

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

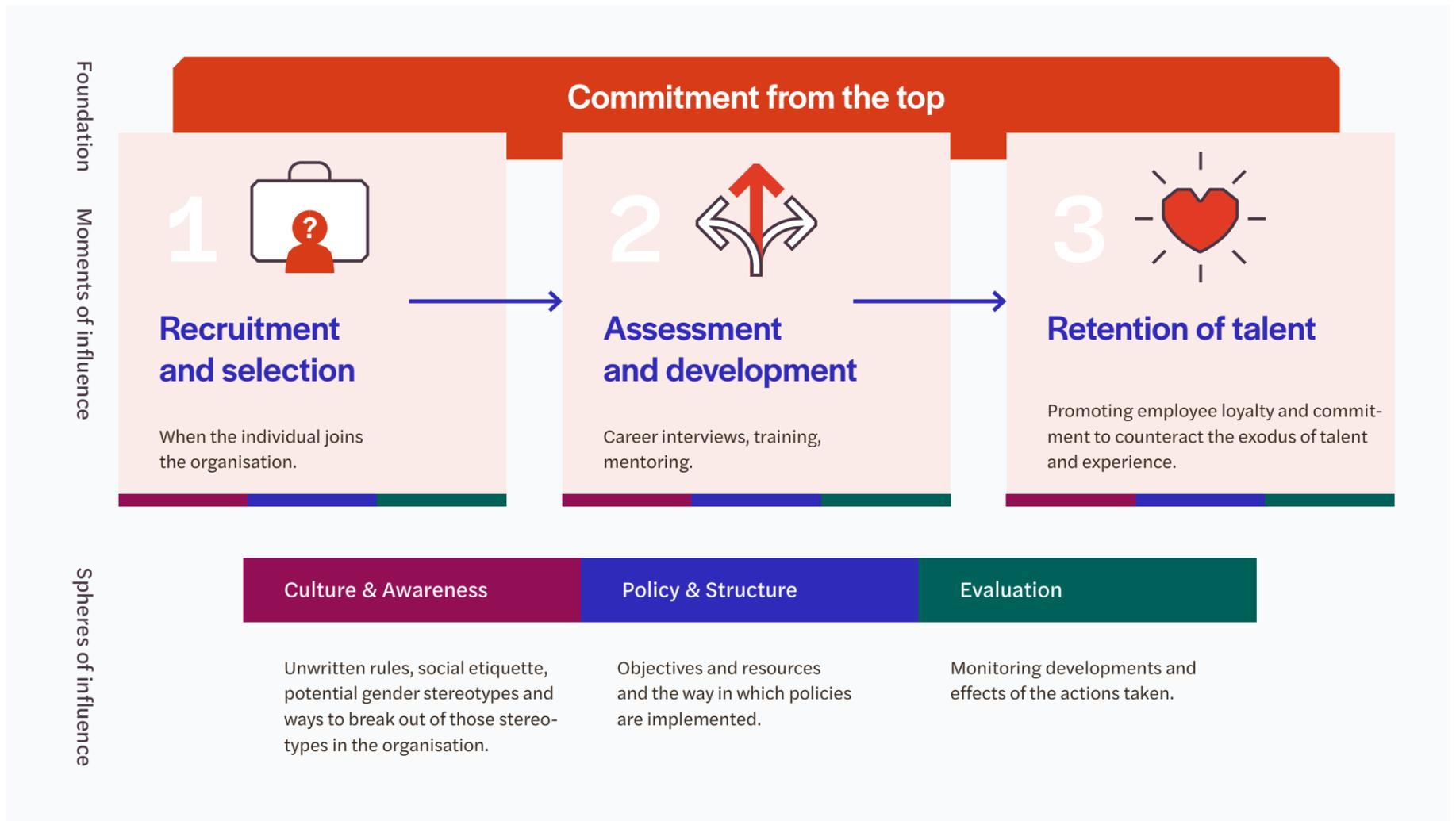
The Institute for Human Rights is the national human rights institute of the Netherlands. The Institute explains, monitors, protects and promotes human rights in the Netherlands (including equal treatment) in practice, policy and legislation, and increases the awareness of human rights in the Netherlands.

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.

Structure

We start the tip sheet with the **foundation**, which is commitment from the top of the organisation. Next, we share tips with regard to specific **moments when** an organisation influences the careers of employees and with regard to the different **spheres of influence**.



Acknowledgements

The government and businesses have been increasingly successful in their efforts to include more women at the executive and upper management levels, but not enough is being done yet with regard to the levels below. In preparation for this tip sheet, the Institute did a study of the literature on the advancement of women to lower and middle management and it worked with several companies that want to be trailblazers in this area. They shared their experiences with us, which we analysed and distilled into tips. Some of these tips also apply to upper management, but the scope is broader and includes a larger part of the career trajectory. Other tips specifically apply to lower and middle management: they focus on seeking out a group of potential leaders that often tends to be ignored.

The tip sheet is structured so you can prioritise the tips yourself by checking one of the following for each tip: “already doing this”, “need to focus (more) on this” or “not relevant for us”. The tip sheet also provides a number of questions for reflection and space for writing down actions. For those who want to dig deeper, we also provide regular references to other sources with more information.

Reflection and review

After reading the entire tip sheet, take a look at your notes. Which area in your organisation offers the best opportunities for promoting the advancement of women? What does this mean in terms of actions you can take right now? Who can you get involved in this?

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 preach¹. 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.



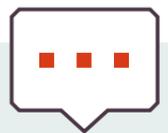
- The top of my organisation sees and acknowledges the added value of women in leadership positions for the organisation.

- 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?

¹ 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