

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



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Achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life

Committee on Social Cohesion
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Summary

Sustainable gender equality in politics is far from becoming a reality.

This report analyses the barriers to equal representation of women and men in the local and regional political sphere. It presents mechanisms which have proven successful in enabling local and regional authorities to respond to this fundamental requirement of democracy. Practical support and guidance coupled with political determination is what will make a difference.

Moreover, it emphasizes that it would be pointless to encourage women to stand for elected office without addressing the fundamental inequalities which prevail in our societies and without changing the underlying culture which persists in many local and regional governments.

¹ L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
EPP/CD: European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress
NR: Members not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress



A. DRAFT RESOLUTION²

1. All Council of Europe member states guarantee legal equality between women and men, including the right to stand for election, to vote and to be elected. In practice, however, there are considerable restrictions on these rights.

2. In European local and regional political life, elected representatives do not always represent the diversity of the whole population.

3. The Congress considers equality between men and women as an integral part of human rights and as a fundamental criterion for democracy. This presupposes the visibility, empowerment and equal participation of both sexes in all the fields of private and public life. Thanks to their proximity with the population, local and regional authorities can take the decisions which promote gender equality and influence citizens' everyday lives.

4. They can act in sectors of activity relating to local and regional governance, particularly in their political role and their roles as employers, in the field of public procurement, service provision, sustainable development and town planning, access to municipal amenities and international co-operation.

5. In accordance with the Committee of Ministers' decisions³, the Congress undertakes to respect the principle of equality between women and men within its own institution. In this connection, it welcomes the fact that since its 15th session in May 2008, in pursuance of its Charter⁴, the delegations of all member states have comprised a minimum of 30% women, taking full and substitute members together. Being resolved to continue along this same road, the Congress:

a. invites national delegations henceforth to apply this minimum level both to full members and to substitute members, and as far as possible to attain a level of 40% in compliance with Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making;

b. as part of the implementation of this Resolution, decides to monitor regularly the gender distribution within the Congress and to publish the data (covering full and substitute members, chairs of committees, political and working groups and rapporteurs) at each session;

6. Furthermore, it decides to:

a. ask its bodies, observers and partners, to provide for gender mainstreaming in all their activities;

b. include the gender dimension in the founding texts of any body set up at the initiative of the Congress and ensure that this dimension is taken into account in such body's activities;

² Preliminary draft resolution and preliminary draft recommendation approved by the Committee on Social Cohesion on 12 October 2009.

Members of the Committee :

Valerio Prignachi (Chair), E. Haider (Vice-Chair), V. Rogov (Vice-Chair), M. Aliev, S. Altobello, A. Antosova, S. Barnes, B. Belin, S. Berger (alternate: G. Neff), S. Bohatyrchuk-Kryvko, J.-M. Bourjac, S. Casey, M. Castro Almeida, A. Clemente Olivert, L. Chunaeva, A. Colucci, I. Dragunkina, J. Eugster-Van Bergeijk, P. Filippou, M. Gerasymenko, S. Geirsson, M. Gojkovic (alternate: D. Davidovic), I. Henttonen, U. Hiller, G. Horvath, T. Karol, M. Khan, W. Krochmal, I. Kuret, F. Lastra Valdes, B.-M. Lövgren, D. Lloyd-Williams, E. Maurer, A. Mimenov, D. Ronga, R. Roperio Mancera, E. Simonetti (alternate: P. Muratore), J. Smyla, C. Tascon-Mennetrier, G. Thum, R. Tirlle, A Toader, E. Van Vaerenbergh, F. Wagner, J. Warmisham, P. Wies, C. Yusifov.

N.B.: The names of members who took part in the vote are in italics.

Secretariat of the Committee : D. Rios and M. Grimmeissen

³ 1040th meeting, 5 November 2008.

⁴ Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2 May 2007), Article 2 (2) d.

c. to alert its Secretariat to gender equality and provide staff training with a view to taking account of this issue in all the Congress' activities.

7. Furthermore, the Congress recalls its Resolution 176 (2004) on gender mainstreaming at local and regional level: a strategy to promote equality between women and men in cities and regions, and considers that this strategy must be backed up with practical action.

8. The Congress accordingly invites the local and regional authorities to give impetus and political support by means of action to:

a. encourage women to stand for elections and fulfil their mandates in order to make councils and assemblies more representative of populations (diversity of generations, origins and experiences encountered in the community) and in order to do this :

- ensure the renewal of persons having political mandates;
- induce elected representatives to encourage women to stand for election;
- ensure that no one is out of pocket because they have to campaign for or hold office;

b. build or develop the capacity of local and regional authorities to deliver measures and services taking account of gender differences and in order to do this :

- gather information on who uses and benefits from their services and the nature of these services broken down by gender and by other relevant categories,
- design and adopt action plans on promoting equality, involving women's organisations: setting clear goals, drawing up a timetable and establishing a monitoring system, while ensuring that the elected representatives are kept informed and that managers are held to account for the requisite progress,
- provide the individuals working for the local and regional authorities with the tools and support to discharge their duties effectively and equitably,
- train the elected representatives and administrative staff in the equality issue and such tools as gender budgeting,
- help reconcile private and working life (adapting meeting timetables, supporting childcare, etc),
- help women accede to higher-level administrative posts,
- alert and involve trade unions for local and regional officials;

c. show care with their internal and external communication and that of their elected representatives and in order to do this :

- combat gender stereotypes,
- reject sexist behaviour in political life, which would be unacceptable in any other context, and prohibit discriminatory attitudes,
- provide a positive image of both female and male elected representatives, and make their action more visible by means of information campaigns on the role of such representatives;

d. facilitate access by women, especially those standing for election or elected representatives, to the local media.

9. The Congress proposes a new approach for political parties whose involvement is vital if women are to be able to stand for election, including:

- in selecting candidates, prioritising an ability to represent the concerns and experiences of the communities rather than long past experience as elected representatives,
- conducting positive action in order to increase the number of women selected and to publicly show their support for female candidates,
- having a gender balance on the selection of executive roles rather than relying on seniority alone,
- encouraging the setting up of women's networks.

10. Lastly, the Congress recommends that European local and regional authorities formalise their commitment to greater equality for all by signing the *European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life* initiated by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)⁵ and implementing this Charter in their respective areas on the basis of the tools (guides and indicators) proposed for evaluating progress.

B. DRAFT RECOMMENDATION⁶

1. The declarations and action plans adopted by the Heads of State and Government at Council of Europe Summits have reminded us that equal participation by women and men is a vital part of democracy. Despite all these activities, the Council of Europe's action to promote and implement gender equality should be increased to bridge the gap between legal and actual equality, both within the Council of Europe and in individual member states.

2. Similarly, balanced participation by women and men in political decision-making, which is a vital requirement for any democratic society, is not yet a reality in all the national parliaments. The average representation of women in lower or single houses of parliament in Europe is only 19.3%⁷. Only three Council of Europe member states⁸ have achieved balanced gender representation (40% of either sex) and seven others⁹ have attained the critical mass of 30% women¹⁰.

3. The Congress fully backs the recent Committee of Ministers Declaration *Making gender equality a reality*¹¹, and reaffirms its longstanding commitment to equality between women and men¹². In this connection, it welcomes the fact that, in accordance with its Charter¹³, ever since its 15th session (May 2008), the delegations of all member states have complied with the provisions on the minimum participation of at least 30% of the underrepresented sex, and expresses its determination to continue along this road. It encourages the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to accede to the motion for a resolution tabled by a number of its members in June 2008¹⁴, in order to guarantee a balanced representation of women and men on all national delegations.

4. Furthermore, now that the Council of Europe has prepared the ground by defining such concepts as democratic parity and by developing various strategies, the Congress welcomes the action taken by the Council of Europe Administration to promote parity, and encourages the Committee on Equal Opportunities¹⁵ to continue its efforts to improve the balance in the representation of Council staff at all hierarchical levels (notably the goal of achieving a 40% threshold in the higher grades)¹⁶.

5. Moreover, the Congress considers that governments are primarily responsible for ensuring the promotion of equality between women and men. Local and regional authorities, however, are also responsible and must be involved in the pursuit and achievement of this equality and in the process of social and cultural change.

⁵ www.ccre.org.

⁶ See footnote 2.

⁷ Asia : 18.3% ; Sub-Saharan Africa: 18%.

⁸ Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden.

⁹ Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Iceland and Norway.

¹⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union (www.ipu.org): conclusions of the Report on the impact of electoral systems on the representation of women in politics. European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), June 2009.

¹¹ Making gender equality a reality. Committee of Ministers Declaration, Madrid, 12 May 2009.

¹² Recommendation 148 (2004) on gender mainstreaming at local and regional level: a strategy to promote equality between women and men in cities and regions.

¹³ Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2 May 2007), Article 2 para. 2 d.

¹⁴ Motion for a resolution from Ms Err and others : requiring a minimum of 30% of each sex on the Assembly's national delegations: a new imperative (Doc. 11664, 25.6.2008).

¹⁵ Set up in March 2004 by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

¹⁶ Articles 3 and 13 of the Staff Regulations (non-discrimination), Article 22 of Annex II to the Staff Regulations (equal opportunities).

6. Accordingly, it recommends that member States reinforce the ability of national, regional and local authorities to carry out gender-based policies, inter alia by means of:

- legislation requiring the authorities to take the gender dimension into account in their activities at all levels, assessing the impact and publishing this assessment (equality indices);
- assistance, including financial aid, to enable municipalities and regions to introduce gender mainstreaming into their departments, possibly under special programmes¹⁷ geared to promoting a society based on sustainable gender equality via fair distribution of powers, resources and services of equal value among women and men;
- incentives to women to become and remain involved in political life and accede to responsibilities, as well as measures to help them stand for election (establishing quota systems and ensuring their implementation, combined with other types of positive action);
- an analysis, by the relevant bodies, of the presence of female candidates standing for elections in the media and financing awareness campaigns which encourage the election of women;
- parity at all levels within the administration, clear anti-discrimination messages and resources earmarked for developing specific tools and training: taking account of respect for equality in civil service careers and training civil servants responsible for preparing budgets in gender budgeting¹⁸.

7. It also invites the Council of Europe Development Bank to take account of the specific needs of women and men in the projects which it finances and of their gender-specific impact.

8. Lastly, the Congress welcomes the work of the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG), particularly its willingness to close the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* equality with positive measures, gender mainstreaming and action against stereotypes thanks to education and the media, and invites the Ministers who will be meeting in Baku on 24 and 25 May 2010 to take the local and regional level into account in addressing these matters.

¹⁷ Eg the Programme for sustainable gender equality run by the Swedish Association of Local and Regional Authorities (SALAR).

¹⁸ See Council of Europe, Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs, Equality in budgets: towards practical implementation. Handbook, April 2009.

C. EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM¹⁹

1. Introduction

The Council of Europe²⁰ and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities have a proud history of commitment to gender equality in the national, local and regional spheres of governance. They have led the way in defining concepts such as parity democracy and strategies such as gender mainstreaming and in developing tools such as gender budgeting for analysing and identifying the impact of decisions taken by political bodies at all levels on the equality of women. The need for balanced participation of women and men in political decision making is seen as an essential component of a democratic society. However, sufficient progress has not been made in increasing the number of women elected at the national, regional or local levels.

The Council of Municipalities and Regions of Europe (CEMR) recognised the difficulty that local authorities have in putting equality into practice by preparing a manual of examples of actions and by producing a Charter,²¹ which suggests some practical action that signatories can take covering the various activities of local government (political role, role as employer, public procurement and contracts, service delivery role, planning and sustainable development, role as regulator, twinning and international co-operation).

2. Gender equality, gender mainstreaming, local and regional authorities

Gender equality is not a women's issue but one that concerns men as well and affects society as a whole. Assumptions and stereotypes about women and men affect all aspects of our lives including social and family life, culture, education, employment, health and political and public life..

Gender equality is the goal, gender mainstreaming is one strategy to reach this goal. The Steering Committee on Equality between Women and Men of the Council of Europe (CDEG) in 1998 defined gender mainstreaming as the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making. This does not mean excluding specific actions. Considering the gender perspective as an integral part of activities and decision-making means that we can identify more easily where specific measures are needed. It is a dual track approach – gender mainstreaming plus specific actions – the latter being one way to compensate existing inequalities.

Local and regional authorities are well placed to promote and implement gender equality. They have a big impact on the daily lives of women and men, girls and boys. They are, in many member states, big employers meaning that their policies have an impact on work conditions and pay, especially for women since the majority of employees in these sectors are women. They provide basic public service such as childcare and care of the elderly. Last but not least, local and regional authorities are democratic institutions. Through their local and regional elected representatives, every citizen may influence the way gender equality is implemented in our societies.

¹⁹ Prepared with the contribution of Diane Bunyan, Director of GEM Consult, Bristol, United Kingdom.

²⁰ Recommendation Rec(2003) 3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making; Declaration of the Committee of Ministers: Making gender equality a reality, Madrid, 12 May 2009.

²¹ CEMR. The Town For Equality. 2005 ; The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life. 2006: http://www.ccre.org/docs/charte_egalite_en.pdf

3. Women in local and regional politics

All member states guarantee women the same opportunities as men to stand for election, to vote and to be elected. However these rights are substantially constrained in reality. The Congress recognised that family voting was regularly observed by election monitors and, in 2006, the Venice Commission devoted a section in its the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters to women's participation in elections.

3.1 How many women are there in local government?

According to a study published by the Council of Europe in 2009²² the percentage of women in regional governments increased slightly from 19,4% in 2003 to 20,9% in 2008 (information available only for 9 member states). At local level, the percentage of women councillors was 23,5 % in 2005 and 23,8% in 2008, a change of only 0,3% (23 member states).

3.2 What makes a difference?

Quotas

According to CEMR figures,²³ most of the countries with the highest percentage of elected women do not have national quotas, with the exception of Spain. However, internationally, quotas seem to work; of the 50 countries with the highest number of women in their national parliaments most have made use of quotas. The evidence suggests that the adoption of quotas or other tools for positive action does increase the number of women elected.

The success of quotas depends on a number of factors: the electoral system in place, the type of quota (e.g. requiring a threshold of 30% of women on an electoral list without specifying where on the list they appear has little effect as women mainly occupy the bottom of the list), and whether quotas are properly enforced and monitored.

The Council of Europe study²⁴ found little difference in the numbers of women elected at regional and local level in countries which adopted quotas or where political parties adopted quotas. It concludes that quotas themselves do not achieve equal participation for women and men but that other measures to challenge existing norms and assumptions in societies are needed.

Size of the constituency

The other interesting point is the huge imbalance between the percentage of women mayors relative to the percentage of elected women showing that women find it even more difficult to achieve the highest offices within local government.

Several studies have shown that women are more likely to be elected to smaller municipalities with fewer resources. For example, in Hungary in 2006, women made up 19.8% of the mayors of small municipalities (up to 500 people) but only 4.8 % of municipalities with a population over 50,000. Women are more likely to be elected as mayors in small municipalities which do not even have a budget to pay the mayor and so rely on the voluntary work of women.

²² Parity democracy: a far cry from reality: Comparative study of the results of the first and second round of monitoring of the Council of Europe Recommendation (2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making. Council of Europe, 2009.

²³ Women in local politics in Europe. Figures from 34 European countries of CEMR membership (draft), 2008.

²⁴ Ibid

Electoral system

A report of the Venice Commission²⁵ considering the impact of electoral systems on women's representation in politics concludes that a much broader and more comprehensive approach is necessary than changing electoral legislation to increase effectively the representation of women. Nevertheless, appropriate electoral reform may facilitate such a progress.

3.3 Why are women under-represented at local level?

There have been many studies that have looked at this issue and various suggestions and proposals as to how obstacles can be overcome. When women stand as candidates they are elected at nearly the same rate as men : 44.9% for women and 47.5% for men.²⁶ It is also the case that women are more likely to be involved at local level in a variety of ways including campaigns for local services, supporting their local schools and in providing support for victims of domestic violence.

Public recognition and value

In many countries the problem is not just getting women to stand for local office but getting anyone to come forward. A Norwegian study²⁷ identified disengagement from conventional forms of public participation and an increasing void between the public and its representatives and linked this to the decline in influence of local authorities over issues for their areas. There is great confusion about the role of local government and the responsibilities and remit of local representatives. This is combined with a mistrust of formal politics, political parties and the institutions of government.

Representativeness

Locally elected representatives often do not “look” like the communities they represent. They are mainly men, older and from the majority community. They are also more likely to come from professional backgrounds, to have higher than average educational qualifications and not to have caring responsibilities. People can, of course, represent the interests of groups that they do not come from but local and regional authorities would benefit from having representatives with a range of different ages, backgrounds and human experiences which reflect their communities.

Why do women want to get elected at local level?

The United Kingdom Councillors' Commission²⁸ found the following reasons for people wanting to stand for election with little difference between women and men: serving the community, improving the local area, strong feelings about a particular issue, support for a political party, family tradition of political activity, being asked to stand, frustration with the council or serving councillor. Status and quotas (political party) were mentioned by very few people.

²⁵ Report on the impact of electoral systems on women's representation in politics. European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), June 2009.

²⁶ Representing the future. The report of the Councillor's Commission, United Kingdom Government, Department of Communities and Local Government, London, December 2007.

²⁷ Norwegian Official reports. Study of Power and Democracy. Oslo: University of Oslo, 2003.

²⁸ United Kingdom Councillors' Commission Report.

What stops women from standing or staying on?

The same study asked people who had been elected and those who were standing down to describe the barriers to political participation. Some of the reasons were:

- Lack of awareness of what local government does, lack of information about how you would go about getting selected or supported to stand, lack of coverage in the local media;
- Culture: negative perception from media and community, hostile comments and actions from fellow councillors and officers, exclusive club-like atmosphere not welcoming to new members, selection more of a barrier than election, women and ethnic minority members are not there just to represent their communities or a single issue;
- Time conflicts: meeting times and arrangements, conflicts with family and work life particularly affecting women with caring responsibilities and those in employment, hard to say “no” when asked to attend meetings/activities.

To this list can be added the following reasons gleaned from other research: lack of participation in local government, costs of standing for election and the job’s remuneration, lack of self-confidence.

Are these barriers the real problem?

All of the above cause difficulties for women in participating in political life. However, as Nan Sloane²⁹ outlined, the difficulty may lie with our perception. “The world assumes that there are a series of obstacles between women and their goal, and that prize - power and influence within existing systems and structures - is what women really want.” She suggests that this approach puts the problem back with women themselves, they lack confidence, or experience, they need more training or to put themselves forward more and to be more assertive above all. “Women could participate if they wanted to, but they don’t seem to want to.”

Many actions have been taken to address these barriers and many have been successful but the real and basic problems remain and will need to be tackled if we are to make real progress. These are:

- Fundamental inequality:
 - A CEDAW committee report³⁰ identified “the persistence of deep-rooted, traditional, patriarchal stereotypes regarding the role and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in the wider community, which are major causal factors for violence against women and are reflected in women’s educational choices, their disadvantaged situation in the labour market and their low level of participation in political and public life”. These attitudes are prevalent in many countries.
 - In many cases the post socialist transition process has made women less equal: they are less likely to take part in political or community life, have higher levels of unemployment and face greater levels of poverty and are expected to play a much more traditional role within their family and society.
 - The current economic crisis has led to calls for action to promote women’s equality to be abandoned in favour of supporting industries which employ mainly men - a return to traditional values where men’s employment is seen as more important than that of women.

²⁹ Centre for Women and Democracy (United Kingdom), presentation to the Committee on social cohesion of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Linz, Austria, 28 April 2009.

³⁰ CEDAW. Concluding Comments on Serbia. 38th Session, May-June 2007.

- Discrimination:
 - Women face discrimination in all aspects of their lives and this continues when they are standing for election and when they take elected office. The attitude that politics and decision making are the male preserve means that women are seen as incapable of taking on these roles. Women are more likely to suffer personal attacks by opponents and the local media than their male counterparts.
 - Women candidates and elected members are less likely to get media coverage, therefore the image of women holding these positions is not seen as 'normal'.
 - Women are often excluded from the informal power-broking sessions which take place before the formal decision-making processes.

4. What can be done?

Political will

The most important issue is that although there is legislation guaranteeing equality of women and men, unless there is clear political will to ensure that legislation is implemented and monitored nothing will happen. The CEMR Charter has tried to tackle this by requiring signatories to make a public commitment to equality of women and men and a statement of their intention to act upon it (Article 4). Similarly, Committee of Ministers' Madrid Declaration includes the requirement to take action to deliver the achievement of gender equality. This action is essential to combat the attitudes which continue to exist.

Monitoring

The CEMR is developing indicators which can be used to monitor the impact of its Charter. The indicators on political representation are similar to those proposed in CM Recommendation (2003)13 :

- percentage of women and men elected,
- success rate of women and men (percentage of women/men elected divided by the percentage of women/men candidates x 100),
- share of women in executive positions (deputy mayors).

Countering stereotypes

The CEMR Charter (Article 6) as well as the Madrid Declaration address the issue of stereotypes. In the United Kingdom, for example, deputy leader of the Labour Party Harriet Harman has been branded by the British media as a 'harridan' and described as 'mad' following her comments on parity. This kind of coverage prevents women from coming forward to stand for elected office.

Proposals for action

The following suggestions for action have either been shown to make a difference to the participation of women or have been proposed by elected members and NGOs:

- **The role of elected members needs to be clearly understood, this entails :**
 - all parts of the community, including women, participating in discussions about issues that affect them;
 - NGOs representing disadvantaged and marginalised groups helping to educate people on the role of elected members;
 - people seeing efficient and fair decision making which includes a consideration of different views;
 - elected representatives having direct and regular contact with those they represent and feeding-in their views and concerns including those of women and men;
 - information campaigns in the media about the role of elected members featuring women;
 - effective citizenship education;

- **Making it easier for women to come forward to stand for election through :**
 - Ensuring no one is out of pocket because they have to campaign for office or because they hold office;
 - limiting the number of terms of office elected members can serve so that there is a healthy turnover and limiting the terms of office of mayors and executive members;
 - elected members encouraging and asking women to stand (often given as the reason women stand at all);
- **Political parties need to have a new approach by :**
 - Prioritising an ability to represent the concerns and experiences of the communities in the selection of candidates rather than long past experience or party experience;
 - positive action to increase the numbers of women selected (e. g. position/number on the lists or women only short lists);
 - having a gender balance on the selection of executive roles rather than on seniority alone;
 - not accepting behaviour in the political arena which would not be accepted in any other work place;
- **Organisation of the local and regional authority should be empowering through:**
 - meeting times ensuring that women and men having other responsibilities can attend;
 - support for childcare, etc ...
 - training for newly elected members;
 - support by the administration to newly elected members, non-acceptance of discriminatory attitudes, including towards women elected members;
 - introduction, in Codes of Conduct for elected members, of clauses about treating others and members of the public with respect and listening to views from all parts of he community;
 - publicity or information including positive images of both women and men elected members.

5. Building and improving gender-sensitive policies and services

Local and regional authorities are the sphere of governance closest to the people, therefore they have a particular responsibility to ensure their policies and practices are not intentionally or unintentionally discriminatory. Within an equality policy, gender mainstreaming is a vital tool in ensuring equality between women and men and gives local and regional authorities a methods for analysing and altering their existing policies to make sure they are fair. By ensuring resources - human, physical and financial - are allocated fairly, local and regional authorities can show that they are responding to their citizens' needs and thus can help to strengthen democracy.

People who work for local and regional authorities are usually very committed to providing public services and, like elected members, want to do their best for the people in their area. However, they do not always have the tools and support to do this effectively or equitably.

Political will and leadership

Political leadership and support for gender equality are essential in ensuring that the issue is considered at all. Politicians have to be convinced that equality of women and men is an important principle of the way the local or regional authority is run and that this principle is conveyed to the administration.

Leadership is also required from the highest level of the administration which needs to show that gender equality is an important part of the work of the authority and that managers will be held responsible for delivering their part in it.

Legislation

Some countries have adopted laws which require local and regional authorities to consider the impact of their policies and practices on women and men. In Sweden, considerable improvements to services have resulted from the well established 3Rs (Representation, Resources, Realia) method.

In Norway the Gender Equality Act requires that there should be a gender perspective on all actions of local and regional authorities which must report on the status and relevant measures as part of annual reports and budgets.

In the United Kingdom, public bodies including local and regional authorities have a legal duty to promote gender equality and must undertake an assessment of the impact of policies, practices and procedures on gender, disability and race equality, which has to be published.

Publicity

Norway publishes, annually, the results of the gender equality index where municipalities are judged on a series of direct and indirect measures of gender equality (Kindergarten coverage for children aged 1-5, education levels for women and men, labour force participation for women and men, income for women and men, percentage of women municipal council members). The publication of this information has led to improvements as no one wants to be at the bottom of the list.

Numbers of women in local administrations

It is difficult to get accurate figures about the participation of women in local administrations but what information is available points to an underrepresentation of women at the top levels and an overrepresentation of women in the lowest paid sections.

Actions which make a difference

The CEMR Charter (Article 11) requires the signatories to recognise the need to promote equality of women and men in all aspects of employment of its staff and to recognise the right to reconciliation of professional, social and private life. It commits signatories to undertaking a review of policies and procedures and addressing inequalities, including in respect of:

- equal pay, including for work of equal value and arrangements for reviewing pay, remuneration, pay systems and pensions;
- fair recruitment, fair and transparent promotion and career development opportunities;
- balanced representation of women and men at all levels, in particular at senior level;
- tackling sex-based job segregation;
- consultation with employees and their trade unions ensuring balanced participation of women and men on consultations or negotiating bodies.

Indicators which are being developed to monitor progress on this are likely to include the numbers of women and men in senior positions and the overall pay gap between women and men employed in local and regional authorities.

Action plans

One of the most effective ways to make progress on promoting equality of women and men is through developing action plans.

Information

Deciding on action to be taken requires a basis of information. It is necessary for the local and regional authorities to have information on who uses and benefits from its services and what the results of these are. This information needs to be broken down by gender and by other relevant categories. It may show that there are considerable differences between women and men and can be used to identify priorities.

Consultation

Asking local people to identify their priorities helps to increase participation and NGOs are a very useful mechanism to get the views of those who would otherwise be reluctant to talk to or engage with a local or regional authority.

Training

Staff need to understand what is required of them. They need to know what is acceptable behaviour and what is not, they need to understand basic concepts such as gender equality and to feel confident in using tools such as gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting. It is necessary for authorities to ensure that staff have this training to help them to undertake this task.

Resourcing

Staff need to see that gender equality is not just another thing that has to be done without any more resources or support. It is essential that there is adequate financing to ensure that priority actions can be implemented. This may include providing specific expertise on gender issues which can be drawn on by different service specialists.

Monitoring

Once priorities have been agreed by politicians it is necessary for the administration to ensure that progress continues to be made and that this, or the lack of progress, is reported to the elected representatives and that managers are held to account for the delivery of real changes.