

Focal Point Survey 2011

[Executive summary]

The system of departmental Focal Points has been created in order to help the Focal Point for Women improve the status of women in the departments of the United Nations. The system has been put in place since 1994, but its functioning has never been formally evaluated. In 2008, the Policy Committee requested the development of a twice-a-year “gender balance scorecard” that would include indicators on the “functioning of the Focal Point system”.

In order to follow the progress on the functioning of the system, the Office of the Focal Point for Women (OFPW) launched a new round of survey among 92 Focal Points for women and Alternate Focal Points in December 2010. In total, 44 respondents fully completed the survey .

> KEY FINDINGS

EXERCISE OF FOCAL POINT FUNCTIONS

- Focal Points usually have a large number of staff (> 500 staff) under their care and responsibility.
- The slight imbalance between the number of Alternates and the number of Focal Points persists.
- Most of the Focal points (43 per cent) have been in their current position as a Focal point for a period of one to three years.
- Yet, most of the Focal Points (41 per cent) have not met with their administration/Executive office or head of department during the last six months in their role as Focal Point for women or Alternate.
- Focal Points have access to basic staffing information (Galaxy, vacancies) but are still restricted when it comes to information about the later stages of the staff selection process (list of recommended candidates).
- Forty per cent of focal points use documentation provided by the Executive office on staffing relevant to the representation of women to systematically access information on staffing relevant to the representation of women.
- More than half of the Focal Points expressed their desire to be better trained in career support programmes (49 per cent) and in staff selection system (42 per cent).

- Overall, Focal Points are to no extent able to carry out their functions as Focal Points in the areas of advocacy and counseling of women staff, monitoring progress made towards the achievement of the gender targets, and participating in the staff selection process.
- The main documents and resources that Focal points use as a tool for advocacy are the Secretary-General bulletins on: Flexible Working Arrangements-Staggered work hours, compressed work schedules, work away from the office (Telecommuting) (ST/SGB/2003/4) Prohibition of discrimination, harassment including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority (ST/SGB/2008/5), special Measures for Protection from sexual exploitation and Sexual Abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13), and Gender Targets (ST/AI/2010/3, para. 7.8).

CONSEQUENCES OF FOCAL POINT ASSIGNMENT

- When asked to expand on their positive experiences, respondents explained that being a Focal Point for women presents valuable opportunities to inform colleagues of their rights as a staff member, and develop a strong relationship with both staff and Management and win the respect of both and the Executive Office because of the consistent principled stands taken on issues of gender.
- Regarding negative experiences, they were mainly related to heavy workload and lack of support from management and staff.

MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

- The majority of respondents (48 per cent) declared that management had taken no measures to increase the awareness about the Focal Point in their department or entity.
- Measures that management has taken during the last 6 months to achieve 50/50 gender distribution at the Professional level and above are mainly related to recruitment (46 per cent) and promotion (37 per cent).
- Supportive measures management has taken during the last 6 months to enhance the advisory role conferred upon the focal points to promote the gender perspective in your office's work environment include: Dissemination of Secretary-General's Bulletin, ST/SGB/2003/4 on flexible working arrangements or other relevant policy (41 per cent), Email or provide focal points access to gender balance statistics (33 per cent), and Presentation of gender balance status and provisional measures needed to meet 50/50 mandate (28 per cent).

TRENDS RELEVANT TO GENDER SENSITIVITY

- Most Focal Points (52 per cent) have seen increased gender sensitivity within the staff selection processes in their departments (e.g. gender balance on interview panels, particularly at high levels, consultation and participation of focal points in the selection process, access to information concerning candidates).
- Most Focal points had no basis for judgment in determining which work/life balance policies (30 per cent) and FWA (49 per cent) have seen increased usage over the last 12 months.
- Most Focal Points (66 per cent) have not seen any negative trends relevant to a gender supportive environment have you witnessed in your department and/or entity over the last 12 months.
- Most Focal points had no basis for judgment in determining which work/life balance policies (63 per cent) and FWA (53 per cent) have seen reduced usage over the last 12 months.

> WAY FORWARD

Suggestions for improvement of the Focal Point system include:

- *Full-time Focal points:* Departments should have dedicated, full-time FPWs. The current, volunteer FPWs should advocate for this with their USGs and the SG/DSG. It would be helpful if there were a policy mandating the appointment of a focal point within each department as a full-time position. If this is not possible, the focal point's office should be bolstered with additional posts.
- *Appointing more alternates:* Appointing/electing more than one (alternate) focal points to share the workload
- *Resources and guidelines for newly appointed Focal points:* New focal points need to be briefed about what in practical terms they need to be doing as focal point and need to be directed more concretely to the resources available to assist them. More user-friendly materials could be developed to help Focal Points in this regard. A collection of tips/best practices from more experienced focal points about what they have found to be particularly useful practices in their role as focal point might be a good source of information.
- *Strengthen the network:* Better networking between the organizations is needed -- not just the UN proper. Also, one Focal point has taken the initiative to launch a Women Network which aims at - primarily - acting as a watchdog monitoring the organizational "climate" for internal professional female staff applying, being interviewed, selected or rostered for internal vacancies. I believe the existence of the Network in itself will force senior management to give internal female staff due consideration in the recruitment and selection process as they otherwise risks be exposed, and reported on to the Secretary General and the GA.