

Leadership and Public Life Meeting

17th October2020

Chair

Okay everybody so I'm going to just be the moderator for this session. We have rapporteurs from each of the 10 breakout groups and each rapporteur is going to present the three key messages from their groups which the groups have agreed they want to bring forward to the wider Assembly today. And we're recording this feedback session as you know and it will be uploaded on our website. And I want to add my thanks to those of you for agreeing to step up and be the rapporteur today. So without any further ado I'm going to call on you in the order of the ten tables and that means I'm going to start with breakout group 1. So can you tell us whatever messages your three messages from your group please?

Breakout Group 1

On the issue of quotas our group was very divided we came up with three possible solutions one was voluntary quarters like we'll say the male champions of change which we saw in the last video that were shown. We thought that was recommended I'd say by all of us. A short share burst of a quota increase was also discussed we'll say not up to the 50 percent but up a little for more women to be in roles to inspire more to follow in them and then maybe a gradual phased-in quota up a few percent every year. That was how we were on quotas and we'll say then but on the voluntary thing along with men champions of change we thought that if gender equality is good for business or for political parties they'll embrace it themselves.

Then for our second point was school curriculum we thought gender balance should be promoted in schools we'll say for career guidance civics at the moment well I don't know about at the moment but certainly when we were in school women were steered one way men the other way. We said in single gender schools you wouldn't get metal work, woodwork subjects and you wouldn't get home economics other stuff in the male only school that it should be more options should be open to females to send them that they can do anything men can do and it should be done in schools this way.

And the third point was mentorship and leadership programs we'll say to outside of mainstream education where women can be guided towards leadership roles in whatever it may be local politics and then as a stepping stone onto mainstream politics or even in local clubs local associations with the aims of getting on to boards getting to the higher positions.

Chair

Okay thank you very much breakout group one, next I come to breakout group two.

Breakout Group 2

So there's a little bit of overlap so the three areas that that that we've kind of selected for feedback and for recommendations I suppose priority areas were so quotas and we had a discussion about quotas versus targets. Second area was the education system and a third one then was about recognizing the diverse identities of women and especially paying attention to supporting leadership from women in marginalized groups so I'll just go through each of these. So on the quotas area and we had quite a healthy discussion both morning afternoon on that but basically we're far I think the group can do very much for quotas as opposed to targets which are aspirational you know. And the idea that they would be like very firmly linked to receipt of public funding with a kind of a sanction or a penalty if they're not achieved and this would be public funding of political parties but also bodies in the arts, media, entertainment, sports etc. areas as well. And that it should also be about not just about promoting women's participation but supporting women into leadership levels that this is what it should also so be about so it's not just about having women on boards it's about having them in leadership positions within those and that there should be a structure to monitor this to report on this and then to adopt the remedial measures so that it's not just left there as a target but it's actually you know shifted and changed in relation to practice so that was the quotas one.

The education system was seen as being really important in its own right and also in terms of the influence it has in wider society from primary school upwards particularly and so a couple of areas came up on that subject choice; the edge of quality of the education materials; degenderizing the curriculum and the materials in terms of things like career guidance but also for example exposing boys particularly girls in this case to for example political life as a career and it should be you know done in a way to inform and encourage girls and boys alike you know away from a kind of a stereotypical kind of approach to education and life and that and that this would have an effect on wider society as well.

The third area then was about recognizing the diverse identities of women and including kind of dedicated initiatives in particular to support participation and leadership from women from marginalized groups and promoting their participation so within any gender equality measure that that needs to be a dedicated specific strand.

Chair

Okay thanks very much breakout group two next I come to breakout group three.

Breakout Group 3

So much similar to my previous two speakers we focus on three points first one being education then removing barriers and finally accountability so what we said about education was education must be in the school, college and throughout the person working life and also in politics and in the wider private business to cover things like unconscious bias, stereotypical bias and then policies procedures and systems to be I suppose updated from a gender equality point of view. And within that we discussed as well quote the quota system. What we said there is that the gender quotas must be meaningful must be tracked and must be accountable but also I suppose it's a balance of the right person skill set for the job as against the quota so we were

tending to say yes you want five directors five male five female but it could be six or four depending on the skill set required so we wouldn't go down that directly.

Secondly then on removing barriers politically moving barriers in the political landscape is for women to progress in politics there must be grants, there must be maternity, there must be benefits, there must be all the supports necessary that already exist in public life or in private corporate life must be in public life as well and also the issue around social media and cyber bullying which is a serious problem particularly for women and that they're protected in that.

And finally then we said our third point would be accountability from the top board and down to through the organizations again in private and public life.

Chair

Thank you very much breakout group three it's interesting to see the way certain themes are coming through from each group and then where there are differences between each group as well so let's hear next from breakout group four please.

Breakout Group 4

Yeah so we've much the similar points actually from as the other three groups so yeah so our first point that we wanted to bring was quotas so we said that we'd have a quota of 40-60 with an aim as to having 50-50 like as like not aspirational but having a minimum quota as 40-60 but alongside that it couldn't work in just as like just throwing in a quota that it would have to be alongside the supports of child care for both women and men going into politics to make politics more gender more accessible to everyone as such as well as like parties being would be penalized if they weren't obeying just they are helping the candidates that they put forward.

Another point that we came up with was we wanted to phase out the funding of single gender schools just to make like just to start from the ground up as well as the quotas on the top like leadership positions in politics.

And our third suggestion that we wanted to bring forward is along with education as well so I know a few of the other speakers have already spoken about education but we wanted education from on a schools level to include civic engagement and like being an active member in society from like primary school level up as well as role models training and mentorship programs. And funding in like at the community level organizations separate from sporting organizations that would encourage more training and development of all members of society so just even like boys and girls should be for everyone to be a more active member of society in the hope that we'd get rid of like stereotypes and make it normal for I don't know for it won't be such like a boy's elitist club of politics in the end and like and in leadership positions that everyone has the opportunity to reach the top as such so yeah there were three recommendations.

Chair

Thank you very much I think it's an interesting idea to encourage everybody to participate in society more broadly from an early age that would be great if that could happen. Next I come to group five and the rapporteur there is breakout group five.

Breakout Group 5

In our group there was a very clear agreement that there is a need for change accelerated disruptive change to the system we were all very inspired by the last Australian video and just the attitude in it. That gender inequality is a symptom of organizational deficiency and needs to be addressed by men and women. Quotas was we there was very clear agreement that we need quarters at national and local government level and in all public bodies. Quotas need to be measurable, transparent, accountable, measurable targets on gender equality and the meeting of those targets is linked to funding.

We would like to see a Minister for gender inequality or for gender equality rather yes a minister for gender equality specifically with responsibility for developing a strategic plan in all sectors to develop a systemic change and things that basic things that would come under that were like parental leave, maternity leave for public representatives we felt it was just beyond belief that that doesn't exist, the gender pay gap and cyber accountability on how women are represented or how young people are targeted all of that would come under that.

And our third one was education and awareness. So awareness raising for everybody on the cultural and historical gender bias and how we have got to where we are. And for education to become gender neutral with gender neutral career guidance with education from an early age on politics and leadership.

Chair

That's great thank you very much again it's interesting to see where views are converging and where they're being elaborated in a different way this is a very rich harvest I think. Breakout group number six please.

Breakout Group 6

Hi so similar to everybody else I don't think this is going to surprise anybody our group had sort of we grouped into three main ways removal of barriers, education and advertising. So looking at removal of barriers we also looked at the quota concerns or the quota issue and we felt that if quotas were more directly related back to the funding and there was that they had to publish their funding figures or they had to publish how they were using it that if it was linked more to equality and to spreading that out equally there would be a better shape on that. We felt strongly about the maternity issue this is particularly moving barriers now into politics into the maternity leave issue but we also felt that it needed to be more of an of an equal split and there's no reason that maternity can't be split fairly evenly amongst partners whatever that partnership looks like so we felt that.

And then into this as well was the pay at the gender gap for the pay gap and to try and close that down. I suppose a bit like everybody else we felt that education was very important and coming in early and young and if we bring the political and the gender equality in together we felt that if there was an earlier practical engagement with younger kids probably primary school age and there was a strong a curriculum change there to bring civic citizenship together and to bring that to the fore with some sort of mentoring and sponsorship support. We felt something like a signature project something like young scientist or Gaisce to really kind of get people thinking and working together but we felt that it would engage politics at a local level at a young a younger age group in society to try and get people engaged in community politics and country politics at a much earlier age and that would then bring through some strong gender balance and some gender equality so we felt strongly about that.

And finally we felt that so much of this is rooted in how media portrays gender how media portrays gender roles and we recognize that a lot has been done there but when we look at social media and how people are how people are attacked on public media how they're portrayed on public media that is definitely a huge barrier and whilst there are so many negative aspects to it they could be very easily turned positive particularly if there was a strong awareness campaign and if that was led by government that that would start to build awareness, challenge ideas, normalize and then also that will build momentum to create that pressure to build that pressure to create that change. And looking back at that Australian video it should all build together really and force that change along so there are three main categories.

Chair

Thank you very much what I think is fascinating is the strong teams that are emerging from every group but the fact that every group had a slightly different contribution to make at the same time I think that's really enriching the whole process. Let's move on next to group number seven.

Breakout Group 7

The recommendations from break out room seven and again a lot of overlap with us. Education we've thought was probably very key in this the earlier the better you start we're going all the way up through sport as well that we feel the supports aren't there we would recommend genderless schooling so doing a way of girls and skirts versus boys and trousers more mixed schools that there is more of an option there rather than the single sex schools. And again to bring that through to sporting not to be segregating them off there's no reason that children can't train together and use each other as role models and learn together and that will then just bring everyone cohesively together more naturally so we thought from preschool years upwards that there should be a good focus on this but should it carry through into his college years.

Our second point was we feel there should be free available child care for all full paid parental leave and available to all parents' guardians whatever the family dynamic looks like. We think that's a huge barrier to both genders but obviously disproportionately women as well. And thirdly onto the kind of harsher penalties for verbal and electronic abuse to enforce the laws

that are already in place that we have legislation there we have laws in place and that there's a bigger accountability and a punishment and they're it's enforced better.

Chair

Thank you very much breakout group seven that's great. Next I come then to group eight.

Breakout Group 8

So this will come as no surprise to anyone on public life our group felt very strongly about quotas and that in order to be meaningful gender quotas should be applied in local elections and senate elections as well as in general elections. There was also a strong push for maternity leave to be available for politicians and that some sort of process should be in place for the selection of a delegate for the duration of the maternity leave and that remote working should also be made available as an option. In industry we found the male champion for change video from Australia very interesting and we thought that initiatives like that would go down very well in Ireland alongside perhaps some training to remove unconscious bias.

And then we were also very interested in the experience and of minorities and in all aspects of life from public life to sport to industry and we would like to see what barriers are there specifically for minorities for their engagement and what can be done to overcome those barriers and engage more in participation.

Chair

Thank you very much breakout group eight. Group nine then please.

Breakout Group 9

Bearing in mind the camel is a horse designed by committee I now present our invention of the horse. First of all on the quota system well we recognized a society such as Sweden the norm gender equality is the norm and because it is a norm they don't actually use a quota system into parliament nevertheless we propose that the accountability of political parties to meet gender quarters be expanded to include local government and that potential independent candidates be financially encouraged to reflect this ethos.

Secondly in terms of education that the time spent currently given to religious education be replaced by social policy and health education that this education be provided to children from national school to leaving cert with the potential of developing a leaving cert subject from it and making it a point including it on the points system for testing. And that religious information on religion be provided as part of cultural elements of social policy.

And finally that social media platforms be held accountable for misinformation and disinformation on their platforms and that traits of sexual gender-based violence be prosecuted as a matter of course.

Chair

Thank you very much breakout group nine again some overlapping ideas and some new takes on it. Thank you very much. And then in group 10 please.

Breakout Group 10

Hi everybody similar themes coming up in our group so firstly education. Education really dominated the first part of our discussion. We would like there to be an in-depth look at the entire education system and this is from early years up, we actually think that primary level is too early when it comes to breaking down or too late when it comes to breaking down stereotypes we possibly need to look at the like the ECEC and crèche and the Montessori age group actually and start from there. And we but we wanted kind of I guess an in-depth study of the whole system of how can promote equality. We recognize the need for kind of education programs specifically for girls to give them the confidence to take up roles in politics and in public life and to kind of break outside of the norm. We also felt like you know that there should be we needed to kind of rethink how we look at careers and how career guidance is managed. The focus on certain careers and as we've heard before you know that they can be very in themselves very gendered so actually we would like you know a focus on skills and that people then take up roles based on their aptitudes and their skills. We also feel that there's probably too much emphasis on academia and too much emphasis on going to third level and this seems to happen in particular in girls for girls and girls schools and their parents thinking I would want my child to go on to college and that really we need to the conversations and kind of try to get people their mind-sets to open up with regards to apprenticeships and looking at trades. Some education from the very early years all the way up.

Our second point was around our recommendation is stronger legislation on online bullying. I think it was mentioned already we feel that really you know whereas the press is quite heavily regulated once you go online you go on twitter it's just open season and unfortunately you know women are disproportionately targeted. We are all able to name lots of examples of politicians and women in public life and that until that is addressed and that there are serious repercussions for people who participate in that abuse and harassment that are comparable to what would happen you know if it was if similar things were to take place in papers or on other forms of media. We think until that happens it's going to be a major barrier for women participating in public life and in politics. And we feel that the sanctions at the moment just aren't in line.

And our final point we was our final recommendation was to introduce quotas to encourage and increase numbers in politics and it's notably at a local level recognizing that that's where a lot of women can kind of gain experience and cut their teeth if you like but also across the private sector and like public sector when it comes to boards. And we well we didn't kind of have a number we did we wouldn't necessarily agree oh yes straight away 50-50. You know whatever would represent an increase in numbers so that we're kind of striving towards sports equality. We also felt it was very important apart from like having gender equality on our quotas that would promote gender equality and also to look at the more marginalized groups that we heard from and so the you know the travellers and other groups that are you know ethnic groups who are who are marginalized in society. But while we say we recognize important to bring in quotas across these different areas we felt it's no it's no good bringing in

quotas unless you know they're no good without teeth and so unless there are repercussions for parties or groups for organizations that don't actually implement them.

Chair

Well that's terrific thank you all very much. I think this would be very useful for us now in thinking ahead and distilling out the recommendations from the groups obviously these are issues that we will come together as a whole assembly to discuss at the end of the process but it's been I think really a rewarding feedback and thank you for being so clear and succinct. I think we have strong teams on education from an early age we obviously have there are different views among the citizens on the issue of quotas and there are lots of nuances going from a very accountable system to making it voluntary we will I think that reflects the views in society the range of views. We have suggestions about how to deal with online bullying, how to do awareness campaigns, how to promote participation in civic life, accountability, the surrounding supports that are needed if we want to change society and have a more equal representation. I'm not going to try and summarize all of the very rich points that you made to us but we take careful note of all of that and we will also get the notes from the discussion groups which will elaborate in a bit more detail on the discussion in each group. So thank you very much I'm going to say now that you can have the rest of the day off what's left of it but I hope that we found it certainly very stimulating and it's great to see the enthusiasm is undimmed even at this stage on the Saturday afternoon so thank you very much we'll be back in touch with you and please do fill out the surveys also on the process because we want your feedback on all the issues and we'll be in touch again shortly with the next the program for the next two sessions and start sending you the weekly deliveries of videos and presentations and give us your feedback on all of that so that we know if there are things that we need to change and to improve but thank you genuinely it's been great and I look forward to seeing you all next time around and it's great to know we have such an enthusiastic and committed group and that there's a wealth of ideas being generated out of all of this so thank you very much again and enjoy the rest of your weekends.