

WOMEN IN POLICY-MAKING

Women in decision-making

Despite the strong arguments in favour of increasing female participation in politics, women are still underrepresented in political decision-making around the world.

- Equality:** Equal representation lies at the very core of democracy. It is thus fundamental to ensure women and men have the same opportunities to participate in decision-making.
- Prosperity & stability:** Having more female decision-makers is good for everyone, not just for women. Research shows that society as a whole becomes more secure and economically prosperous as gender equality improves (World Economic Forum, 2017). Likewise, public trust and political stability improve with increased female representation.
- Better policy:** Some argue women bring different qualities, values and priorities to the political arena, and thereby make policy-making processes more holistic and effective. A study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) from 2008 shows female and male parliamentarians from around the world believe women prioritise different policy issues than men, like social issues, women's physical concerns and development issues. It only makes sense women should have a say on issues that concern them directly, like reproductive rights. Women bring different perspectives to decision-making (on childcare, parental leave, poverty alleviation, etc.), which improves the inclusivity of policies.
- Party support:** An increase in female leadership also benefits men, and male politicians in particular. Increasing gender parity in political parties attracts more female votes and party membership. It also roots the party more deeply into their constituencies through female candidates' NGO and CSO ties. In addition, women's wings can attract increased earmarked public party funding as well as international support in the form of training and mentoring.

FACTS & FIGURES

Data from 2017, worldwide, IPU¹



7.2%
heads of state
are women

23.3%
of MPs are women

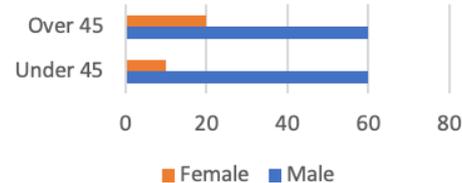


Female ministers portfolios



Defence : 15
Finance : 19
Family : 98
Social affairs : 102

Age/Gender² % of parliamentarians



- [IPU data](#) as of 01/01/2017
- [IPU Report 2016](#)

Development commitments to female representation

The international community has long recognised the importance of female representation, as shown by the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and UN Resolution 1325, amongst others. Most recently, this support has materialised in Sustainable Development Goal 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Target 5 of SDG 5 reads:

“Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”

This target will be measured with indicators on the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments, and the proportion of women in managerial positions. SDG 5.5 is directly linked to SDG 16.7, which embodies the commitment of all signatories to ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Progress has thus far been slow on both targets.

But there are a number of entry points for supporting women's participation in politics. Political parties are crucial gatekeepers to women's participation in decision-making, but civil society and female parliamentarians can be targeted too. The most effective strategy combines technical support for institutional reforms, like party bylaws, quotas and women's wings, with direct support to women through trainings and mentoring.

Supporting women's political empowerment in practice

Here you can find an overview of the type of actions to support women's participation in politics.

Party rules & strategies

Political parties are key gatekeepers to women's participation. They should therefore have **gender equality strategies** which guide them in policy-related decisions and position taking in relation to all sectors they are involved in. These strategies should also lead them to improve **party by-laws** and increase the participation of women in the party structures through women's wings, earmarked funding, or quotas.

Quota systems

There are 2 types of quotas: **candidate quotas** and **reserved seats** for women. In some countries, quotas are stipulated in the constitution or electoral codes, but parties can also establish quotas within party bylaws.

Women's wings

Parties can establish a women's wing where issues salient to **women voters** are discussed. When women's wings have a strong grassroots support base, they can effectively pressure the party to be gender-sensitive in both internal party policies and national policies. Ideally a part of public funding goes directly to the women's wing or is earmarked for them.

Women's caucuses

Women's caucuses bring together female **parliamentarians from across party lines** in order to gender mainstream legislation and advance solutions to gender inequality. International actors can facilitate the creation of a women's caucus.

Gender mainstreaming & Responsive Budgeting

The informal model of **mainstreaming gender** in all parliamentary commissions necessitates a high level of gender awareness amongst parliamentarians, but has the potential to make policy more inclusive. Another method is **Gender Responsive Budgeting**. Civil society actors and politicians can be trained to spot gender-blind budget initiatives and amend them.

Trainings, capacity building and mentoring

Trainings and capacity building are the main method of supporting women in politics. Trainings can focus on:

- self-esteem, public speaking, self-assertion
- political campaigns, advocacy and fundraising
- leadership skills
- media engagement
- ways to challenge stereotypes and cultural barriers

Women-only trainings can be very useful for empowering women with the necessary skills and overcoming psychosocial barriers. The safety of a women-only environment helps build confidence and resilience.

However, **mixed gender approaches** can be more effective at changing the system. By connecting men and women on gender equality and sharing perspectives, men's attitudes and relations with their female colleagues might change. This is especially useful for trainings on campaign skills and fundraising.

Political Parties of Finland for Democracy (Demo Finland) and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) base their approach on a long-term engagement by setting up **democracy schools** and political academies to support female politicians in all stages of their career. At the same time, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recommend adapting the type of trainings to the different stages of the **electoral cycle**.

Female politicians can learn the most from each other. Therefore, **mentoring** and twinning are particularly effective for young female politicians, as it provides them with a female role model in a male-dominated arena. **Peer learning** between politicians from different parties, countries or even continents can be incredibly valuable for exchanging innovative tactics to deal with shared barriers.

Further Reading

- Demo Finland (2015), [Gender Equality within political parties and Women's Cross-party Cooperation](#).
- Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (2017), [Dancing Backwards in High Heels](#).
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (2008), [Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments](#).
- National Democratic Institute & United Nations Development Programme (2011), [Empowering women for stronger political parties](#).
- Women Political Leadership, The World Bank (2015), [The Female Political Career](#).
- Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (2014), [Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties](#).
- World Economic Forum (2017), [The Global Gender Gap Report](#).