

CHARTER

For the Participation of Women in Co-operatives



ICOS supports actively promoting gender equality in all of society, and particularly in co-operatives. Thus, ICOS commits to addressing the lack of women in co-operative leadership roles, and to which end it is resolved that:

- ▶ ICOS will endeavour to identify, support and promote female candidates, who can be available for election or selection to all leadership roles in the sector.
- ▶ ICOS will conduct research analysis to identify issues relating to women's involvement in co-operatives and participation in representative structures. Results will be used to inform co-operatives of current barriers, challenges, and opportunities to encourage female candidates for election to co-op boards.
- ▶ Each ICOS member co-operative should set a target for female representation on their board. This target will reflect the current level of female membership of the society, and the measures to be put in place to increase that number.
- ▶ Conscious that the root of the poor participation of women in co-operative structures follows from low numbers of female members, ICOS co-operatives will actively encourage male shareholders to add the names of their partners, where appropriate, as joint shareholders on the co-operative share register. This will facilitate and encourage those women who may have significant business expertise and experience to be available for election onto co-op representative structures.
- ▶ ICOS will investigate and promote measures which will encourage female participation in co-ops representing the newer, evolving farming structures which are growing in number; companies, partnerships, share-farming arrangements, and so on.
- ▶ ICOS will support member co-operatives to amend their rules and policies to facilitate and provide for attracting more female members to lower representative tiers. This may involve the creation of additional "female-only" positions on regional committees, as well as ensuring that meeting times and schedules are more family friendly.
- ▶ ICOS co-operatives will commit to having the item of female board representation, and methods to increase female representation on their agenda for discussion at their next AGM with the stated aim of appointing a working group tasked with finding ways (while cognisant of limitations and circumstances in individual co-ops) of identifying female candidates for board elections.
- ▶ ICOS commits to developing and enforcing an equal opportunities policy for male and female participation on co-op boards which will include investment and training in inclusivity, gender equality and diversity awareness and promotion as part of co-operatives' corporate governance policies.
- ▶ ICOS and co-operatives always promote the use of gender neutral and inclusive language in rule books, internal and external communication, documents, advertising and slogans.

Ratified by the Board of the Irish Co-operative Organisation Society Limited. March 2023.

James O'Donnell
President

TJ Flanagan
Chief Executive Officer