

# Advancement of women to lower and middle management

Netherlands

Institute for Human Rights



Do you want to increase the strength and diversity of your organisation? Make better use of the talents of women by structuring your organisation in such a way that they have the same opportunities for advancement to leadership positions as men. Although the advancement conditions for men and women are often the same, in practice it doesn't quite work out that way. This is not only a missed opportunity for the organisation, the underrepresentation of women at the executive and management levels is also a human rights issue. It is a result of gender inequality which at the same time perpetuates this inequality. Gender inequality is a form of discrimination. It prevents women from reaching their potential and from fully participating in society.

## Purpose of the tip sheet

In this tip sheet, the Institute for Human Rights offers advice on how organisations can facilitate the advancement of women to lower and middle management.

Are you a professional who is actively involved in the career trajectory of women? Use this tip sheet to:

- **Evaluate your current practices:** compare the tips to the existing practices within your organisation: what are you already doing to improve the position of women? And where do you see room for improvement?
- **Develop new plans:** use the tip sheet in the development of new plans, policies or initiatives aimed at promoting inclusion within the organisation.
- **Initiate discussion:** share this tip sheet with colleagues within your organisation to start a discussion about the advancement of women in your organisation.

## About the Institute for Human Rights

The Institute for Human Rights is the national human rights institute of the Netherlands. The Institute explains, monitors, protects and promotes human rights in the Netherlands (including equal treatment) in practice, policy and legislation, and increases the awareness of human rights in the Netherlands.

We seek to improve the human rights situation in the Netherlands and thereby create a society:

- in which the observance of human rights is assured for all those who find themselves in the Netherlands or within the Dutch sphere of influence;
- with a culture of respect for human rights;
- in which everyone can participate with freedom and dignity
- without hindrance from prejudice or discrimination and where everyone can develop his or her full potential.



Advancement of women to lower and middle management

# Commitment from the top of the organisation

Almost all CEOs say they are committed to “gender diversity”, but only 41% actually practice what they preach<sup>1</sup>. However, involvement and commitment from the top of the organisation is an absolute condition for promoting the advancement of women. This is true for lower and middle management as well. Change doesn’t happen by itself; organisations have to make it happen.



- The top of my organisation sees and acknowledges the added value of women in leadership positions for the organisation.

---

- The top formulates clear goals and strategies for the participation of women in the workforce and for increasing diversity in management, including lower and middle management.

---

- These goals and strategies are part of the regular human resources policy.

---

- The top sets a good example, makes sure that women are represented in the upper management team and that they feel acknowledged and supported.

## Reflection

To what extent is this foundation on the right track in your organisation? Are there ways for you to obtain or increase the involvement and commitment of the top of your organisation? If not, who can you recruit who will be able to get this done?




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

<sup>1</sup> Devillard, Sandrine; Graven, Wieteke; Lawson, Emily; Paradise, Renée & Sancier-Sultan, Sandra (2012): Women Matter: Making the breakthrough. McKinsey & Company (Ed.). [www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/dotcom/client\\_service/Organization/PDFs/Women\\_matter\\_mar2012\\_english.aspx](http://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/dotcom/client_service/Organization/PDFs/Women_matter_mar2012_english.aspx)



## Advancement of women to lower and middle management

# Recruitment & Selection



### Culture & Awareness

ALREADY  
DOING THIS



NEED TO  
(MORE) ON THIS



NOT RELEVANT  
FOR US



- Be aware of “protective hesitation”. This means that you don’t offer women the same opportunities in order to protect them, for example by not approaching them for a job opening. Prevent this by asking questions instead of making assumptions.

---

- Screen recruitment and assessment texts for gender bias.
  - Language matters: review job listings and job requirements to make sure that the text is gender-neutral. Avoid using words that primarily appeal to men. For example: “dynamic”, “flexible”, “team player”.

---

- Provide “debiasing” training for employees, especially for those who do the assessments and make the decisions. The focus of this training should be on the application of selection criteria for promotion and on the decision-making process for promotion. These training sessions will increase awareness about personal explicit and especially implicit biases, and the effects of these on the assessment of the potential of men and women for leadership positions.

---

- Offer training sessions on advancement without bias, also focused on lower and middle management.

### Policy & Structure

- Provide part-time or flex-time options for lower and middle management positions. But watch out for the pitfall of unpaid overtime. Make sure that the work can actually be completed in the available time.
 

***Example:** consider job sharing, where two (or more) people share one full-time position. The organisation gets twice the experience and expertise for one position this way.*

---

- In the job requirements of job listings, ask for specifics that can be checked with a CV.

---

- Use recruitment images that show diversity.

---

- Announce openings for leadership positions within the company first. Make sure that the job is clearly open to everyone in the organisation.



- Get a diverse group of managers to take a look at the organisational layer right below the open position and objectively select qualified candidates. Actively approach those candidates and encourage them to apply.

- If the company uses a recruiter, ask the recruiter to present a diverse group of candidates.

- Actively post the job opening in networks that represent a lot of women.

- If algorithms are used in the recruitment process: check these algorithms for gender bias and make sure that they are in compliance with human rights.

- Look for potential instead of immediate fulfilment of all criteria. Don't try to find a carbon-copy replacement for the person who is leaving the position.

- Affirmative action, where you give preference to a female candidate in cases of equal qualifications, is an extreme measure which may be used under certain circumstances.

- Guarantee sufficient representation of women on all interview, assessment and decision-making committees. Use 50/50 as a rule of thumb. This is because one token woman on an interview committee is merely an exception to the rule and does nothing to counteract stereotypes.

## Evaluation

- After the interview process, send candidates a brief questionnaire on their experience with the recruitment and selection process.

**Example:** *The recruitment team of a large insurance company regularly evaluates the experiences of candidates with their selection procedure. They also monitor the difference in gender outcomes for job openings filled through different recruiters.*

- Monitor the effects of your recruitment and selection policy by collecting data on gender differences with regard to new employees.





## Advancement of women to lower and middle management

# Development & Assessment



### Culture & Awareness



- In your assessments, also be on the alert for “protective hesitation”, where you don’t give women clear, consistent and meaningful feedback on order to “protect” them. Avoid this by using an objective, consistent assessment format.
- Be aware of gender bias in self-image: women tend to give themselves lower evaluations for the same performance as men.

### Policy & Structure

- Be transparent about how the company is investing in advancement to lower and middle management and about the selection criteria. Make sure that all employees have this information.
- Make the employees’ ambitions, including in the area of leadership, a standard part of regular evaluation interviews.
- Use an objective, consistent assessment format. Apply this format in the same way to everyone.
- Screen career development feedback for gender bias. Make sure that the career development feedback is uniform and consistent for male and female employees. To this end, use standard questions about skills to be developed, team-oriented activities, leadership vision, etc..
- In performance reviews, don’t penalise employees for time taken off for care-related activities related to childbirth, childcare, pregnancy leave and parental leave. Base your assessment on the time spent at work and the employee’s performance during that time.
- Ensure gender balance in talent programmes and in the recruitment of lateral-entry employees.
- Create candidate programmes, aimed at those layers of the organisation where women are well-represented. This may help to advance talented employees at a more rapid pace and plug the leak in the pipeline.



- Create an official mentoring programme. A mentor can help with career advice and may also make his or her network available. When creating a programme like this, make sure to include enough mentors representing minority groups.

**Example:** At one telecom company, anyone (starting at a particular level) can become a mentor in their mentoring programme. This prevents a situation where the mentoring programme only consists of mentors who are high-profile talents or talents selected by their managers. In doing this, they provide opportunities for a target group that might otherwise miss out..

- Networking within the organisation is important to make ambitions known and to get promoted. Facilitate and encourage informal interpersonal contact and employee networking opportunities that are more inclusive than the traditional drinks after work, like a lunch for example.

- Create a women's network and organise activities and workshops exclusively for women. Use these activities to focus on the impact of stereotypes on the self-image of women and on increasing visibility.

**Example:** The work group on diversity and inclusion at one engineering firm organised workshops exclusively for women, in which about 200 women participated. Part 1 was about diversity, inclusion and bias, and part 2 addressed barriers and what women can do themselves to break these barriers.

## Evaluation

- Compare the career trajectories of different employees on a regular basis. This may lead to the realisation that one person is not advancing despite positive evaluations and may prevent someone like that from continually getting overlooked "by accident"..

- Create a dashboard which also shows the assessment scores and the perceived potential of female colleagues and male colleagues, and discuss these in management teams.

## Reflection



What opportunities does your organisation offer in terms of development & assessment to promote the advancement of women?

---

---

---

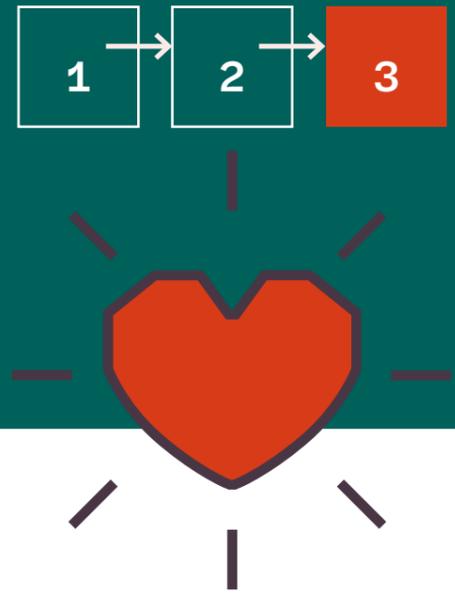
---

---

---

---

---



## Advancement of women to lower and middle management

# Retention of talent

### Culture & Awareness



- Take a critical look at the unwritten rules and gender bias in the organisation with regard to expertise and leadership.

---

- Create an inclusive corporate culture where women feel welcome and safe.

---

- Initiate discussions at work about (gender) diversity, as awkward as this may feel sometimes. For example, organise a “lunch and learn” where colleagues can talk about positive and negative biases they have experienced because of their sex.

---

### Policy & Structure

- Offer flexibility and support for care obligations. Be proactive by initiating discussion about this with men as well as women.

---

- Offer longer mandatory paid childbirth leave. This will reduce the stereotype that mothers take care of the children and fathers go to work, like the standard association of women with part-time work.

---

- Have the organisation offer a course on combining work and care obligations for men and women.

---

- Besides discussing increased work hours with women who are working part-time, also talk about reduced work hours with men who work full-time. Offer men and women the same options with regard to part-time work.

---

- When talking about reduced work hours, for example after the birth of a first child or in case of family care obligations, also make agreements about increasing the number of contractual hours again at a later time.

---

- Research shows that women often receive less support and fewer resources from the company to help them do their work properly. Be mindful of this, and offer women adequate resources, such as financing, management support and team size, to enable them to do well as leaders.

---

- Include the advancement of women as a topic in succession planning and talent management.

---



- Encourage and facilitate informal interpersonal contacts and employee networking opportunities in inclusive ways. An example would be a company lunch instead of drinks after work.

- Give employees room for “job crafting” - let them decide where, when and how to do their job.  
**Port authority example** *All positions, including management positions, at one port authority have part-time options. In addition, employees are free to decide where and when they work.*

## Evaluation

- Make a habit of finding out what the women in your organisation need, what they value and what obstacles they face.

- Check the human resources policy, culture and structure of the organisation for possible gender bias, including in lower and middle management. For example, evaluate whether the requirements for different positions are actually necessary and make sure they do not unnecessarily exclude candidates. Revise if necessary.

- Monitor the gender balance in the entry, advancement and exit figures at different levels, including lower and middle management. Knowledge is power: learn how your organisation is doing in terms of the advancement of women by collecting data. Look at the proportional representation of women at different job levels and at their advancement at each job level. Pay attention to the number of women in leadership positions and the number of women who work part-time.

**Example:** *one telecom company maintains figures on gender equality on a gender diversity dashboard. The dashboard shows entry, advancement and exit figures for the different (higher) levels. It contains information about the male/female distribution of the team, the objective, how many men/women have left and the percentage of female appointments at each job level. Moreover, it also shows where successful internal and external advancement candidates come from, which can then be taken into consideration.*

- Review the scores of the employee satisfaction questionnaire by gender to find out if there are differences, and if so, what these differences consist of.

- Investigate the effects of tools to improve the gender balance at the company, including in lower and middle management.

