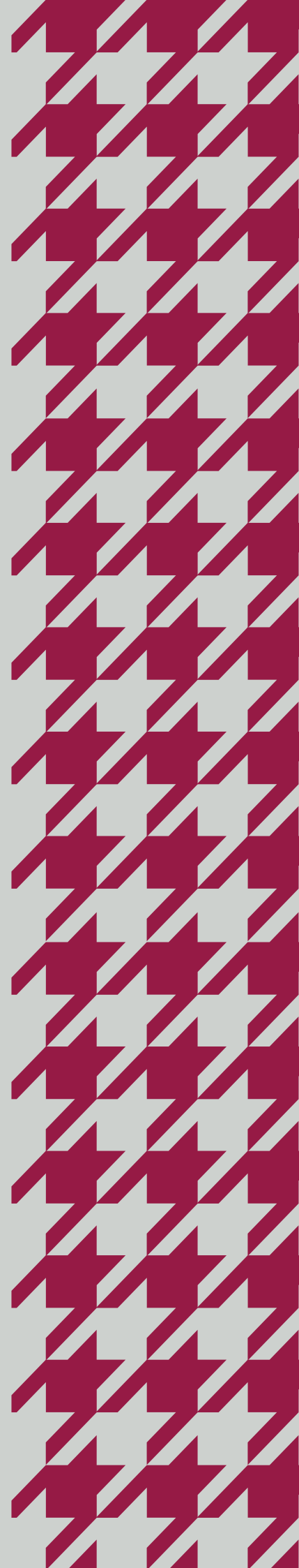




GENDER-RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE TOOLKIT

TOOL 1:

Advancing gender
equality in politics —
National assessments
and action plans



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Gender-responsive Governance Toolkit

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National assessments and action plans

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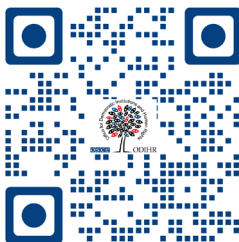
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Designed by Zofia Konarska



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Gender-responsive Governance Toolkit

Advancing gender equality and promoting women's participation in all spheres of political and public life is at the centre of the OSCE's commitments. The 1991 OSCE Moscow Document, states:

“The participating States recognize that full and true equality between men and women is a fundamental aspect of a just and democratic society based on the rule of law. They recognize that the full development of society and the welfare of all its members require equal opportunity for full and equal participation of men and women.”¹

Since 1991, the OSCE's commitments in the area of women's rights, gender equality and non-discrimination have been further strengthened in several Ministerial Council decisions.² Specifically, Ministerial Council Decision No. 14/04 on the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and the 2009 Ministerial Council Decision No. 7/09 on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life call for a comprehensive approach to politics and democratic governance in the OSCE participating States. This approach includes ensuring:

- a) **Non-discriminatory legal policy frameworks**, so that participating States comply “with international instruments for the promotion of gender equality and women's rights, ...”;³
- b) **Full and equal participation of women and men**, including in ‘political parties’, aiming for “gender balance in all legislative, judicial and executive bodies” and overall “gender-balanced representation in elected public offices”;⁴
- c) **Gender mainstreaming in decision- and policymaking and implementation**, by “assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels”⁵ and “open and participatory processes in all phases of developing legislation, programmes and policies”;⁶
- d) **National mechanisms**, including “democratic institutions for advancing gender equality”⁷.

The OSCE's comprehensive approach to gender equality in politics aims not only to ensure the equal and meaningful participation of women and men but also to guarantee that institutional and policy outcomes meet the different needs of women and men in all their diversity.

The **Gender-responsive Governance Toolkit** is a series of targeted tools, each with a distinct practical and thematic focus. They introduce or advance institutional and policy solutions and practices for gender-responsive governance. The toolkit is aimed at participating States' political parties, other democratic institutions and civil society organizations, and complements ODIHR's existing gender-equality publications.



Introduction

Gender equality in political life has been a core focus of efforts to promote women's rights around the world. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1949) establishes that "Everyone has the right to take part in the government of [their] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives."⁸ The 1978 United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) calls on States Parties to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life, ensuring women, on equal terms with men, the right to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies and the right to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy.⁹

In the intervening decades, these commitments have been deepened and expanded at the global and European levels. For example, in 1990, the UN Economic and Social Council adopted a resolution establishing a target of at least 30 per cent women in leadership positions by 1995, with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men by the year 2000.¹⁰ The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, identified women in power and decision-making as one of its twelve strategic objectives. It called on governments to establish the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, including by using positive action to "substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men."¹¹

Key global commitments to gender equality in political life

- **Universal Declaration on Human Rights** (1948), see, e.g., Articles 1, 2, 7 and 21
- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** (1979), see, e.g., Articles 1, 3 and 7
- **Resolution 1990/15**, United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1990, New York: UN
- **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** (1995), see, e.g., the Declaration and Chapter IV G., Women in power and decision-making
- **CEDAW General Recommendation No. 23 on Political and Public Life** (1997)
- **UN Security Council Resolution 1325** on Women, Peace and Security (2000), see, e.g., para. 8c) and related resolutions
- **UN General Assembly Resolution 58/142** on Women and Political Participation (2003)
- **CEDAW General Recommendation No. 25** on Temporary Special Measures
- **UN General Assembly Resolution 66/130** on Women and Political Participation (2011)
- **Sustainable Development Goals**, Targets 5.5 and 16.7 (2015)
- **UN General Assembly Resolution 73/148** on Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment (2018), see, e.g., paras. 7, h and 13
- **Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women** on Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (2021)

Global and regional commitments over the last thirty years provide solid support for promoting gender equality in political decision-making. Although these documents suggest a deeper understanding and wider application, the most common statistic used to measure women's political empowerment is the share of women in parliament. While the percentage of women in top political positions is important, gender equality in political life is about more than numbers; women must also occupy positions of power, giving them an equal voice in democratic politics. Moreover, gender equality must not be seen as incidental, but rather integral to the conduct of political life.

1. INTRODUCTION

In other words, gender equality is not only about access, but also about voice and transformation.

At the same time, women's participation and gender equality in politics are influenced by various intersecting factors, such as age, socio-economic background, disability, ethnicity and/or other characteristics. It is important to recognize that these intersecting characteristics can create additional layers of discrimination affecting women's equal political participation and leadership, and how democratic institutions deliver for their citizens. The impact of these factors needs to be addressed appropriately in gender equality in political life.

This publication seeks to **advance gender equality in politics in three ways**. First, it explains gender equality in political life in terms of **access, voice and transformation** and considers how these three dimensions might be measured. Second, it provides guidance on **how to conduct a national assessment** of gender equality in political life, offering practical suggestions for organizing the research as well as offering a list of questions that should be asked. Unlike existing frameworks, the methodology focuses on multiple, rather than single loci of political decision-making; namely governments, parliaments, political parties and, where feasible, regional and local politics. Third, this publication outlines **how to develop a national action plan** based on the findings of the assessment, offering a menu of options for action that reflect international standards and promising practices. The most successful plans cultivate broad-based political support, offer concrete actions that transform institutions and realities for stakeholders, and address not only access, but also voice and transformation to ensure full gender equality in political life. It concludes with examples of actions taken in each area by parliaments across the OSCE region.



Gender equality in political life

The most common statistic used to measure women's political empowerment is the **share of women in parliament**. Since the 1990s, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has collected and published this information on its website.¹² Each year it publishes an analysis of progress and setbacks in women's parliamentary representation worldwide¹³ and, in collaboration with UN Women, creates a map of women's access to cabinet positions, alongside their presence in parliament.¹⁴ Other organizations, like the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE),¹⁵ the OECD,¹⁶ the World Economic Forum¹⁷ and the Our World in Data project,¹⁸ frequently use this data and other information to develop indices and rankings of women in political power. In 2018, UN Women also began to collect data on women in local government¹⁹ to help measure progress towards Target 5.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which monitor progress towards women's full and effective participation in decision-making in relation to the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments.²⁰

However, **gender equality in political life is about more than just numbers**. The percentage of women in parliament, for example, does not reveal whether women exercise equal influence in political debates. It also does not indicate whether gender equality is truly integrated as a core value of political life, embedded in policies and institutions and advanced by both men and women in the political sphere. Gauging the degree of gender

2. GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICAL LIFE

equality in political life requires going beyond the numbers and measuring progress not only in relation to access, but also in relation to voice and transformation.

2.1. Access to political life

The number of women in parliaments, political parties and regional and local councils/government is a **measure of access**, or the **degree to which women and men can enter politics**. Historically, women were largely excluded from being elected or appointed to public office, apart from a few notable exceptions. Since the 1995 Beijing conference, this pattern began to change dramatically, with countries around the world witnessing major shifts in the proportion of women running as candidates, winning elected positions and being appointed to cabinets. At the global level, the average share of women in national parliaments more than doubled from 12 per cent in 1997 to 26.7 per cent in 2023. In the OSCE region, these changes are even more pronounced, increasing from 11 per cent in 1995 to 31.6 per cent in February 2024.

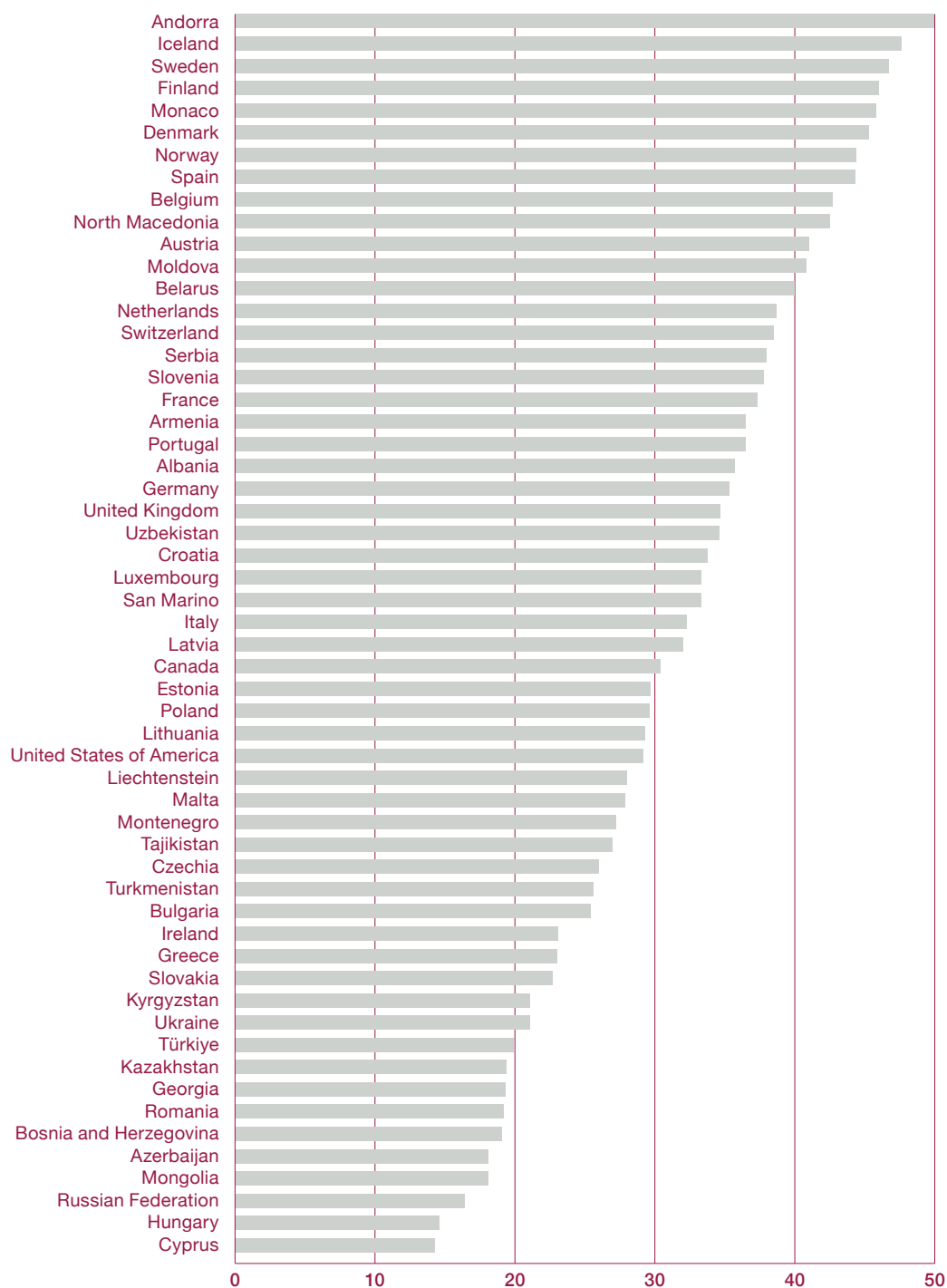
Shifts at the national level have been substantial. As at December 2023, 30 of the 57 OSCE participating States had met or exceeded the 30 per cent target mentioned in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Of these, 13 had elected more than 40 per cent women parliamentarians and one, Andorra, had reached the 50 per cent target for full gender parity. The leading countries in this respect are mainly in the Nordic region (including Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark) or small states like Andorra and Monaco. At the other end of the spectrum, 12 countries in the OSCE region still had 20 per cent or fewer women in their national parliaments. The data shows therefore that, while women's access to political life has increased significantly in many countries in recent years, states across the OSCE region still have significant work to do to level the political playing field so that women can enter parliaments at the same rates as men.

Based on the available data, at the level of local government, the representation of women is progressing, albeit slightly slower than in national parliaments in the OSCE region.²¹ For example, eight participating States have reached 40 per cent representation of women in local government, compared to 13 States at national parliament level. Twenty-eight states have reached 30 per cent representation of women in local government level, compared to 32 states at national parliament level. The OSCE average of

2. GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICAL LIFE

women's representation in local government is 31 per cent, based on data from 2018–2023.²²

Figure 1: Women in parliament in the OSCE region, (% unicameral and lower chambers)

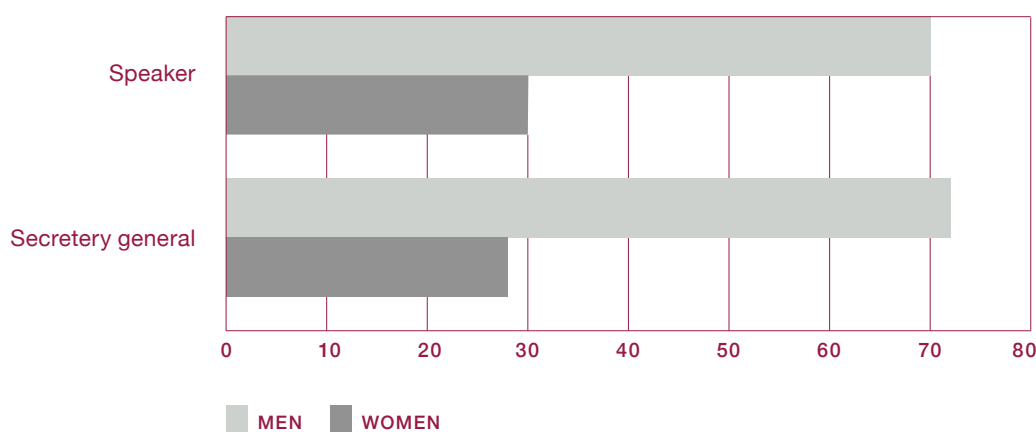


Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, monthly ranking of women in parliament, as at February 2024.

2.2. Voice in political life

Greater access to political life for women does not necessarily translate into equal power in politics, as women may continue to be excluded or marginalized after entering political institutions. Global data suggests that women often have fewer opportunities than men to take up **national leadership positions** from where they can drive and inform the agenda, for example, as presidents and prime ministers,²³ speakers of parliament²⁴ and presidents of legislative committees.²⁵ Similarly, despite making up around one-third of local councillors,²⁶ women constitute just 5 per cent of mayors worldwide.²⁷ These patterns are replicated at party level: between 1965 and 2013, only 14 per cent of party leaders were women, across 71 political parties in 11 parliamentary democracies.²⁸ As at the end of 2023, globally, only 39 of 188 unicameral parliaments or lower chambers of parliaments had a woman as a speaker.²⁹ In the OSCE region, as at January 2021, women held less than 37 per cent of the parliamentary speaker or secretary-general positions, and most parliamentary leadership positions — from party leaders (87 per cent male-dominated) to committee chairs (89 per cent male-dominated) — were held by men.³⁰ To measure these patterns more systematically, the EIGE Gender Statistics Database collects data on women and men in key decision-making positions, including national leaders, cabinet ministers, chamber presidents, parliamentary offices and committees, mayors and other political executives, and political party leaders.³¹

Figure 2: Gender composition of parliamentary Speakers and Secretaries General in the OSCE region³²



Source: IPU Parline data on Secretaries General in parliament and on Speakers in parliament as at May 2024

2. GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICAL LIFE

When women enter political decision-making positions, they can often be relegated to **lower-status duties or assignments**. In national cabinets, for example, women tend to be assigned **ministerial portfolios** on women and gender equality, family and children's affairs, social inclusion and development, social protection and social security, and indigenous and minority affairs.³³ While these are important issues, they are generally considered less powerful and prestigious than cabinet portfolios typically held by men, such as defence, finance and foreign affairs.³⁴ A similar pattern can be seen in national parliaments, with **men over-represented in prestigious, influential committees**, stemming from deeply-rooted inequalities of power, influence and opportunity. These differences shape political careers as well as potential policy outcomes, creating gendered patterns of political power.³⁵

Finally, women may face various **forms of discrimination that undermine their effectiveness**. Work by the IPU on gender-sensitive parliaments highlights the rules, practices and less tangible aspects of the broader culture and environment that make it difficult for women and men to be treated as equals in political spaces.³⁶ In 2021, the ODIHR developed a guide for parliaments in the OSCE region which focuses on integrating a gender perspective into the functions of representation, legislation and oversight. The guide identifies several key areas where action was critically needed, such as supporting the reconciling of work and family obligations and preventing all forms of violence against women in political spaces.³⁷

Violence against women in politics has gained increased attention in recent years, both globally and in the OSCE region.³⁸ In 2018, a collaboration between the IPU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe uncovered alarming patterns of violence in European parliaments. Most notably, 85.2 per cent of women in the study reported having experienced psychological violence during their political work. Of these, 46.9 per cent had received threats of death or rape, and 58.2 per cent had been the target of online sexist attacks. In addition, 14.8 per cent had faced physical violence and 24.7 per cent had suffered sexual violence.³⁹ In 2022, ODIHR launched a toolkit for addressing violence against women in politics in the OSCE region, recognizing it as “one of the most pervasive impediments to women’s full, equal, and effective participation in political and public life and as a threat to human security.”⁴⁰ With detailed recommendations for governments, parliaments, political parties and civil society, the toolkit recognizes that this violence not only targets women for their political views but also deters them from engaging in politics and decision-making

2. GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICAL LIFE

altogether. Therefore, in order to promote the equal voice of women in politics, the wide range of factors that prevent them from exercising full and equal political influence must be addressed.

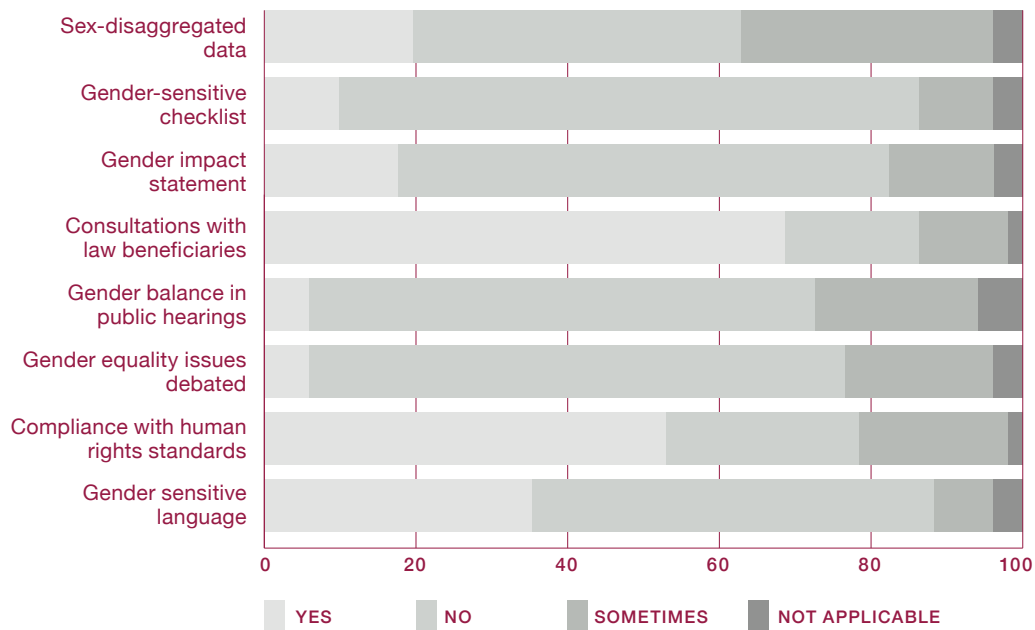
2.3. Transformation of political life

Giving women access and a greater voice in politics is the only way to hear their perspectives and **to ensure women's issues and interests are on the political agenda**. However, true **transformation** occurs only once gender equality has become **a key value in political life**, deeply embedded in policies and institutions, and advanced by men and women across the political sphere.⁴¹

Ensuring that gender equality is seen as integral (and not incidental) to the conduct of political life requires a **commitment to gender mainstreaming**. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action defines gender mainstreaming as “an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively.”⁴² This approach counteracts gender biases within existing policy systems and focuses on changing the gender inequalities embedded in political, economic and social structures, rather than reproducing them.⁴³ Gender training is vital to ensure gender mainstreaming commitments are implemented effectively. Training should include tools such as gender impact assessments, gender-responsive budgeting, gender evaluations of laws and policies, as well the collection of sex-disaggregated statistics. For example, more than half of the parliaments in the OSCE region use sex-disaggregated data often/always or sometimes, but only about 30 per cent of parliaments include gender impact statements often/always or sometimes to ensure the gender-sensitivity of their legislation. (see figure 3) The active engagement of men and women in gender mainstreaming is a further indicator that gender equality is becoming embedded as a value in political life. Conversely, reversals in gender equality policies and commitments suggest that gender equality is fragile and vulnerable to erosion by opponents of gender equality.

2. GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICAL LIFE

Figure 3: Approaches to gender-sensitive lawmaking in the OSCE region⁴⁴



Source: OSCE 2020 survey, data as of January 2021.

3

Conducting a national assessment on gender equality in political life

National assessments are a vital element of promoting gender equality in political life. Assessments provide insights into the current situation and establish a baseline for measuring progress (and setbacks) over time. They should identify areas for improvement, highlighting where interventions are needed. To be effective, an assessment should have the **support of actors from across the political spectrum** and be carried out by independent researchers or specialists with expertise in gender equality in politics. The assessment report should be made public to ensure that the results are available to state and non-state actors. The goal is to take those results and turn them into actions — in the form of a national action plan — to achieve change.

The focus areas of the **three-part national assessment** are summarized in the table below. While each area is discrete (e.g., increasing women's access does not guarantee improved voice or gender equal transformation of political life), progress in each area is necessary for advancing gender equality in political life. Therefore, a robust assessment, and the ensuing action plan, must look at all three areas.

Table 1. Measuring access, voice and transformation in politics*

Area	Definition	Key assessment measures
Access	The degree to which women and men can enter politics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender balance (%) in political institutions (e.g., parliaments, political parties, regional/local government) 2. Existence of supportive measures (e.g., gender quotas, laws, funds, services) to open up politics to women or the under-represented sex/gender
Voice	The degree to which women and men can influence and inform the political agenda equally	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender balance (%) in leadership positions 2. Gender equality in political assignments and responsibilities 3. Existence of supportive measures to foster a gender-equal political culture
Transformation	The degree to which gender equality is embedded as a value in political life	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender mainstreaming is adopted and applied in all political decision-making 2. Gender equality is advanced by both women and men in the political sphere 3. Gains in gender equality are robust and not subject to reversal by opponents

The assessment consists of three phases: preparation, data collection and report drafting. As described below, the assessment approach is highly participatory, building upon a mixture of data collection tools (i.e., desk review, focus groups, workshops, interviews), which together feed into the final product. In each national context, the assessment will be localized and adjusted to specific particular needs and circumstances, aiming at informing future policy developments and reforms. In the next sections, we describe the individual assessment steps and the data collection tools applied.

* In addition to gender, the assessment should pay attention to other intersectional factors, such as age, socio-economic position, disability and/or ethnicity, and include these in the assessment where relevant.

3.1. Preparation

Step 1 in preparing for a national assessment is to **ensure local/national commitment** both to conducting the assessment and implementing the recommendations, alongside **appointing the assessment team** and **designing the assessment plan**. The team should include a primary/lead researcher who will work on the project for at least three months. This person should be supported by a small team which brings complementary expertise, for example, in subject matter, national context or research methods. These experts may inform the assessment plan, help to locate data, develop lists of potential interviewees or focus groups, and provide feedback on the draft assessment report.

Step 2 is to **develop the national assessment outline document** (see an example below). This document should describe the stages of assessment, the institutions and individuals who will be involved, and the key outputs that are planned, including how the assessment report will feed into the design of a national action plan. At this stage, the team should also **identify key stakeholders** whose support might be particularly helpful for the data collection process.

Example: National assessment outline document

- Introduction (background, previous studies, commitments to gender equality in political life, etc.)
- Areas of analysis (assessment topics, measures and questions)
- Assessment methodology (methodology, stages of assessment and institutions/individuals involved)
- Access to political life (findings and recommendations)
- Voice in political life (findings and recommendations)
- Transformation of political life (findings and recommendations)
- Steps towards an action plan

3.2. Data collection

Step 3 of the assessment is the **desk research**. This will focus on the data that can be collected using official statistics, primary research of publicly available data, and data from studies by academics, civil society and international organizations. A thorough desk review will help inform the assessment in valuable ways, helping the team to ask relevant questions, understand the data, and avoid collecting duplicate data.

Information to be collected during desk research may include: statistics on the share of women and men in various types of political institutions, domestic legislation and constitutional guarantees related to gender equality and women's political participation, and gender mainstreaming mechanisms. This information can be found in various databases assembled by global and regional organizations, as well as in documents available at the country level, including information on legal frameworks and statistics on women's representation in government, parliaments and political parties.

Table 2: Potential sources of data

International Organizations
Inter-Parliamentary Union
- Women in Parliament monthly ranking, https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking
- Women in Parliament data archive, http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif-arc.html
- Parline Database, https://data.ipu.org
UN Women
- Women in Local Government, https://localgov.unwomen.org/
- UN Gender Quota Portal, https://genderquota.org/
International IDEA
- Gender Quotas Database, https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas-database
- Political Finance Database, https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/political-finance-database
European Institute for Gender Equality
- Gender Statistics Database, Politics, https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/browse/wmidm/wmidm_pol
- Gender Mainstreaming Country Specific Information, https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries

Country Level

Legal and regulatory frameworks:

- National constitution
- Electoral laws
- Gender equality laws
- Political party laws
- Political party constitutions

Data from government/parliament/parties:

- Cabinet minister list
- Parliamentary standing orders
- Parliamentary leadership list
- Parliamentary committee composition
- Party leaders and national executive committee lists
- Party women's sections
- Party rules and procedures
- Data and/or studies on gender equality run by parliament and parties (e.g., gender audits of parliaments or political parties)
- Gender equality strategies and policies by government, parliament or political parties

International organizations/civil society/Ombudsperson's office

- Reports to international treaty bodies
 - Studies/research reports
 - Policy briefs
 - Surveys
-

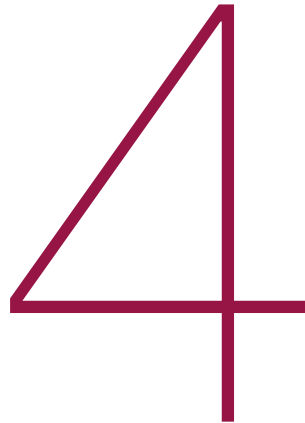
Step 4 involves **research to gather materials not available through desk research**. To ensure efficient use of time and resources, this stage should begin with a **workshop** with a mixed group of participants. Participants should include stakeholders from government, parliament, political parties and civil society, together with academic experts, members of the media and, where relevant, international donors. The workshop should focus on collecting feedback on the measures and questions being used to assess access, voice and transformation. (see [Table 1](#) and [Chapter 4](#)) The research team should also use the meeting as an opportunity to collect data from workshop participants, to solicit recommendations for other people to contact and to build support and political will to implement the findings.

3. CONDUCTING A NATIONAL ASSESSMENT ON GENDER EQUALITY

Following the workshop, the team should focus on filling gaps in knowledge not answered by the desk research, making sure to include, as far as possible, respondents from a broad range of backgrounds: men and women, and people from different backgrounds and with different personal characteristics, including related to ethnicity, age, socio-economic background and disability. The team should try to obtain any missing quantitative data and gather more qualitative insights through interviews and, possibly, focus groups.

3.3. Drafting and finalizing the assessment report

Step 5 is to **write and disseminate the report**. Following the structure of the assessment questions, (see [Chapter 4](#)) the report should include a comprehensive account of achievements and gaps in attaining gender equality in political life along the three dimensions of access, voice and transformation, including intersecting factors such as age, socio-economic background, disability and others, where relevant. The report should also include a **list of conclusions and recommendations for a national action plan**. It should present the data as clearly as possible and offer detailed recommendations that target specific stakeholders on the actions to be taken. The draft report should then be discussed with other members of the research team as well as a selected group of stakeholders and gender and political experts at a verification workshop. The assessment team should incorporate the feedback into the final report, which should be published and sent to all stakeholders to encourage implementation of these recommendations. Implementation is best delivered via an action plan.



Assessment topics and questions

The following tables provide **suggested assessment questions**, organized according to the **three focus areas** for gender equality in political life: **access, voice and transformation**. The questions should be tailored to the specifics of the assessment, and the team should add, remove or adapt them as necessary during the course of the assessment. Questions about access focus on the numbers of women in political institutions, as well as the existence of policies and other initiatives to promote their inclusion. Questions about voice focus on opportunities for women to access leadership positions, exercise influence in debates and decision-making, and participate equally and safely in political life. Questions about transformation focus on the degree to which gender equality is embedded in the fabric of political life. In addition to gendered aspects, other factors, such as age, socio-economic background, disability and/or other intersecting characteristics could be taken into account depending on the context and focus of the assessment.⁴⁵

Table 3. Questions about access to political life

<p>Gender balance* in political institutions</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- What is the gender balance (%) in the national cabinet/government** in the last three electoral cycles?- What is the gender balance (%) in the national parliament in the last three electoral cycles?- What is the gender balance (%) in regional/local councils in the last three electoral cycles?- Do political parties run equal numbers of men and women candidates?- What is the gender balance (%) among political party members? <hr/> <p>Temporary special measures</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Is there a gender quota or gender-related rules for women or under-represented sex/gender in the national cabinet/government?- Is there a gender quota or gender-related rules for members of the national parliament?- Are there any rules requiring a minimum level of participation by the under-represented sex/gender in parliamentary committees?- Are there any voluntary gender quotas or gender-related rules in political parties?- Is there a gender quota or gender-related rules for members of regional/local councils? <p>If yes to any of the above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- What is the quota/rule?- Has this policy been introduced at the party level voluntarily and/or through national legislation?- Has this policy been effective in increasing the number of women or under-represented sex/gender elected or appointed? <hr/>
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* Questions can collect information, at least, on the percentages of men and women. Other factors, such as, age, socio-economic background, disability and/or other intersecting characteristics could be taken into account depending on the state and overall assessment focus.

** In case of complex, multi-layer political systems, focus of the assessment should be placed on the national/state/federal level of governance, including elected and appointed ministers, deputy ministers and state secretaries. References to lower levels should be made only if feasible and operationally doable.

4. ASSESSMENT TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

Political financing, including laws, funds and services

- Are there any laws that incentivize political parties to nominate and/or elect women candidates or candidates of under-represented sex/gender?
- Are there any special funds or services provided by the government and/or political parties to support the campaigns of women candidates or candidates of under-represented sex/gender?
- Are there any campaigns by civil society organizations to raise money for women candidates or candidates of under-represented sex/gender?
- If yes, describe these laws, funds and services briefly.

Recruitment, training and mentoring

- Have any political parties established programmes to recruit, train, or mentor women candidates or candidates of under-represented sex/gender?
- Are there any efforts by civil society or other organizations to recruit, train, or mentor women candidates or candidates of under-represented sex/gender for elected and/or appointed positions?

If yes to any of the above:

- How effective are these initiatives in opening up pathways for gender-equal political participation?

Reconciling work and family obligations

- Are there gender-sensitive policies in
 - the government,
 - parliament,
 - political parties, or
 - regional/local councils

that enable women and men to combine political work with family obligations?

For example:

- Do parliamentary/council sitting times accommodate the needs of cabinet members, parliamentarians and councillors with parental, family or caring responsibilities?
 - Have any measures been implemented to support the needs of cabinet ministers, parliamentarians and councillors in fulfilling their caring roles?
 - Are political party meetings held in locations open to women and men at hours that are family-friendly?
 - Do any political parties provide assistance with child care to attend party meetings and conferences?
-

4. ASSESSMENT TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

Intersecting factors

- How do intersecting characteristics, such as age, socio-economic background, disability, ethnicity or other factors, play a role in women's access to or gender equality in political life?
 - Is there data on gender balance taking into account intersecting factors?
 - Are there special measures, financial support and/or capacity building provided to under-represented sex/gender with intersecting characteristics?
 - Are spaces and events accessible to women or men with disabilities?
-

Table 4. Questions about voice in political life

Leadership in political institutions*

- What is the gender composition of cabinet/government portfolios in the last three electoral cycles?
- What is the gender composition of parliamentary leadership in the last three electoral cycles?
- What is the gender composition of parliamentary committees in the last three electoral cycles?
- What is the gender composition of mayors in the last three electoral cycles?
- What is the gender composition of political party leadership in the last three electoral cycles?

Institutional mechanisms for gender equality

- What is the mandate of the institutional mechanism for gender equality?
- Does the institutional mechanism influence government decision-making?

Parliamentary bodies for gender equality

- Is there a parliamentary women's caucus or gender equality body?
- If so, is the caucus/body formal or informal?
- What activities does the parliamentary caucus/body engage in?

Gender equality bodies in regional/local government

- Is there a gender equality committee in parliament/regional or local council/government?
- If so, what is the institutional status of the gender equality committee?
- Is the committee able to influence parliamentary/regional or local council/government decision-making?

Gender equality bodies/women's sections in parties

- Are there gender equality bodies or women's sections inside the political parties?
- If so, what is the institutional status of the body/section within the party?
- Are bodies/sections able to influence party decision-making?

* Questions can collect information, at least, on the number of men and women. Other factors, such as, age and/or other intersecting characteristics could be taken into account depending on the state and overall assessment focus.

4. ASSESSMENT TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

Financing for gender equality

- What types of resources and budget are allocated to the institutional mechanism for gender equality?
 - What types of resources and budget are allocated to the parliamentary women's caucus and gender equality committee in parliament/councils?
 - What types of resources and budgets are allocated to women's sections or for gender equality work in the political parties?
-

Mechanisms for civil society influence

- What opportunities exist, formal or informal, for civil society and researchers working on gender equality to inform government action?
- Does the government, parliament and/or regional or local council have an official mechanism for engaging with civil society and researchers working on gender equality?

If yes to any of the above:

- How often and regularly are these opportunities and mechanisms used?
 - How do civil society's views influence the decision-making?
-

Gender-based discrimination, violence and harassment in politics*

- Has there been research on gender-based discrimination and/or the types of violence and harassment experienced by women and men in politics?
 - Has there been research on the categories of women and men who are more frequently targeted?
 - Are there any government, parliamentary, council and/or party mechanisms in place to deal with gender-based discrimination?
 - Are there any government, parliamentary, council and/or party mechanisms in place to deal with violence and harassment targeting women and men as political actors?
 - Are there any government, parliamentary, council and/or party mechanisms in place to deal with sexual harassment in politics?
 - If so, are the mechanisms in place effective in dealing with gender-based discrimination, violence and harassment?
-

Intersecting factors

- How do intersecting characteristics, such as age, socio-economic background, disability, ethnicity or other factors, play a role in women's voice or leadership in political life?

* This section applies to elected/appointed politicians as well as parliamentary and local council/government staff.

4. ASSESSMENT TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

- How do institutional mechanisms and bodies take into account intersecting characteristics, such as age, socio-economic background, disability, ethnicity or other factors in their work?
 - Are intersecting characteristics, such as age, socio-economic background, disability, ethnicity or other factors taken into account in financing and in consultations with civil society?
 - How do intersecting factors influence gender-based discrimination, violence and harassment in politics?
-

Table 5. Questions about the transformation of political life

Integrating the principle of gender equality
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Is there an official gender equality or gender mainstreaming mandate, for example in the constitution, legislation, government policy, or recommendations of parliament? Do any political parties mention gender equality or gender mainstreaming in their statutes or electoral platforms?- Is gender training, including on preventing gender-based violence and harassment, provided to government officials and/or members/staff of parliament and/or regional or local councils?- Do political parties offer gender training, including on preventing gender-based violence and harassment, to their leaders, candidates, and/or rank-and-file members?- What kind of training and how often?
Implementing the principle of gender equality
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- To what extent does the government, parliament, political party, and/or council apply gender mainstreaming tools? <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Does the government, parliament and/or regional or local council undertake gender impact assessments?- Does the government, parliament and/or regional or local council engage in gender-responsive budgeting?- Does the government and/or parliament engage in gender-sensitive legislative scrutiny?- Does the government, parliament and/or regional or local council have guidance and methodology to conduct gender impact assessments, gender-responsive budgeting and/or legislative scrutiny?- To what extent do political parties apply gender mainstreaming tools? <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Do any political parties engage in gender analysis or undertake gender impact assessments?- Are women's sections involved in the development of party statutes and campaign materials? If so, how?
Monitoring progress and change
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Does the government, parliament, regional or local council and/or political party collect sex-disaggregated statistics or other gender data?- Does the government, parliament and/or regional or local council conduct gender audits?

4. ASSESSMENT TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

- Does the government, parliament and/or regional or local council conduct research on gender equality in political life?
- Does the government, parliament and/or regional or local council undertake gender evaluations of laws or policy?
- Does the parliament conduct oversight on how the government is implementing international and national gender equality commitments?

If yes to any of the above:

- Are these findings reported on a regular basis — for example, to parliament or the public?
- Do research, data and/or evaluations lead to concrete improvements in laws, policies or practices?
- What were the key results of gender audit(s) and improvements made?
- Do political parties conduct gender audits?

If yes:

- What were the results of the gender audit(s) and improvements made?

Role of men in advancing gender equality

- Are men central and active participants in gender equality initiatives in government, parliament and/or the political parties?
- What activities have men been involved in to promote gender equality?

Tracking backsliding on gender equality

- Are there efforts within government, parliament, regional/local councils and/or parties to roll back gains or address backsliding in gender equality (e.g., attempts to repeal gender equality legislation or regulations)?
- If yes, what are these efforts?

Intersecting factors

- Do the aforementioned laws/rules, policies or measures on gender equality in politics, including their implementation and monitoring, take into account any intersecting factors, such as age, socio-economic background, disability and/or ethnicity?

General questions:

- What are the overall shortcomings in terms of gender equality in politics?
 - What are the achievements of past years in advancing gender equality in politics?
 - What should happen next/what are the recommendations for the future?
-

5

National action plans

National assessments can provide insights into progress towards achieving gender equality in political life. By revealing good practices and areas in need of improvement, these assessments can also help identify opportunities for action.

There are a number of **reasons why national action plans should be developed**. Beyond the principle that everyone has the right to take part in government and public service (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21⁴⁶), the inclusion of women is also important for strategic reasons. When women are excluded, issues that disproportionately affect them, such as child care, women's health and gender-based violence, may be ignored or overlooked. Policies on the economy, taxation, social security, labour rights, national security and foreign policy will likely also lack a gender perspective, excluding women's experiences, visions and priorities. The quality of decision-making, moreover, improves when women are included; research suggests that women often adopt more collaborative leadership styles, which can help resolve long-standing political stalemates,⁴⁷ and that their participation is also associated with greater societal investment in political outcomes, resulting in improved content and implementation of public policy.⁴⁸

Developing a national action plan might take one of two paths:

- Creating a separate action plan on gender equality in political life; or
- Incorporating findings from the assessment into existing and cross-sectoral national gender equality strategies and action plans.

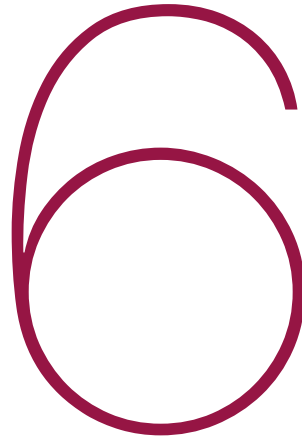
5.1. Who should lead the process?

In most contexts, this process might be led by the **country's national body mandated to promote gender equality** (institutional mechanism for gender equality⁴⁹), which is normally tasked with developing and implementing gender equality strategies. However, another possibility might be for a **cross-party body based in parliament** to take the lead, such as a gender equality committee or parliamentary women's caucus. In either case, the success of the assessment and the action plan is likely to hinge on the availability of technical expertise as well as on broad-based support from across the political spectrum.

5.2. What should it look like?

To be effective, a national action plan should include **clear and specific objectives and actions**. It should also indicate individual stakeholders responsible for implementing each action. The strategies chosen to achieve the objectives, and the resulting actions should be evidence-based and take into account international standards and good/promising practices that aim to make a real impact and transform politics from a gender perspective. The plan should have an agreed timeline (2-5 years is typical) and include an independent final assessment, to be run at the end of the period to assess its achievements against the baseline outcomes of the first national assessment.

Finally, the national action plan must be properly resourced — both with experienced and committed staff and sufficient budget — and include a suitable communications plan to ensure stakeholders are familiar with the plan and can contribute as necessary.



Possible actions

This chapter presents a range of actions or measures that could be included in a national action plan, looking at each element of gender equality — access, voice, and transformation — in turn. Some measures, such as gender quota laws or candidate training programmes, may already be in place. The most promising action plans will be those that adopt a holistic approach, addressing access, voice *and* transformation.

6.1. Increasing access

Ways to increase access to political life:

1. Nominate women and men candidates in equally winnable seats/set up temporary special measures (e.g., gender quotas);
2. Support women's campaigns equally to men's campaigns;
3. Equip women with political skills; and
4. Mitigate conflicts between political work and family life.

Action 1: Nominate women and men candidates in equally winnable seats/set up temporary special measures (e.g., gender quotas)

Gender quotas

Temporary special measures are common around the world as well as in the OSCE region. Electoral quotas typically seek to increase the share of women standing as candidates to parliament, but a growing number also address the share of women standing as candidates for regional/local government. In the OSCE region, quotas take two forms: legislative quotas (requiring all parties to nominate a certain percentage of women) and party quotas (involving voluntary commitments from individual parties to include a certain share of women on their electoral lists). At the time of writing, 27 of the 57 OSCE participating States have adopted legislative quotas, while political parties in a further 14 States have introduced party measures. Only 16 participating States have no quotas in place, either at the national or the party level.

However, quotas vary in their effectiveness. Policies vary in terms of the percentage they specify, whether or not they include placement requirements, and the types of sanctions they impose for non-compliance. Data on quota policies and the share of women in parliament in the OSCE region suggests that countries fall into four groups. Those with strong legislated quota regimes include Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Belgium, Italy, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and Uzbekistan. In these cases, the quota legislation stipulates 30 per cent or higher women's representation, outlines placement requirements and imposes sanctions for non-compliance. In these participating States, the quota percentage is roughly reflected in the share of women elected.

States with 30 per cent or lower representation, despite the adoption of legislative quotas, include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Ukraine. Here, there are no placement requirements, and/or there are no sanctions for non-compliance. In other OSCE countries, the share of women elected is ten or more percentage points below the level stipulated by the quota policy. These include Croatia, France, Kyrgyzstan and Malta. In these cases, there are no placement requirements and/or ineffective or non-existent sanctions for non-compliance.

Countries with party quotas have more varied results. These variations are related in part to the voluntary nature of these policies, which rely on

6. POSSIBLE ACTIONS

the political will of elites for their implementation. The number and size of parties adopting quotas is also important: in some cases, this may be only one small party, while in others, quotas may be introduced by several major parties across the political spectrum. Some of these participating States (with party, not legislative quotas) have women's representation well below 30 per cent, including Romania, Türkiye, the Czech Republic and Lithuania. Several other countries hover around the 30 per cent target, including Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany. Five others are on the path to parity, including Switzerland, Austria, Norway, Sweden and Iceland. For these countries, the key appears to be quota adoption by multiple major parties, which appears to have a similar effect as strong legislated quota regimes.

Countries with no current party quota measure fall mainly into two groups. The first includes countries such as Hungary, Georgia, the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan, where women's representation falls below — and often far below — the 30 per cent benchmark. These countries are prime candidates for quota (re-)introduction. The second group includes countries with some of the highest levels of women's representation, including the Netherlands, Denmark and Finland. Here, formal quotas do not apply, but there are strong informal norms of equal representation.

Table 6. Gender quotas for national parliaments in the OSCE region⁵⁰

Country	Quota Policy ⁵¹	Placement	Sanctions	Women MPs
Albania	30% legislated	1 in 3	List rejection and fine	35.7%
Andorra	40% legislated	None	List rejection	50.0%
Armenia ⁵²	30% legislated	1 in 3	List rejection	36.5%
Austria	33-50% party	None	None	41.0%
Azerbaijan	None	None	None	18.1%
Belarus	None	None	None	40.0%
Belgium	50% legislated	Alternation	List rejection	42.7%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	40% legislated	1 in top 2; 2 in top 5; 3 in 8	List rejection	19.1%

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Country	Quota Policy ⁵¹	Placement	Sanctions	Women MPs
Bulgaria	None	None	None	25.4%
Canada	50% party	None	None	30.4%
Croatia	40% legislated	None	Fine	33.8%
Cyprus	20-30% party	None	None	14.3%
Czech Republic	25% party	None	None	26.0%
Denmark	None	None	None	45.3%
Estonia	None	None	None	29.7%
Finland	None	None	None	46.0%
France	50% legislated	None	Fine	37.3%
Georgia	None ⁵³	None	None	19.3%
Germany	33-50% party	None	None	35.3%
Greece	40% legislated	None	List rejection	23.0%
Holy See	None	None	None	0.00%
Hungary	20% party	None	None	14.6%
Iceland	40% party	None	None	47.6%
Ireland	40% legislated	Alternation	Fine	23.1%
Italy	40% legislated	None	List rejection & fine	32.3%
Kazakhstan	30% legislated ⁵⁴	None	List rejection	19.4%
Kyrgyzstan	30% legislated ⁵⁵	1 in 4 ⁵⁶	None	21.1%
Latvia	None	None	None	32.0%
Liechtenstein	None	None	None	28.0%
Lithuania	40% party	None	None	29.3%
Luxembourg	40% legislated	None	Fine	33.3%
Malta	40% legislated	4 in 10	None	27.9%
Moldova	40% legislated	None	List rejection	40.8%
Monaco	None	None	None	45.8%

6. POSSIBLE ACTIONS

Country	Quota Policy ⁵¹	Placement	Sanctions	Women MPs
Mongolia	30% legislated	None	List rejection	18.1%
Montenegro	30% legislated	1 in 4	List rejection	27.2%
Netherlands	None	None	None	38.7%
North Macedonia	40% legislated	1 in 3	List rejection	42.5%
Norway	40-50% party	None	None	44.4%
Poland	35% legislated	None	List rejection	29.6%
Portugal	40% legislated	1 in 3	List rejection	36.5%
Romania	30% party	None	None	19.2%
Russian Federation	None	None	None	16.4%
San Marino	33% legislated	None	List rejection	33.3%
Serbia	40% legislated	2 in 5	List rejection	38.0%
Slovakia	None	None	None	22.7%
Slovenia	35% legislated	1 in 3	List rejection	37.8%
Spain	40% legislated	None	List rejection	44.3%
Sweden	50% party	None	None	46.7%
Switzerland	33-40% party	None	None	38.5%
Tajikistan	None	None	None	27.0%
Türkiye	25-50% party	None	None	19.9%
Turkmenistan	None	None	None	25.6%
Ukraine	40% legislated	2 in 5	List rejection	21.1%
United Kingdom	40-50% party	None	None	34.7%
United States	None	None	None	29.2%
Uzbekistan	40% legislated	2 in 5	List rejection	34.6%

Various sources, see footnote. Information largely from 2023.

Action 2: Support women's nomination and election

Political financing

In countries where political parties are publicly funded, some parliaments have passed regulations tying access to these funds to the increased nomination and election of women.⁵⁷ One approach is to sanction parties that do not nominate women, removing or reducing their access to state funding. In Albania, the Law on Gender Equality in Society imposes a fine of up to 10 per cent of the party's state subsidy for electoral campaigning if they do not respect the 30 per cent gender quota law.⁵⁸ In Ireland, political parties that do not nominate at least 30 per cent women and 30 per cent men (a requirement later raised to 40 per cent women and 40 per cent men) are subject to a 50 per cent reduction in their annual state funding.⁵⁹

A different approach is to use state funding to create incentives for parties, rewarding them for including women on their lists. This approach has become increasingly common across the OSCE region in recent years. In Croatia, parties are entitled to a bonus of 10 per cent of the amount allocated for each MP or member of a local or regional body for each elected representative who belongs to the under-represented gender.⁶⁰ And in Moldova, 7.5 per cent of annual party funding is calculated in proportion to the share of women elected to parliament, with another 7.5 per cent calculated in proportion to the share of women elected to local government. The law further stipulates that 20 per cent of the annual allowances should be used to promote and encourage women's participation in political and electoral processes, to be managed by each party's women's organization, where such organizations exist.⁶¹

Political parties can also provide direct support to women's campaigns. In Canada, the Liberal Party established a fund to assist women with their campaign costs. The money is raised through fundraising events, direct mailings and the internet, and the party maintains centralized control of determining who is prioritized to receive contributions. Female candidates may be reimbursed up to Can\$500 for childcare expenses incurred when seeking a nomination, Can\$500 for travel when campaigning in geographically large constituencies, and Can\$500 when pursuing a nomination in a district where an incumbent is retiring.⁶²

6. POSSIBLE ACTIONS

Examples of political financing incentives⁶³

Bosnia and Herzegovina	10% of subsidies distributed to parties proportional to number of seats belonging to the less-represented gender
Croatia	10% bonus for each member elected from under-represented gender
Moldova	7.5% of annual funding in proportion to the share of women elected to parliament and 7.5% for the share of women elected in local elections
Montenegro	20% of public subsidies distributed to parties in proportion to the number of elected representatives of the under-represented gender
Romania	Public funding increased in proportion to the number of mandates obtained by women candidates
Ukraine	10% of annual public funding to be distributed among parties who ensure that no more than two-thirds of their MPs are of one sex

Recruitment initiatives

In other contexts, women's organizations in civil society have supported women's campaigns by launching recruitment initiatives, assembling lists with the names and CVs of potential female candidates to combat claims that no qualified women could be found to run for office. This strategy was applied in Sweden in the 1970s, with the names presented to party officials as they sought to find women to put on their lists. More recently, a local party leader in Sweden used the list of female party members in his district to contact women personally, one by one, to ask them to consider putting themselves forward as candidates.⁶⁴

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Action 3: Enhance women candidates' political skills

Training and mentoring programmes

Some parties have developed training programmes to enhance the capacities of female candidates. Training can be offered to women currently running for office, as well as to those who might consider doing so in the future. Topics might include fostering motivation to run for office, improving public speaking and demystifying the campaign process. In 2005 in the United Kingdom, women inside the Conservative Party launched the Women2Win campaign to promote women in the party by providing support, advice and training in public speaking and media skills to Conservative party women members who wish to get more politically involved. It also hosts networking events for women at all levels of politics.⁶⁵ At times, the training is organized or supported by the international community.

Action 4: Mitigate conflicts between political work and family life

Family-friendly working hours

Private obligations may shape women's ability to participate fully and equally in political life. Many parliaments, for example, work late into the night, precluding members from being at home with their families in the evening. Recognizing that this is a problem — particularly acute for women, because societal expectations often place a greater burden on them for such tasks as preparing dinner and putting children to bed — several legislatures have established new rules on hours. Norway's parliament has revamped its working hours several times. In 2011/2012, the traditional three-hour afternoon break was eliminated to avoid evening sittings. When the presidium determines that an evening session must take place, an announcement is made a week in advance. To introduce greater predictability in schedules, voting times are also fixed for Tuesdays at 3p.m. and Thursdays at 2p.m.⁶⁶

Childcare provisions

Questions of work-life balance have led to greater attention to ways in which parliaments can become more 'gender-sensitive', to make parliament a more attractive place to work for both women and men. In Sweden, all

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parliamentarians — both male and female — are entitled to use the childcare centre in parliament. In Poland, the lower chamber of the parliament introduced a childcare facility next to the parliament building with professional staff to provide child care to cover two consecutive parliamentary sittings in 2024. Discussions continue on whether to make this a regular arrangement.⁶⁷ Additionally, several parliaments have introduced provisions to allow parents in parliament to care for young children. In Estonia, the parliament building has a children's room, where children from five to ten years of age can play, read books, study or watch TV and DVDs under their parent's supervision. In Iceland, there are highchairs in the parliamentary cafeteria, as well as baby-changing facilities in the bathrooms.

Less is known about the gender-sensitive policies of political parties to ensure that women can be present at party meetings. Anecdotal evidence suggests that assistance with childcare — for example, by offering group babysitting — might enable more women to attend. Holding party meetings at locations open to women at hours that are family-friendly is also important. This would involve avoiding traditional meeting places like pubs or saunas, with meetings lasting late into the night.

Parental leave policies

Until recently, few political institutions anywhere in the world permitted members to take parental leave. This pattern has started to change, however. In the United Kingdom, the Ministerial and Other Maternity Allowances Act of 2021⁶⁸ introduced formal paid maternity leave for ministers, which allows the prime minister to designate a pregnant minister as a 'minister on leave' for up to six months and to appoint another paid minister to temporarily fill the role. However, the Act does not guarantee that the minister on maternity leave will be reappointed to the same role after six months. The situation is different for Members of Parliament (MPs), who are considered officeholders, not employees, and therefore are not eligible for statutory maternity leave. In Finland, MPs and ministers, both men and women, can take parental leave in a similar way as other citizens. There is no law that explicitly governs parental leave for MPs, but, according to the Finnish constitution, MPs can be released from their duties for an acceptable reason.⁶⁹ The Parliament has a long-established practice since the 1960s of permitting parental leave as an acceptable reason, and both men and women MPs take parental leave. While MPs do not get a designated replacement for their parental leave, a temporary substitute is usually appointed for ministerial positions.⁷⁰

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Proxy voting policies

Parental leave to give birth or care for a new-born child raises questions about who will represent constituents when an MP is on leave or otherwise unavailable due to their caring responsibilities. In Andorra, the rules of procedure were reworked in 2019 to permit proxy voting for reasons such as pregnancy and parental leave.⁷¹ In the UK, this question was originally dealt with through an informal agreement among parties to balance participation by removing a colleague from the opposing party from a particular vote. When this pairing arrangement was not respected in 2019, a new procedure was put in place to permit MPs who are new parents to cast their votes through proxies, in the form of other MPs who can vote on their behalf. Made permanent in 2020, this scheme is open to mothers, fathers and adoptive parents who do not have to attend parliament while they are expecting or looking after a new-born child. The scheme also covers circumstances where there have been complications relating to childbirth, miscarriage or baby loss.⁷²

6.2. Amplifying voice

Ways to amplify women's voices:

1. Promote and nominate women equally to leadership positions
2. Institutionalize commitments to gender equality
3. Plan and finance gender equality initiatives
4. Provide channels for meaningful civil society influence
5. Combat gender-based violence and harassment in politics

Action 1: Promote and nominate women equally to leadership positions

Gender balance provisions

To improve gender balance in parliamentary leadership positions, the Parliament of Montenegro adopted several amendments to its rules of procedure in December 2020. Article 18 (4) now stipulates that at least one Vice-President of the Parliament must be elected from the under-represented sex; Article 34(5) requires that, in the process of determining the composition of each committee, including the positions of chair and deputy chair, care must be taken to ensure the participation of the under-represented

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sex; and Article 210(3) requires the same course of action in relation to the composition of parliamentary delegations.⁷³ These new rules had an immediate impact: less than a year later, a woman held the position of Vice-President of Parliament; women were sitting on every parliamentary committee apart from the Security and Defence Committee; women were chairing three parliamentary committees; and women headed three parliamentary delegations.⁷⁴

To promote gender equality in party leadership, some parties have also established quotas for women in internal leadership positions. These measures typically provide for women to be included on a party's governing board or national executive committee, but they may also be applied to party committees. In Germany, the Christian Democratic Union adopted a 33 per cent quota for party officials in 1996. If the quota is not met, the internal elections must be repeated.⁷⁵ Similarly, many Green parties around the world apply the principle of gender parity to their party leadership, electing one woman and one man to serve as joint spokespeople for the party.

Action 2: Institutionalize commitments to gender equality

Institutional mechanisms for gender equality

Most countries around the world have institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and gender equality, but these offices vary dramatically in terms of their status, resources and ability to influence public policy. Across EU member states, only Luxembourg and Spain have established ministries dedicated exclusively to gender equality issues. Countries such as Germany and Poland combine gender equality with family affairs, while countries like Bulgaria and Greece deal with gender equality under the auspices of their ministries of labour, employment and social security. Three countries — the Czech Republic, Hungary and Portugal — place gender equality under the Prime Minister's Office.⁷⁶ Many post-Soviet countries have gender equality commissions/councils attached to an independent ministry or to the Office of the President or Prime Minister. For example, the Commission for Women, Family and Demographic Policy in Kazakhstan and the Council for Women's Affairs in Armenia are both attached to the Office of the President.⁷⁷

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Parliamentary women's caucuses

Women's caucuses seek to bring women together across party lines to amplify their collective voice in parliament. These organizations can also serve as a means to connect women in parliament with actors in civil society and the private sector. Caucuses can be more formal organizations, with permanent offices and objectives, or less formal groups that convene meetings as necessary. In addition to coordinating women's legislative activities, women's caucuses can play a role in leadership training and gender mainstreaming.⁷⁸

Parliamentary bodies for gender equality

Gender equality committees work specifically on developing women-friendly legislation. They can take a variety of different forms, focusing on gender equality, women's status and, often, family issues. Their varied tasks may include generating draft legislation, providing oversight for bills proposed in other committees, monitoring the implementation of laws, requesting briefings from ministers and government departments, and conducting study tours.

In 2011 in Denmark, a Gender Equality Committee was established to address equal opportunities for women and men. It handles bills and motions regarding gender equality, engages in ongoing scrutiny of the government in the area of gender equality by tabling questions to the Minister for Gender Equality and organizes hearings and expert meetings to discuss gender equality. It invites members of the public, both organizations and private citizens, to contact the committee if they wish to draw attention to a particular issue or case. The committee also makes study trips abroad to expand their knowledge and gain inspiration.⁷⁹

Women's sections in political parties

Women's sections — also known as women's associations, women's wings, and women's committees — can play an important role in incorporating women into the party and giving them a voice. Historically, women's sections have primarily served the party by recruiting female party members, organizing political campaigns and providing logistical support for party meetings. Over time however, women's sections in many countries have come to serve as important platforms for women inside parties, both in

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mobilizing around women's issues and in gaining commitments from party leaders for the increased recruitment of female candidates.⁸⁰

In Serbia, for example, women's sections play a direct role in pressing for the nomination of women, including lobbying party leaders to ensure they are given high positions on electoral lists.⁸¹ One way to ensure that a separate women's section does not result in the sidelining of women's issues is to provide for the section chair to have a seat and vote on the party's governing board. This is the case in many political parties in Sweden. In Croatia, membership of the Social Democratic Women's Forum opened up its membership to non-party members, to enable women to contribute to the party's platform without having to face the pressure of joining the party.⁸²

Action 3: Finance gender equality initiatives

Funding for gender equality

To fill the resource gap, laws in some countries stipulate that public subsidies to political parties must be earmarked for gender equality activities. In Armenia, 20 per cent of the public funding received must be spent on including women, youth, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities in the activities of the party.⁸³ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 10 per cent of the public funding is given to parliamentary groups proportional to the number of seats belonging to the less-represented sex.⁸⁴ In Finland, 5 per cent of the annual party subsidy must be used to support women's wings.⁸⁵ In Italy, parties face a fine if they do not spend at least 10 per cent of their 'two per thousand' donations (i.e., individuals donating 0.2% of their personal income tax) on initiatives to increase the active participation of women in politics.⁸⁶

Action 4: Provide channels for civil society influence

Channels for civil society

Governments and parliaments can give women a greater voice in politics by establishing official mechanisms for engaging women in civil society, giving visibility to women as political actors and providing opportunities for women in civil society to inform political work. In Slovenia, Article 3 of the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act⁸⁷ establishes a legal

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obligation for the government and ministries to cooperate with social partners (e.g., trade unions and employer associations) and NGOs working in the field of equal opportunities. The Expert Council for Gender Equality includes experts working in various fields, including representatives of NGOs active on issues of gender equality.

In Lithuania, NGOs can select four representatives to the Commission of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. Serving as an advisory council, the Commission is invited to give feedback on policy documents and legal acts related to gender equality.⁸⁸ The Gender Equality Committee in Slovakia, to give another example, is composed of an equal number of representatives from ministries and NGOs. It serves as an advisory body that can provide the government with recommendations on legislative and policy development.⁸⁹ A similar body, the Consultative Council for Women's Rights, was established in Malta in 2018.⁹⁰

Action 5: Combat gender-based violence and harassment

Data collection

Collecting data is a necessary first step for understanding the frequency and patterns of gender-based violence and harassment in politics. In recent years, the literature on this topic in the OSCE region has expanded dramatically. A study supported by the OSCE in Kyrgyzstan found that women politicians experienced violence more frequently than men. Psychological violence was particularly prevalent: 32 per cent of women had received threats of harm, 15 per cent had faced offensive remarks, and 12 per cent had been silenced or prevented from speaking in political debates. When asked what the purpose of the violence was, 54 per cent of men said the violence was an attempt to hurt their popularity or eliminate them as competition. While 25 per cent of women gave the same answer, another 25 per cent said that the violence was an attempt to discourage them and other women from participating in politics, and a further 24 per cent said it was an attempt to show that politics is not for women.⁹¹ Similarly, in Serbia, an ODIHR-supported study found violence against women in politics to be pervasive and covering various forms, from structural violence to direct physical violence.⁹²

Looking in greater depth at social media abuse, a study conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs in Poland reveals that much of this online violence tries to get women to leave politics, to belittle their contributions

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and achievements, and to delegitimize and degrade them as political actors and as women. In their sample, the abuse directed at women in politics included threats and justifications for physical violence; references to the women's private lives to discredit their reputations; references to intimate issues like menstruation to ridicule them; the use of diminutive forms of first names to belittle or show contempt; sexist insults and comments; references to sexual life to portray women as subordinate to men; and harassment and bullying.⁹³

Focusing more specifically on the issue of sexual harassment, a survey of 137 parliamentary assistants in the National Assembly in France found that one in two respondents had been subjected to sexist or sexual jokes in the course of their work in parliament. One in three had experienced sexist insults, including 'looks' and the miming of sexual acts. One in five had faced unwanted sexual advances, and one in six had been subject to unwanted touching of their breasts, buttocks, or thighs.⁹⁴ These patterns indicate that sexual harassment is far from being an unusual occurrence in political institutions, creating a hostile environment for both elected women and women members of staff.

Awareness-raising

In 2022, ODIHR launched a five-part toolkit on *Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics in the OSCE Region* to raise awareness about gender-based violence and harassment in politics across the region. The toolkit offers definitions and examples to help citizens recognize this phenomenon. It also outlines some emerging good practices for tackling this violence, both at national and political party levels.

Legal reforms

Violence against women in politics is increasingly recognized around the world as a barrier to women's political representation. Parliaments in a number of countries, mostly in Latin America, have begun to debate laws to punish violence and harassment that targets women to reduce their participation in parliament and elections more broadly.⁹⁵ In Europe, at local level, the Parliament of Catalonia revised its law on violence against women in 2020 to recognize violence against women in political life, noting it had the effect of discouraging women's political participation and of restricting their capacity to influence public life. The reform also added an article to the law mandating study and public debate on violence

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against women in politics, to better understand its forms, frequency and impact, as well as the responses taken or not taken by public institutions to address this problem. A second new article also required all political institutions to create a code of conduct to prohibit such violence; adopt a protocol to prevent, detect and sanction such violence; and provide training on gender equality and violence against women in politics to all elected and appointed officials.⁹⁶

Two articles in the Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina directly address violence against women in politics. Article 7.2 proscribes the “posting, printing, and dissemination of notices, placards, posters, or other [election] materials... on which women or men are presented in stereotype and offensive or humiliating ways.” Article 16.14 forbids campaign conduct “by way of electronic and printed media where the contents are stereotype and offensive against men and/or women or which encourages any stereotype and offensive behavior on the grounds of gender or any humiliating attitude against the members of different genders.” Additionally, Article 7.3 indirectly addresses violence against women in politics by prohibiting hate speech, establishing that electoral actors may not “use language which could provoke or incite someone to violence or spread hatred, or to publish or use pictures, symbols, audio and video recordings, SMS messages, Internet communications, or any other materials that could have such effect.”⁹⁷ The Central Election Commission has the power to impose three types of sanctions on those who violate these rules: fines of up to 5000 euros, removal of perpetrators standing as candidates and decertification of political parties.

To tackle the problem of sexual harassment and other misconduct, the UK parliament has introduced an Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) for bullying, harassment and/or sexual misconduct. The scheme is a comprehensive set of policies, procedures, measures and services to effectively tackle and react to misconduct in parliament.⁹⁸ The scheme has an independent investigation and sanction mechanism, which dealt with 31 disclosures and closed 20 cases between July 2022 and June 2023. Sixteen of these went through a full investigation, of which seven were upheld and nine were not upheld.⁹⁹

Party measures

Harassment and violence are not only a problem in parliaments, but also in political parties. In November 2023, the Greens/EFA parliamentary group

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in the European Parliament adopted their anti-harassment policy covering any type of psychological, sexual, physical and remote harassment, as well as discrimination. The policy includes prevention measures, such as training, a mediation procedure and an inquiry procedure conducted by external experts, alongside a number of disciplinary measures. Additionally, the policy defines various forms of harassment and gives guidelines for appointments and mandates of confidential counsellors and a party/group ombudsperson.¹⁰⁰ In March 2024, the parliamentary group committed itself to further immediate measures related to its harassment policy to improve implementation. These measures include external assessment of the current policy and structures, support and awareness-raising on the topic, developing a code of conduct to be signed at the start of the parliamentary mandate, strengthening transparency, and communication on the cases and their outcomes, etc.¹⁰¹

6.3 Fostering transformation

Ways to foster transformation

1. Formalize commitments to gender equality
2. Apply gender mainstreaming tools
3. Monitor progress towards gender equality
4. Encourage men to advance gender equality
5. Combat backsliding against gender equality

Action 1: Formalize commitments to gender equality

Gender mainstreaming mandates

Commitments to gender mainstreaming, or the integration of gender equality perspectives in all aspects of political decision-making, take a variety of forms. In the UK, the 2010 Equality Act established the ‘public sector equality duty,’ requiring public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and to advance equality of opportunity when carrying out their activities.¹⁰² In Belgium, a gender mainstreaming law passed in 2007 imposes a ‘gender test’ for every new policy measure, compels the federal government to define strategic objectives with regard to gender equality at the beginning of each legislature for each policy area, and requires identification of government funds earmarked for the promotion

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of gender equality. The law also requires that ministers define gender indicators and measure changes in gender equality at the beginning and end of each legislature.¹⁰³

Gender equality and political parties

Party statutes provide an opportunity to enumerate the values of a political party. In the United States, the statutes of the Democratic Party prohibit any discrimination in the party on the basis of sex, race, age, colour, creed, national origin, religion, economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnic identity or physical disability. The party also commits to moving “aggressively to end such discrimination through lawful means.” The statutes also stipulate that all positions in the party’s leadership “shall be as equally divided as practicable according to gender.”¹⁰⁴

Party platforms offer a means for political parties to outline and explain their key policy commitments before every election. The Women’s Equality Party in the UK identifies seven core objectives to make equality a reality: equality in health, equal representation, equal pay and opportunity, equal parenting and caregiving, equal education, equal media treatment and ending violence against women.¹⁰⁵ Campaign materials also provide an opportunity for parties to illustrate their main priorities through posters, pamphlets and social media graphics, among other formats. They can also use these materials to communicate ideas about gender equality, whether positive or negative. In 2016, the Hillary Clinton campaign used the slogan, “I’m With Her,” to create a sense of support for women’s leadership.

Gender training

Training government officials in gender equality concepts is crucial for ensuring that gender equality becomes a central consideration when implementing policy. In Luxembourg, mandatory training on gender equality was introduced in 2011 for trainee officers of the state and municipalities. The aim of the training was to educate future public administration officials on gender equality in light of their role in implementing gender mainstreaming strategies. Since 2014, this training has been available to all staff, including sessions on specific topics related to gender equality.¹⁰⁶

In Finland, gender training is available for government employees of various types. Some ministries include gender equality in the introductory training

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given to new employees. Ministers receive a gender mainstreaming briefing at the start of each government period from specialists at the Gender Equality Unit, and in March 2020, a new e-learning tool was published and made available to all civil servants. The training website states: “Gender equality and equality are not matters of opinion” and stresses that “authorities have a legal obligation to promote their implementation.”¹⁰⁷ In addition, employees of the governmental body for gender equality and employees at some other ministries and departments receive gender equality training at least once a year.

Training in gender dynamics is also crucial for promoting gender equality within political parties. In the late 1990s, the women’s section of the Labour Party in Norway produced a pamphlet on the five ‘master suppression techniques’ identified by Norwegian psychologist Berit Ås. The aim was to raise awareness about methods used consciously or unconsciously to maintain power and privilege. The five techniques include: making invisible (where women are forgotten, overlooked, or ignored); ridiculing (where women’s efforts are scorned or women are treated as incompetent or useless at tasks that do not conform with traditional female gender roles); withholding of information (where women are not invited or denied access to meetings where key decisions are made); double punishing (where women are criticized for being wrong regardless of what they do or do not do); and heaping blame and putting to shame (where women are told that they are not good enough despite being denied the information needed to succeed).¹⁰⁸

Action 2: Apply gender mainstreaming tools

Gender impact assessments

Gender impact assessments are a key gender mainstreaming tool. In Belgium, Article 3 of the Gender Mainstreaming Law calls for the implementation of a ‘gender test’ for all proposed laws and regulations.¹⁰⁹ The Law on the Equality of Women and Men in Bulgaria, adopted in 2016, establishes a similar legal obligation.¹¹⁰ Article 14 states that gender equality coordinators should assess the impact of proposed regulations on women and men to neutralize discrimination and promote gender equality.¹¹¹ In the Czech Republic, the Rules of the Procedure of the Government also include an obligation to submit a gender impact assessment evaluation for all documents submitted to the government.¹¹²

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Gender-responsive budgeting

Gender budgeting entails analysing budgets from a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality. In Iceland, gender budgeting has been practiced since 2009 and has been mandatory at the state level since 2016 as stipulated in the Public Finance Act.¹¹³ This work is overseen by a steering committee on gender budgeting, led by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs and with the participation of all ministries. The ministries' representatives work with internal steering groups that are responsible for implementing gender budgeting within the ministry.¹¹⁴ In Albania, gender equality is integrated into national budgetary system principles through legislation. This allows the state to quantify and follow percentages allocated to gender equality in the budgets of ministries and municipalities.¹¹⁵

In Italy, Article 8 of Legislative Decree 2018/116 and Article 38 of Law 2009/196 establish a legal obligation to carry out gender budgeting. The measure includes examining the budget, money spent, services and time, to highlight any potential gender gaps in revenue, expenditure and equitable and sustainable well-being. In annual performance reports, the state should analyse results in relation to planned objectives and resources, indicating any deviations from gender balance.¹¹⁶ In Latvia, official instructions to the cabinet note that ministries should indicate and explain the results of the state budget and their performance indicators, broken down by gender.¹¹⁷

Action 3: Monitor progress towards gender equality

Sex-disaggregated statistics

Monitoring progress towards gender equality requires the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated statistics. According to Article 17 of the Gender Equality Act in Croatia, all statistics and information collected, recorded and processed by state authorities must be reported by gender.¹¹⁸ A similar national obligation exists in Romania, where the National Institute of Statistics must collect and disaggregate data by sex. In 2016, a government decision also required the Institute to analyse this data in reports and forecasts regarding equal opportunities and treatment between women and men in all fields of activity. The Institute disseminates this data through its annual Statistical Yearbook.¹¹⁹

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In Denmark, the Law on Statistics does not explicitly require statistics to be sex-disaggregated, but, in practice, they are. Statistics Denmark, moreover, has a dedicated website on Gender Equality in Denmark, devoted to statistics on gender equality. Indicators posted on the site include statistics related to democracy and women in decision-making, family, education, work, wages, income, health, safety and culture.¹²⁰ Additionally, states, regions and municipalities in Denmark are legally obliged to collect data on equal treatment disaggregated by sex, to be analysed in yearly reports on gender equality.

Action 4: Encourage men to advance gender equality

Engaging men

Many gender equality initiatives target women, but change is likely to be limited if men do not also participate. In Sweden, the Speaker's Network for Gender Equality was established in 1995 to bring together women parliamentarians from the seven parties with representation in parliament. In 2006, this network was transformed into a Reference Group for Gender Equality Issues, with representatives from all political parties tasked with promoting equal opportunities among MPs. The network organizes meetings and seminars on the importance of gender equality, including on topics related to men and masculinity. They also organize open seminars on gender equality at Almedalen, a political summit for politicians, lobbyists, newsmakers and the public, which attracts thousands of visitors each year.

From 2014-2018, the Group focused specifically on highlighting differences in the conditions for male and female MPs to perform their duties and to increase knowledge and awareness about the gendered dynamics of power. In 2018-2022, the goal was to work towards a gender-sensitive parliament, which was defined as ensuring an equal gender distribution in various bodies and contexts, integrating gender equality work into activities, developing an internal culture characterized by respect and equal resources for women and men, facilitating a balance between political work and family responsibilities for women and men, and enabling the participation of both women and men in gender equality work.¹²¹

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Action 5: Combat backsliding against gender equality

Defending gender equality

Efforts to roll back gains in gender equality are on the rise across the OSCE region. Framing ‘gender ideology’ as a threat to the traditional family, anti-gender equality actors have abolished existing gender-related laws, passed laws restricting and/or undermining women’s rights, retracted funding from women’s organizations and eliminated the certifications of university gender studies departments. Working at the EU level, the European Women’s Lobby has responded to such actors by linking the defence of gender equality to the defence of democracy, highlighting that democracy, and therefore gender equality, are founding values of the EU.¹²²

ODIHR's Gender-responsive Governance Toolkit and other gender and politics publications

The **Gender-responsive Governance Toolkit** is a series of targeted tools, each with a distinct practical and thematic focus. They introduce or advance institutional and policy solutions and practices for gender-responsive governance. The toolkit is aimed at participating States' political parties, other democratic institutions and civil society organizations, and complements ODIHR's existing gender-equality publications. The following tools have been released so far:

Tool 1: Advancing gender equality in politics —
National assessments and action plans

Tool 2: Transforming political parties from within —
Gender audits and action plans

List of ODIHR resources on gender equality

- Institutional Mechanisms as Critical Actors for Gender Equality: A Review from the OSCE Region, 2023
- Addressing Violence against Women in Politics in the OSCE Region: Toolkit, 2022
- Participatory Gender Audits of Parliaments: A Step-by-Step Guidance Document, 2022
- Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region, 2021
- Making Laws Work for Women and Men: A Practical Guide to Gender-Sensitive Legislation, 2017
- Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women's Political Participation in the OSCE Region, 2016
- Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties, 2014
- Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan, 2011

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