

Synthesis: PROGRESS projects on Gender Equality in Decision-Making Positions

Background

On March 30, 2015 coordinators of five PROGRESS-funded projects on gender balance in decision-making discussed experiences and lessons learned from their projects during a workshop in Vienna.

The five projects focus on similar key points: the nomination and selection procedures for top positions in management and company boards, the company cultures and effective measures to increase women's proportion towards a balanced representation.

The participating projects in detail

Italy | Women mean business and economic growth: Promoting gender balance on company boards

The Italian project evaluates the implementation of the quota law introduced in 2011. This law sets targets for gender balance in boards of state-owned and publicly listed companies. Additionally, research is conducted on the selection processes by experimentally studying the selection of CVs. Furthermore, the project promotes measures for a change in company cultures and for awareness-raising in the public.

Slovenia | Include.All

During the Slovenian Project, (implicit) discrimination in recruitment processes and actual career paths of female and male managers are studied. A broad public awareness-raising campaign aims at increasing knowledge and reducing stereotypes about women in leadership positions. Also, a toolkit for companies to set effective measures has been compiled and distributed.

Croatia | Dismantling the Glass Labyrinth – Equal Opportunity Access to Economic Decision-Making in Croatia

The analysis of recruitment processes is one of the core points of the Croatian project. To change company cultures and increase the awareness of the economic benefits of balanced participation, manuals for companies are going to be developed, and a media campaign has been carried out. Additionally, regulatory instruments setting targets for gender-balance in decision-making positions will be drafted based on the project's findings.

Iceland | Mobilize Talent – Balancing Participation

In the Icelandic project, studies on board member nominations are conducted. Also, concrete support and information measures for companies are implemented with the companies to promote a more balanced representation of both genders. Public awareness raising makes up another important aspect of this project.

Austria | Women are top. To the top by innovative corporate cultures

During the Austrian project, an online game is developed that simulates the nomination of new board members and should encourage reflecting and overcoming gender-biased decisions. Additionally, good practice examples from companies to promote women in management are collected and made accessible to interested companies and public.

Lessons learned from the projects: Discussion results

During the workshop, the lessons learned from the projects and their implications for further measures to promote gender-balanced participation in decision-making were discussed along three main questions:

1. What are the 3 most efficient ways to motivate companies to get active in promoting gender-balanced decision making by themselves?
2. What can we learn from public-sector or political decision-making quota regulations when drafting quota laws for the private sector?
3. Irrespective of quota laws: which specific tools can be implemented to foster transparent selection and recruitment processes for decision-making positions?

The workshops participants' contributed with experiences from their projects, which were clustered under main headings for each topic. Thus, these lessons learned from 5 different national contexts and projects can be transferred to future policies, measures and initiatives not only in the countries participating at the workshop.

What are the 3 most efficient ways to motivate companies to get active in promoting gender-balanced decision making by themselves?

The contributions from the participants covered a broad range on strategies that motivate companies to get active and that support the already active companies. These strategies could be clustered into three core messages, comprised of several inputs and successful starting points. Especially important seems to be the **visibility of efforts and role models** – both for rewarding the companies and for inspiring others to follow.

→ Make a strong business case

The business case argumentation promotes measures set by companies on their own. This can be reached by the following strategies:

- Highlight the economic benefits and growth potential of gender balance: **use real-life experiences and role models.**
- Ensure personal contact with management teams: **enrich your argumentation with the business perspective**
- Convince companies that promoting gender-balance is state of the art, and not innovative anymore – if companies do not have it, they're out of date: **address competition.**
- Highlight the best possible ways to make **use of talent** in your workforce ie with guidelines on family-friendly company cultures.
- Communicate that individual and company-specific solutions taking needs of employees and employers into account are the optimal solution for companies: **show that their efforts are worth it.**
- Give companies a platform where they can show what they are planning and doing: **make their efforts visible.**

The visibility of efforts already taken by companies serves two functions: it showcases successful companies and addresses competitiveness, while at the other hand these best practices are disseminated further.

→ Collect and disseminate best practices

To make successful strategies **visible** – both as **acknowledging** the active companies following the business case and as **inspiration** to other companies – the collection and effective dissemination of best practices is a valuable tool. For **dissemination**, a number of successful strategies were identified by the participants:

- Introduce the good results, progress and strategies of companies in **media coverage**.
- Develop **certificates** for companies.
- Establish an online **database** of best practices to be publicly accessible
- Motivate role model companies to be **role models** > the rest will follow

→ Ensure top level commitment

For a successful implementation of company strategies, top level commitment is crucial and ensures an **efficient top-down implementation**. A number of approaches proved effective to ensure this commitment:

- **Inform, educate and train** managers and HR representatives about theoretical and practical aspects, start pilots, compile guidelines.
- Work directly with top management and convince them to **apply the top down approach**
- Showcase committed managers as **high level role models**.

What can we learn from public-sector or political decision-making quota regulations when drafting quota laws for the private sector?

Drawing from the experience of implemented quota-laws and targets for the public or political sector in Italy, Iceland, Slovenia and Austria, essential criteria were compiled for drafting and implementing new regulations. The inputs were clustered into three key points: prepare the **arguments**, draft **legislation** and the need of **continuous efforts**.

Furthermore, the question remains: do company cultures need to change first before a quota law can be implemented and show success – or will a legal regulation contribute to that necessary change in company cultures? It seems clear however, that legal provisions and cultural aspects are interconnected.

→ Communicate arguments for a necessary legal framework

The implementation of quota laws requires a unified **political will**. Also, any legal measure requires good preparation and a certain public awareness: a good preparation of how and what is communicated to create **public awareness**, a wide discourse and a positive attitude, especially among, but also beyond the companies that will be affected by the law, is therefore especially important when introducing quota laws:

→ Ensure that your argumentation appeals to companies and include the **business case**: social justice arguments are not enough.

→ Show how similar regulations worked in other contexts or countries – because quota **laws are working**.

→ Include vital elements in the law

To ensure a quota law proves to be an effective way to increase women's proportion in decision-making in the private sector, the legislation has to cover the important aspects relevant to its context:

→ Specify **monitoring and reporting obligations** for companies as well as for authorities, who monitor implementation and progress. **Publish** the monitoring results – make successes as well as room for improvement visible beyond published averages.

→ Include **enforcement** measures in all legal regulation, and **follow-up measures** if legal regulations are temporarily.

→ Make sure to have **sanctions** – without sanctions, there will be no, or significantly less visible results.

→ **One size does not fit all** – take needs and possibilities of companies of different sizes into account.

→ **Quota regulations are - and ask for - an ongoing process**

Experiences in the public sector and the project's findings showed that the introduction of the law has to be only the first step. Efforts to increase balanced participation have to continue even after the law is implemented:

→ **Do not stop the awareness-raising** after the legislation is adopted.

→ Show and monitor how **gender diversity leads to better company performance**

→ Accompany quota laws by introducing and monitoring further **policies promoting gender balance and new organisations of work.**

Irrespective of quota laws: which specific tools can be implemented to foster transparent selection and recruitment processes for decision-making positions?

Based on the findings from the Austrian project this question aimed at finding measures that promote transparent selection processes to counteract informal recruitments in personal networks of decision-makers, where women tend to be more excluded. The contributions from the projects also studying and addressing these processes four essential measures could be identified: clear **job descriptions**, **recruitment** not only by one individual, **monitoring** of selection processes and – to ensure implementation – again **awareness raising** was highlighted as important factor. All of these strategies could be used for effectively accompany quota regulations.

→ Define clear and publicly visible criteria for candidates

Transparent recruitment processes start with transparent **job descriptions** that are accessible and identical to all candidates, and should be published for all positions. With these defined criteria, companies can also be encouraged to use the established **databases of qualified women**. Also, the **selection criteria** for the appointed persons should be transparent:

- Request companies to list their **criteria for recruitment and recruitment processes**, both as **internal guidelines** and **publicly accessible**, eg on the website.
- Ensure that candidates/ CVs are analysed and selected following the **same criteria**.
- Establish **compulsory job descriptions** for every position incl. necessary qualifications.
- Oblige companies to **publish** their **selection criteria**.
- These criteria can also include direct **programmes for women's promotion and selection at all levels**, from top to bottom.

→ Guarantee more than “two eyes” when selecting candidates

To ensure a transparent appointment to positions, the recruitment and selection of candidates should be in the responsibility of more than one individual:

- Establish **nomination / selection committees** who actually select candidates: chosen candidates should not be the personal choice of one CEO/manager.
- Organise recruitment (only) through **recruitment offices**.

- Ask each candidate the same questions and write down the answers: guarantee **structured job interviews** that follow same procedure and are **protocolled**.
- **Supervisors** should monitor and control the selection process internally.

→ **Ensure solid (internal and external) monitoring**

In addition to monitoring the process to ensure the “4 eyes-or-more principle” monitoring by the company and external stakeholders helps to **evaluate the efficiency of and progress made** by the criteria. It also helps to evaluate whether there is further **need of adapting** the recruitment criteria or the selection processes. Thus, the provision of monitoring and evaluation guidelines for companies is also necessary.

- **Monitor applications, short listed and recruited candidates** by gender at the HR department.
- Provide a clear **statistical overview over the companies’** employee composition.
- **Ongoing publicity and reflection**: when boards are registered, the criteria for recruitment and the final members have to be “explained”.
- **Compulsory publication of all board members** on companies’ websites.
- For a thorough implementation of objective and non-individual processes **legal provisions** are to be set up.
- Compile and distribute **guidelines or manuscripts for HR departments (“how to”)** on family friendly culture in the workplace and the best use of talent in companies.

→ **Raise awareness on the positive effects of transparency**

Highlighting the companies’ benefits of transparent recruitment and selection processes is crucial to make the business case and encourage companies to take these efforts, with or without legal regulations:

- Raise **awareness for companies** about “what they miss” when relying on informal searches.
- Establish a trademark or **pledge for transparent recruitment**.
- Enable and establish **dialogue and exchange between companies** to allow for best-practices and mutual learning
- Ensure **broad and targeted public communication** (of measures and procedures).