives participate on equal terms? Are their contributions respected and valued equally?

Have you considered offering training on how to make committees more woman-friendly?

Have you considered providing training or mentoring for women who could take up the role of member/advisor/observer in time?

Important!

- Both representation and attendance at meetings should be monitored on a gender basis.
- The above points should also be considered when committee Working Groups are established, and when external expertise is sought.

References

National Women's Council of Ireland Irish Politics: Jobs for the Boys (Dublin, 2002)

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