

**50:50 Group**

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10 July 2014

Minister Phil Hogan
Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government
Custom House
Dublin 1

Dear Minister Hogan

I am writing on behalf of the 50:50 Group. We wish to raise our serious concerns regarding the withdrawal of funding to the Women's Networks.

As part of our 50:50 campaign for equal representation in Irish politics, we work closely with several networks. In the recent Local Elections, many played a significant role in supporting women candidates and in raising awareness of the importance of addressing the gender imbalance in politics. Seminars were organised and attended by women who subsequently ran as candidates and succeeded in getting elected. Without the presence of Women's Networks at local level, who have the capacity to mobilise and organise, such events would not have happened.

As Minister, you played a key leadership role in passing gender quota legislation. However, to ensure implementation additional supports are necessary to encourage women to go into politics and to challenge the structural and cultural barriers. As illustrated above, Women's Networks are ideally placed to provide such supports and we believe their work certainly contributed to the 5% increase in the number of female councillors elected.

In the proposed new programme (SICAP) it is of serious concern that women are not named as a target group. Furthermore, the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks is not permitted to tender for the contract to ensure continuation of the vital services delivered by the 17 Networks.

While significant gains have been made with regard to gender equality in Ireland, we still have a long way to go to achieve de facto gender equality. The Government committed to implementing the National Women's Strategy (2007-16) which aims to bring about '*an Ireland where all women enjoy equality equally with men and can achieve their full potential while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life*'. Women's Networks can continue to play a significant role in working with Government, and national organisations like our own, to realise this vision.

I urge you, Minister, to keep the current national programme in place and ring fence the €1.3m for the 17 Women's Networks. If the Programme is discontinued it will represent a serious setback for the advancement of women's rights in Ireland and call into question the Government's commitments, at national and international levels, in this regard.

Yours sincerely

Nóirín Clancy
National Chairperson