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PRESS RELEASE

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NEW INITIATIVE IS LAUNCHED TO HELP TACKLE LOW LEVELS OF WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN PUBLIC LIFE

Recent statistics highlight that Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland are lagging behind in the number of women participating in public life, including political positions and other civic focussed decision-making roles.

A newly launched 'Women into Public Life' initiative, supported by the EU's INTERREG IVA Programme, has been created to help reverse this trend and will be made available to women across western Scotland, Northern Ireland and the north-west of Ireland.

Figures made available by the project demonstrate that Scotland is leading in terms of women possessing a legislative role, with 34.1% of the Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) being women.

Northern Ireland, however, has much lower numbers with women accounting for only 16.7% of Members of the Local Assembly (MLAs). An even worse situation can be found in the Irish Parliament where only 13% of those elected to the *Dáil Éireann* and 17% of those elected to the Seanad are women.

The results from the last local elections determined that both in Scotland and Northern Ireland 22% of local councillors are women, whilst in Ireland women account for only 16% of all elected local representatives.

Speaking about the project, Noirin Clancy, Project Co-ordinator for Women into Public Life said: “The situation with low levels of women’s participation in public and political life is particularly noticeable at a local level. In peripheral regions such as the north-west of Ireland, Northern Ireland and western Scotland this tendency can be especially difficult to overcome given their distance to the decision-making institutions.”

Lead by Donegal County Council in partnership with Engender, the Donegal County Development Board, the Foyle Women’s Information Network and the Second Chance Education Project for Women, this initiative aims to address the gender gap at parliamentary level but also help more women acquire the necessary skills to engage in civic networks and participate in the policy debate at a local, national and European level.

Commenting on the project, Pat Colgan, Chief Executive of the Special EU Programmes Body said: “Whilst across Europe the number of women holding decision-making and leadership positions is gradually increasing, this trend is not consistent across all European regions. The WiPL project will make a valuable contribution to changing this reality and help to increase the number of women achieving leadership positions in public life.”

Throughout its implementation, ‘Women into Public Life’ will promote a series of seminars and training designed to empower women and help them to become effective leaders in the public domain. It will include 19 conferences and seminars, a community leader training programme, a grassroots leadership programme as well as opportunities for local women to visit and engage with regional and national policy-makers.

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SEUPB

The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland and the Department of Finance in Ireland. It is responsible for managing two EU structural funds Programmes PEACE III and INTERREG IV designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society.

The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland.

The INTERREG IVA 2007-2013 Programme is worth €256 million and aims to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders. It has two distinct priority measures to create co-operation for a more prosperous and sustainable cross-border region.

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