

# **Opinion on gender equality in decision-making**

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
ON EQUAL  
OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR WOMEN AND MEN  
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## **The Advisory Committee for Equal Opportunities for women and men**

### **Opinion on Gender equality in decision-making**

#### ***Background***

The persistent under representation of women in decision making is a question the Commission attach much importance to. Several initiatives are taken to promote gender balance in decision-making at European level and at the national level, but further efforts are needed in order to achieve gender equality. The Advisory Committee is set up to assist the Commission in formulating and implementing the Community's activities aimed at promoting equal opportunities for women and men, and shall foster ongoing exchanges of relevant experience, policies and practices between the Member States and the various parties involved.

The document produced by the Advisory Committees working group is an input to the Commission's work on gender equality in the area of decision making and gives in particular information on initiatives in Member States to promote women for the National Parliament and European Parliament elections and the results of these efforts, explores the current situation and provides a summary of barriers to a balanced participation and the support needed. The working group had a mandate from the Commission, where the need for regular information on and analysis of the situation in this area was underlined.

The working group has consisted of members from the following States: Belgium, Italy, Latvia, Norway and Sweden and of the ILO and European Women's Lobby.. The working group has been chaired by Sweden, as appointed by the Commission.

The working group have produced the report "Gender equality in decision-making in the European Union" based on a questionnaire sent to all members and observers in the Advisory Committee. The report summarise the situation in the political and private sectors in the European Union and makes some comments on developments. The report gives an in dept description of initiatives taken to promote gender balance in decision-making and provide valuable information on the current situation and challenges ahead.

This Opinion is based on the report and, as usual, the opinion of the Advisory Committee does not necessarily reflect the positions of the Member States and does not bind the Member States

#### **1. Summary of the findings of the report**

Based on the respond made in the questionnaire the following summary can be made. The summary gives an overview of the areas of concern and the main answers received.

## Statements on balanced participation

16 respondents have replied that their Governments have *stated that it is important* to have balanced participation in the National Parliament. 11 have also stated that it is important to have balanced participation in the EU-Parliament. 13 of the Governments in Member and Observer States have stated that it is important to have balanced participation of women and men in the Cabinet. Statements that gender equal representation is important are more common for National Parliaments.

## Goals and targets

9 respondents have replied that they have *goals and targets* for balanced representation in the National Parliament, 7 countries have goals and targets for balanced representation in the European Parliament and 9 countries have goals and targets for balanced representation in the Cabinet. Half the countries that have said they have made statements also have goals and/or targets for representation in these different political areas. Most of the countries giving yes replies to the question about goals and targets refer to more over-arching goals like “equal access of women and men to all positions or “women and men shall have the same rights and opportunities to participate and influence ...”

Statements on the importance of gender balance are more common than goals and quantitative targets. Goals are more common than quantitative targets. It seems that the lack of a statement from governments on the importance of balanced participation in the National Parliament is connected with very low representation of women in the National Parliament. Thus, such a statement seems to promote gender balance, but does not guarantee balanced representation.

## Initiatives for gender balance

*13 Governments* have taken *initiatives* to achieve more gender balanced participation in the National Parliament, 10 with regard to the European Parliament and 9 when it comes to the Cabinet. The most common action is a National Action Plan for Gender Equality to promote women’s and men’s equal participation.

The *Political Parties* in 17 countries have taken *initiatives* to increase the number of women in the National Parliament, and in 11 countries they have done so with regard to the European Parliament. Most of them have introduced a kind of gender quota in their candidate lists.

In the private sector, 16 Governments have *stated that gender balance is important* and all 16 have also taken *initiatives* to change the imbalance. 10 of these countries have *goals and targets for gender-balanced representation in the private sector*. Most of these countries have goals and targets of a more over-arching nature; some refer to the Syracuse targets of at least 30 per cent.

Most countries, (15) have replied that a *public debate* is in progress on in their country with regard to women in the National Parliament, 14 with regard to the

European Parliament, 12 with regard to the Cabinet, and finally 14 concerning gender-equal participation in the private sector.

## **Situation**

11 Member and Observer States have representation of women in the National Parliaments above the average for 43 European National Parliaments. The 15 “old” Members of the EU have an average of 26 per cent women in their National Parliaments.

The average representation of women in the European Parliament (30 per cent) is better than the average representation in the National Parliaments of all EU Members (20 per cent). This is a very interesting fact, because according to the responses it seemed to be more important for Governments to have gender balance in the National Parliament than in the European Parliament. And the result is the other way round.

A statement in countries concerning the importance of gender balance in the *Cabinet* does not seem to be connected with gender balance in reality.

There is actually no legislation in the European Union that directly stipulates equal representation for both sexes in the Cabinet. Self-imposed systems, informal commitments and the political climate and traditions seem to decide whether there should be gender equality in the Cabinet or not.

The average percentage found in the Commission’s database on women’s representation in Cabinets (National Governments) is slightly higher than the representation of women in National Parliaments (Cabinets 24 per cent women, figures not available from all countries.)

## **Barriers and further measures**

All countries have found *barriers* to women’s participation. The most frequently mentioned barrier in the political sector is “gender roles and stereotypes” and in the private sector it is men at the top choose men”/“men’s networks prevent women from being seen.”

There is certainly a need for *further measures*. The most common measure suggested in the political sector in countries is “legislation on quotas” or that the political parties must “take initiatives on quotas in their election lists.”

In the private sector “exchange of good practice”, “legislation on quotas” and “more coercive legislation” are the most common responses on measures needed.

*Support from the EU* is mostly needed in terms of “exchange of good practice” and expressed in terms of “the EU taking the lead and serving as a good example at all levels.

The detailed information on the above can be found in the chapters 3 to 7 in the report.

## **Recommendations for measures to promote gender equality in decision-making**

The Advisory Committee, recognising the imbalance between women and men in decision-making, and recognising that the equal sharing of decision-making power between women and men of different background and ages strengthens and enriches European democracy, recommends the following:

The Commission should:

1. Maintain, strengthen and develop the focus on balanced participation (50%) of women and men in decision making in key EU policy areas. These include regulations governing the Structural Funds; guidelines for the European Employment Strategy; the Lisbon strategy; and the open method of co-ordination on social inclusion.
2. Ensure the full implementation of the **Decision relating to Gender Balance within the Committees and Expert Groups** established by the Commission of 19/06/00.
3. Remind all governments to take responsibility for achieving gender-equal participation at all levels and in all areas of society, in line with the Council Recommendation of 1996, the Syracuse Conclusions in 2003, and the Commission decision in 2000.
4. Consider the feasibility of legislation at EU level for the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making.
5. Mandate the European Gender Institute to monitor and promote women's participation and to push developments forward.
6. Lead by example in the field of balanced representation and develop mechanisms to bring about a balanced representation in the next European Commission.
7. Monitor and evaluate progress in achieving equal participation of women and men in political and public life, and report on the measures taken and progress made in this field.
8. Make the situation visible by continuously updating the database "Women and men in decision-making" in all the areas needed, making annual reports and ranking lists, and presenting these to the media. Figures in the database should include both public and private sectors and be presented both as numbers and percentages.
9. Promote and disseminate good practice through annual seminars, arranged together with different Member States and disseminate the results on the website.
10. Promote and encourage women's participation in decision-making in public, political and private sectors through future special measures and financial support to projects.
11. All measures should recognise women's diverse experience, needs and identity, and the multiple forms of discrimination faced by some groups of women who are thereby particularly under-represented in decision-making.

12. Challenge gender stereotypes, in particular in relation to leadership and decision-making, through education, training and awareness-raising measures.

13. Stimulate and support the social partners to promote gender equality in decision-making in the public and private sector, including in collective bargaining and social dialogue, through sharing good practice, while respecting the autonomy of the social partners.

14. Encourage Member States to make it possible for women and men to reconcile their work and family responsibilities with participation in public life.