

Women into Politics bridging gender gaps in local leadership in rural Germany

SUMMARY

The local action programme Women into Politics (de: Frauen in die Politik) **tackled gender inequalities in local political leadership** in Germany, with a strong focus on rural contexts. Addressing structural, cultural and personal barriers, such as party nomination processes, gender stereotypes, work-family balance and hostility towards women in politics, the initiative combined individual empowerment with systemic change.



Themes: Women, Democracy and participation

Country: Germany

Organisations:

- > EAF Berlin (lead organisation), civil society organisation
- > German Association of Rural Women, civil society organisation

Start & end date: 01/2021 - 12/2024

Funding sources:

- > Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ)

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CONTEXT

Women into Politics was implemented in 20 rural regions across Germany characterised by dispersed populations, long distances, limited public transport, and often more traditional gender roles. In these contexts, **women are significantly underrepresented in local political decision-making**. Key challenges include male-dominated political networks, limited entry points into politics, and significant time constraints due to unpaid care responsibilities.

The programme addressed these challenges through a place-based, participatory approach, where local stakeholders worked for 1.5 years to identify barriers and co-create tailored action plans.



OBJECTIVES

- > Increase women's participation in local political processes by **reducing structural and cultural barriers**;
- > Foster locally driven solutions by bringing together key actors (e.g. decision-makers, equality officers, civil society) to **identify region-specific challenges**;
- > Support the development and implementation of **tailored regional action plans** responding to rural needs and constraints;
- > Provide **targeted financial support** to enable concrete measures in contexts with limited resources;
- > Strengthen **mentoring, networking and capacity-building** opportunities for aspiring women in politics;
- > Improve framework conditions for participation, including childcare provision and more inclusive and accessible political practices.



ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The programme was implemented by EAF Berlin, in collaboration with the German Association of Rural Women, in two cycles through the following steps:

- > **Open call and selection:** rural regions applied to participate; 10 regions per cycle were selected.
- > **Kick-off and action plan:** each region established a local steering group and held a kick-off meeting led by EAF Berlin in their region.
- > **Local implementation:** plans were implemented using dedicated funding. Actions included awareness, network-building events, and measures to improve local political conditions.
- > **Mentoring:** regions recruited local mentors. People were matched centrally via a digital platform, based on personal and professional criteria.
- > **Democracy workshops:** region-specific workshops were organised by the German Association of Rural Women on selected topics.
- > **Final event:** a closing event in Berlin brought all regions participating in the cycle together.

The programme involved aspiring and active women politicians, mentors, equality officers (locally appointed or designated public officials), local decision-makers, civil society actors and local communities. A follow-up project, 'Women.Diversity.Politics', builds on the programme's results.



RESULTS

- > More than **260 women participated** in the programme's mentoring scheme, 70% of whom were not affiliated with political parties, highlighting outreach beyond traditional party structures.
- > Around two-thirds of participants ran for office or intended to do so, **indicating increased political engagement**, including previously underrepresented groups.
- > Around 90% of participating regions reported that the role of equality officers was strengthened, with their expertise gaining greater recognition in local decision-making processes.
- > **Structural changes were initiated in several regions**, including the introduction of codes of conduct and, in one state parliament, a speaking-time app was implemented to support more inclusive procedures.
- > The initiative **strengthened networks and fostered more inclusive local governance**, contributing to cultural and structural change longer term.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > The programme's success was rooted in its **long-term, place-based approach**, with regions supported over 1.5 years, enabling sustainable change beyond one-off activities.
- > A key success factor was the **combination of local ownership and central expertise**, allowing regions to address context-specific challenges while benefiting from structured guidance and knowledge sharing at programme level.
- > Even **modest financial support** for local actions proved crucial, particularly in rural areas where equality officers often have limited or no dedicated budgets.
- > The programme generated momentum by being initiated at national level, increasing legitimacy and helping place gender equality on local political agendas when it might otherwise have been neglected.
- > **Dedicated financial and human resources**, ensured through the programme's nationwide structure, enabled consistent implementation across regions.



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