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INTER PARES
Parliaments in Partnership
EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments



Beyond Numbers:
STORIES OF **GENDER EQUALITY**
IN AND THROUGH **PARLIAMENTS**



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- Belgium, Chamber of Representatives
- Belgium, Senate
- Bhutan, National Assembly
- Côte d'Ivoire, Senate
- Croatia, Parliament
- Cyprus, House of Representatives
- Czechia, Senate
- France, National Assembly
- France, Senate
- The Gambia, National Assembly
- Germany, Bundestag
- Germany, Federal Council
- Ireland, House of Representatives
- Italy, Senate of the Republic
- Lithuania, Parliament
- Luxembourg, Chamber of Deputies
- Malawi, National Assembly
- Maldives, People's Majlis
- Malta, House of Representatives
- Montenegro, Parliament
- Niger, National Assembly
- Portugal, Assembly of the Republic
- Sweden, Parliament
- Trinidad and Tobago, Parliament of the Republic

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Foreword



It is my privilege to introduce *Beyond Numbers: Gender Equality in and through Parliaments*, a practical handbook to enhance our understanding and implementation of gender equality within parliaments.

European Commissioner Ms. Jutta Urpilainen decided to mark her mandate putting priority on the essential role of young people and women as actors of democratic governance. This priority has also translated into a targeted umbrella initiative “WYDE: Women and Youth Democratic Engagement”.

The handbook accurately reflects the changes that WYDE is meant to promote, especially through parliament support and helping the full and effective participation in decision-making of diverse women, by leveraging collective action, partnerships, knowledge, and resources at the global level.

Gender equality will only be achieved by changing the social norms and cultural attitudes that portray the roles of women in communities and society as incompatible with political power. This requires a mind shift and building the capacity and political skills of young women, and to engage men, boys, office holders and the media as allies for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

In recent years, our collective journey towards gender equality has taken significant forward strides.

We have celebrated numerous achievements and milestones in breaking barriers and challenging entrenched inequalities. However, the path towards full gender equality is long and complex, with persistent obstacles including structural inequalities that require innovative and consistently applied strategies to overcome. It is within this complex landscape that *Beyond Numbers: Gender Equality in and through Parliaments* will be a useful tool for lawmakers, policymakers, activists, and stakeholders committed to the cause of gender equality and democratic governance in and beyond parliaments.

This handbook provides a comprehensive framework for embedding gender lenses into the heart of parliamentary functions and processes. It underscores the paramount importance of equipping parliaments with the knowledge, skills, and mechanisms necessary to foster an environment that not only values gender equality as a core objective, but actively works towards its realization in every facet of legislative, oversight, budgetary, and representative roles. By doing so, it aligns perfectly with the European Union’s ongoing efforts to champion gender equality as a fundamental right and a key principle of democratic governance.

The detailed chapters present a panoramic view of the multifaceted dimensions of creating gender-sensitive parliaments—from increasing the representation and participation of women and underrepresented groups to embedding gender perspectives in law-making, oversight, and public engagement.

Each chapter not only illustrates the current challenges and barriers but also highlights inspiring stories of change, best practices, and actionable recommendations that can serve as a blueprint for tangible progress.

Let us embrace the examples, insights and recommendations offered in this handbook as we continue to strive for a world where gender equality is not just an aspiration but a reality in every parliament, every community, and every country.

Chiara Adamo

Head of Unit ‘Gender, Human Rights and Democratic Governance’,
DG INTPA, European Commission

Preface



International IDEA integrates gender analysis across our work, from assessing democratic performance to developing democratic capacity, because gender equality is a prerequisite to our vision of a world in which all people live in sustainable, inclusive democracies. Moreover, gender equality is the only route towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I am thus delighted to present this handbook, *Beyond Numbers: Stories of Gender Equality in and through Parliaments*. Developed by INTER PARES, a global programme for parliamentary strengthening delivered by International IDEA and financed through the Women and Youth in Democracy initiative of the European Union, this publication represents a significant contribution towards enhancing gender-sensitive practices and policies across democratic institutions globally. Around the world, parliaments play a central role in shaping the laws, policies, and budget allocations that are required to meet the needs of diverse citizenries. Yet just like other state institutions, parliaments have long reflected and perpetuated the gender inequalities in wider society. International IDEA has long advocated and supported more inclusive, representative, and responsive parliaments, including in terms of gender—not just as a matter of fairness and rights but as an asset for democratic effectiveness, legitimacy, and resilience. That prior work, captured in the 1998 and 2005 editions of International IDEA’s seminal *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, has served as an inspiration for this handbook.

This publication draws on a wealth of research, analysis, and real-world examples to outline the principles of gender-sensitive parliaments and provide practical guidance. It covers a wide array of topics, from increasing women’s presence and leadership in parliaments to ensuring that legislative processes consider and respond to the needs and perspectives of all genders. The handbook also explores the specifics of organizing parliamentary work and infrastructure to accommodate and value gender diversity, as well as how parliaments can engage actively and meaningfully with women and gender-focused civil society groups.

Through that broad scope, one of the handbook’s key insights is the interconnectedness of various aspects of gender sensitivity within parliaments. It highlights how initiatives aimed at improving gender balance among parliamentarians, enacting gender-sensitive legislation, fostering an inclusive parliamentary culture, and engaging with the public on gender issues can reinforce one another, creating a virtuous cycle that propels parliaments towards greater gender equality, while also enhancing parliaments’ role in governance.

Alongside this structural analysis, the handbook underscores the role of individual gender champions in driving change. The stories in this volume testify to the power of people—whether parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, civil society activists, or partners in international organizations—to catalyse institutional transformation.

Amid a disturbing backlash against gender equality, renewed awareness of how crises like the Covid-19 pandemic affect social equity, and evolving threats to democratic institutions, this handbook calls for weaving gender sensitivity into the fabric of parliamentary institutions and offers both inspiration and practical guidance to do so. I am confident this publication will be a valuable resource for parliamentarians, policymakers, civil society organizations, and others working to advance gender equality through democratic institutions, and to build parliaments that both represent and improve the societies they serve.

Dr Kevin Casas-Zamora

Secretary-General, International IDEA

Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPA	Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
CSO	Civil society organization
CWP	Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
FEMM	Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (European Parliament)
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
ODIHR	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PPI	Parliamentary Powers Index
PR	Proportional representation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WYDE	Women and Youth in Democracy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

While gender equality has made great strides in recent decades, it was only as recently as 2022 that the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) could declare that ‘not a single functioning parliament in the world is male-only’.

Political representation is essential to achieving gender equality. Diverse voices make democratic decision making more legitimate and effective. Equal representation also empowers and inspires others to participate in leadership roles.

Parliaments play an important role in prioritizing gender equality, by transforming their institutional cultures, practices and outputs towards achieving it. Many parliaments around the world strive to become more gender-sensitive, and there are a suite of tools, guides, experts and international organizations to support them.

This handbook tells real stories from parliaments that have made changes to become more gender-sensitive. This includes changes to internal practices, processes and structures. But it also tells the stories of those actors who have used their powers to advocate for gender equality, change discriminatory laws and hold governments to account on their gender equality commitments. It describes the diversity of approaches taken around the world, to inspire other parliaments to act.

WOMEN'S PRESENCE IN PARLIAMENT: INCREASING NUMBERS WITHOUT EQUAL REPRESENTATION

The presence of women in parliaments changes democratic decision making: different issues are raised, new perspectives are heard and citizens relate to their representatives differently.

Since 1995, the percentage of women in parliaments around the world has increased from 12 per cent to nearly 27 per cent.

Since 1995, the **percentage of women in parliaments around the world has increased from 12 per cent to nearly 27 per cent.** However, this is still below the 30 per cent target set by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for 1995.

And **global progress is unequal.** The Americas is currently the leading region for women's political representation, at 35.1 per cent in 2024, an increase on 12.7 per cent in 1995. In contrast, the Middle East and North Africa region stood at 4.3 per cent in 1995, and 16.5 per cent in 2024.

Of the **43 countries that are the focus of this handbook** (see Annex A: Methodology for details), only three have more than 45 per cent women in parliament. A further six have more than 40 per cent women, and seven have reached 30 per cent.

Women in parliaments have moved from being a **'small minority' to a 'large minority'** (Dahlerup 2016: 64)—but still far removed from equal representation.

The factors that influence women's numerical presence in parliaments include:

- socio-economic and cultural factors (including women's movements, religion and gender norms in society);
- electoral and political institutions (particularly the electoral and party system, type of parliament, gender quotas and affirmative action);
- political parties, acting as gatekeepers through the recruitment and selection of candidates;
- voters' attitudes towards women candidates; and
- the political ambitions and resources of women (including time, money and access to networks).

Another factor affecting the number of women in a parliament is its power (i.e. the parliament's level of influence over the executive, its autonomy, specified powers and institutional capacity). Previous studies have shown that parliamentary power has a negative impact on women's numerical representation, especially where women are newcomers in politics and politics is costly. But applying the analysis to the 43 countries of focus in this handbook shows that powerful parliaments have a higher percentage of women than less powerful parliaments.

Informal rules play an important role in women's political representation too. These include: gendered norms and practices in parliament (such as gendered divisions of labour within parliamentary work, a lack of work–life balance, and norms about masculinity and politics as a 'male business'); gendered ideas of what makes a competent politician; gender stereotyping and implicit bias; or norms about acceptable levels of gender equality in politics and society.

Women are also underrepresented in parliamentary leadership roles, such as speaker, secretary general, president, committee chairs, party leaders and deputies. In the 43 selected countries, most chambers have at least one woman in these leadership roles, but the average share remains low.

Gender quotas, when effectively designed, can boost women's presence in parliaments and can also positively affect society more broadly.

Women in parliaments have moved from being a 'small minority' to a 'large minority'—but still far removed from equal representation.



The Story of Change from Uruguay describes the societal impact of gender quotas.

Beyond just the numbers, gender quotas have the potential to influence politics and society on a broader scale. They can elevate the consideration of women's interests and perspectives within the legislative process, legitimize women's political roles, influence public perceptions regarding women in politics and/or strengthen young women's political engagement. The last point is vividly illustrated in Uruguay, where gender quotas led to an increase in women's political presence and visibility. This affected women citizens, who became more closely connected with the democratic process and more politically engaged. Previous gender gaps in political interest, political knowledge, perceptions of understanding issues and political discussion declined. Uruguayan women also became more trusting of elections, confident of democratic institutions and supportive of democracy.

Intersectional experiences shape political representation in a range of ways. Gender cannot be separated from age, "race", ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, (dis)ability and other social identifiers. These are affected by institutional and electoral systems too. There is no 'magic formula' for designing institutions that benefit all women equally. Conditions that support majority women's representation do not necessarily benefit minority women's representation to the same extent.

FORMAL COMMITMENTS ON THE PATH TO A GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENT

There is no 'one size fits all' approach for a parliament to become more gender-sensitive. **Parliaments can become more gender-sensitive through formal commitments** (such as strategies, action plans, audits, training, or changes to rules and procedures). But **it can also happen through informal processes and agreements**, mobilized by Members of Parliament (MPs) and/or staff from the bottom up. Among the surveyed parliaments in this handbook, only 19 per cent have a gender equality policy or strategy, and not one said that it had obligatory gender training for new staff and MPs.

Gender audits are a formal process to collect experiences, ideas and information from MPs and staff, and sometimes externally, on how a parliament can become more gender-sensitive. These can be undertaken with the support of, or in cooperation with:

- **external organizations** such as the IPU, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which have been key in shaping gender-sensitive parliamentary norms, but also supporting parliaments on their journeys to become gender-sensitive, including through audits;
- **external academic gender experts**, who undertake audits and critically challenge parliaments from an independent perspective;



The Story of Change from Belgium describes the Federal Parliament's gender-sensitive journey.

Despite a high numerical representation of women in both chambers, the parliament was ranked in a middle grouping for gender sensitivity by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). Surprised by this ranking, the Speakers of both chambers—who were both women—committed to turn the parliament into one of the world's most gender-sensitive by 2030. This included work on gender-sensitive communication, preventing stereotyping in committee allocations and developing a gender action plan. An audit was carried out, with the support of international organizations, to capture the current state of gender equality in the parliament. This process illuminated areas for improvement based on a wide evidence base, to begin the parliament's process of change.

- **internal self-assessments using free tools**, including those published by the IPU, CPA, EIGE, OSCE and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD);
- **proposals for specific measures from within the parliament**, which is not usually part of a systematic, whole-parliament approach, but the result of the mobilization of critical actors.

While audits are useful, their recommendations and findings need to be acted on. Action plans and strategies are most effectively implemented with continuous momentum and ongoing support of MPs and staff. Parliamentary gender equality bodies, whether formal or informal, can play a key role in this.



The Story of Change from Montenegro illustrates the close connection between audits, formal commitments and tangible change.

Development of the Parliament of Montenegro's gender action plans was supported by the OSCE, the parliamentary gender committee and the Women's MP Club. As a result, the parliament has developed a mechanism for the safe reporting and processing of cases of discrimination and sexual harassment, and created a booklet designed to welcome MPs to a gender-sensitive parliament. Other measures proposed include extending the mandate of the parliamentary gender committee to other laws beyond gender equality, and to undertake ex-ante and ex-post gender assessments of laws.

SPECIALIZED GENDER EQUALITY BODIES IN PARLIAMENTS

Specialized gender equality bodies are a popular institutional mechanism to turn formal commitments into action. Such bodies include parliamentary committees, women's caucuses and all-party groups.

Specialized bodies can perform a wide range of activities in pursuit of a gender-sensitive parliament. They can unite women across political boundaries, advocate for gender-sensitive changes to parliaments, put gender issues on the political agenda, propose or amend laws to address gender

issues, engage with women's civil society movements and citizens and experts, and oversee government progress on gender equality.

Most parliaments in the survey had a women's caucus or a women's or gender equality committee (86 per cent). Only three did not have either, and some combine both.

Women's caucuses are usually informal bodies with diverse functions, such as promoting solidarity among women MPs and with women citizens, influencing policy and legislation from a gender perspective, raising awareness of gender issues, increasing the capacity of women MPs, monitoring implementation of gender policy and laws, and holding events, discussions and public engagement activities.



The Story of Change from Fiji illustrates the importance of inter-parliamentary inspiration and momentum for creating a new specialized body and determining its functions.

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Fiji Group provides a space for the (small and decreasing) group of women MPs to work together to raise issues of importance to them. Its creation was inspired and supported by the New Zealand Parliament. The Fiji Parliament Speaker made several public statements in support of women MPs. The secretariat then provided an options paper for the Speaker to decide the scope of the new caucus' work, such as resources, political dynamics, finding champions, and recognizing MPs' existing workloads. The group works to strengthen the role of women MPs in parliamentary work and interacts with standing committees in their investigation of legislation and other issues that have gender implications.

Other caucuses in Côte d'Ivoire, Finland, Ireland and Malawi demonstrate the wide range of work that these bodies undertake. This includes networking, proposing laws and legislative amendments, budgetary oversight, public engagement, providing learning materials to schools, providing scholarships and advocating for policy changes.

Parliamentary committees focused on gender or women usually enjoy more formal powers and access to resources. But their status and functions still differ from country to country. Their roles include overseeing government actions on gender equality, providing MPs with specialized knowledge on gender equality and interacting with civil society.

Committees can address gender as part of a wider portfolio, as a specific focus, or have a role in mainstreaming gender across other committees.

The European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), for example, was a key actor defining the measures and reporting duties to implement the Parliament's formal gender mainstreaming commitment.

Parliamentary committees are 'gendered institutional spaces', often with gendered segregation of membership. Women's membership is often highest on committees like culture and education, and lowest on foreign affairs and economic and monetary affairs.



The Story of Change from Finland shows how a parliament with nearly equal parity of representation can address persistent gendered committee membership.

The Finland Parliament commissioned a study to assess equality in parliamentary work, which found persistent challenges, particularly in committee leadership and membership. It found that men were overrepresented in prestigious committees like international affairs and finance, and women held only 21.7 per cent of committee chair positions, despite comprising 41.5 per cent of MPs. The study found that the informal rules that allowed access to sought-after committees indirectly discriminated against women MPs. Parties informally negotiated between themselves to promote parity in committee leadership and membership. More recent studies found a record 10 committees had 40–60 per cent women membership, and the remaining seven had 30–35 per cent. The changes paved the way for women to gain informal seniority, improving their prospects for leadership roles in politics and society.

Specialized bodies face a range of challenges, including: a lack of power or resources, isolation, partisanship, low numbers of women MPs and turnover of MPs. Some solutions include: advocating for access to parliamentary resources and powers, linking back to formal parliamentary commitments to gender equality; securing support from external bodies and international organizations; support of parliamentary leadership to prioritize gender issues; changes to formal rules and procedures; opening up membership of caucuses to men to broaden support among MPs; establishing processes to agree workplans and give equal power to all members; focusing initially on less politically controversial issues; and developing succession plans to manage turnovers.

However, it is important that specialized bodies are not seen as a single 'solution' to gender equality in a parliament, but part of a wider, ongoing programme of change. They need the power, status and resources to function effectively; in addition, the use of such specialized bodies should not result in the isolation of gender issues to become solely their responsibility.

GENDER-SENSITIVE LAW-MAKING AND OVERSIGHT

Law-making and oversight are core functions of democratic parliaments. Representing the needs and experiences of people of different genders (gender mainstreaming) in these functions is therefore key to a gender-sensitive parliament.

Gender-sensitive law-making and oversight (sometimes called ‘gender-sensitive scrutiny’) can include: putting gender issues on the political agenda (through debates, questions, committee inquiries, etc.); ensuring that governments are held to account on their commitments to gender equality; examining all proposed laws, policies, programmes and budgets from a gender perspective, and monitoring the actual gender impact of these once implemented; and gathering gender-disaggregated information from a wide range of sources, including the lived experiences of citizens.

The purpose of gender-sensitive law-making and oversight is to unpick assumptions that all laws, policies, programmes and budgets affect everyone in the same way. Instead, they support parliaments to systematically examine how different groups of people are affected by state actions in different ways, because of their different needs, experiences and contributions to society.



The Story of Change from Fiji highlights the power of a procedural rule in getting gender issues on the agenda, even in policy areas where gender inequalities are not usually visible.

The Fiji Parliament’s Standing Orders require committees to ensure all committee work considers the impact on and benefit to men and women. To help fulfil this requirement, the Speaker led the development of guidance and training on how to embed gender in committee work. Committee reports have since included a ‘gender analysis’ section, and the Fiji Parliament hosts a gender data hub. The success of the rule has been mixed, with some tangible changes to proposed laws to embed a gender perspective, but also missed opportunities to assess gender impact systematically. It shows that rules have to be supported by ongoing momentum and wider cultural change, often led by ‘critical actors’ to make a difference.

Gender-sensitive law-making can involve: proposing new laws or amendments to address gender inequalities and discrimination; systematic consideration of all laws from a gender perspective, through gender analyses or gender impact assessments; collection of gender-disaggregated data and consultation with gender experts and people affected by proposed and existing laws; and monitoring compliance of new and existing laws with international women’s human rights law and national gender commitments.

Few parliaments in the survey use systematic methods to scrutinize legislation from a gender perspective, although some require texts to be written in gender-neutral language.

Gender-sensitive oversight includes (but is not limited to): monitoring progress and holding governments to account on their commitments to gender equality (at national and international levels); putting gender issues on the political agenda through, for example, inquiries, consultations, debates, questions and motions; and monitoring the potential and actual gender impact of government policies, programmes and actions.



The Story of Change from Italy demonstrates the different roles of governments and parliaments in gender impact assessments of laws.

Since 2016, the Italian Government has been required by law to provide the Italian Parliament with a gender budget report, which is then debated and discussed with gender experts. In 2020, the Parliament extended its role in gender-sensitive law-making—the parliamentary research service was requested to provide a gender impact analysis of proposed laws being considered by committees. It provides contextual information, gender-disaggregated statistics, and ex-ante and ex-post methodology to evaluate potential impact.

The survey found that most of these measures are not widely adopted by parliaments. While gender-sensitive oversight responsibility often rests with specialized gender equality bodies, many other actors inside and outside parliaments can play their role. Examples described include the Joint Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Femicide in Italy, the United Kingdom House of Commons Women and Equalities' Select Committee's various oversight inquiries on gender inequality in different policy areas, and the Parliament of Australia's Finance and Public Administration References Committee's inquiry on gender segregation in the workplace.



The Story of Change from Chile illustrates how small methodological changes can unfold larger impacts in parliament, and the important role of gender-sensitive post-legislative scrutiny.

The Law Evaluation Department in the Chilean Congress evaluates laws for their effectiveness in three stages: technical law analysis, citizen engagement and a report. Following a series of workshops on gender-sensitive scrutiny and development of a gender impact assessment template by INTER PARES, the department decided to integrate gender as a transversal category across all areas of its analysis. The gender-sensitive evaluation led to a revision to a street harassment law, as well as training for law enforcement officers.

Integrating a gender perspective into parliamentary budgetary scrutiny is challenging but arguably the most effective way to mainstream gender into parliamentary work. Parliaments can play a role in highlighting and prioritizing gender issues during budget formulation stage, scrutinize allocations and impact assessments at approval phase, and monitor the actual gender impact of spending at implementation phase. Many parliaments have established gender budgeting functions, including in Georgia, Malaysia and Pakistan.

Parliaments use different approaches to examine the gender impact of laws, policies and budgets. Tools include gender impact assessments, tailored tools and checklists, templates and, importantly, data and analysis.

Making gender-sensitive oversight and law-making successful involves an understanding of the following factors: rules and tools do not change practices and cultures alone; consistency is key; every issue is a gender issue; 'one size' does not 'fit all'; access to trusted data and analysis is crucial; and gender-sensitive changes often result from critical actors.

GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS AND (CIVIL) SOCIETY

Women's movements, activists and organizations are powerful drivers of gender equality. Institutionalizing relationships between parliaments and women's civil society organizations (CSOs) is a key part of creating a gender-sensitive parliament, especially when women's political representation is low.

Public engagement between parliaments and citizens and civil society includes consultation and participation activities, education activities, and information and communication activities. There are increasing calls for these activities to be gender-sensitive, and for them to target women, and ensure that diverse views are meaningfully included in parliamentary work.



The Story of Change from Malaysia shows the power that comes from women MPs and women's CSOs working together.

To amplify their efforts and improve advocacy with MPs, women's CSOs formed a coalition, called the Parliament Engagement Group. The group submitted oral and written questions through the MPs, obtaining updated data and insights into pertinent gender issues that would not previously have been known. An organization within the coalition, ENGENDER Consultancy, also advocates for legislative reform, pushing for the adoption of domestic violence and sexual harassment laws. ENGENDER also facilitates briefing sessions and reports for MPs, monitors parliamentary debates for sexism, hosts discussions and runs gender mainstreaming training, all of which contribute to improving gender equality within and through the Malaysian Parliament.

The survey asked how often the views of different individuals and groups were consulted in parliamentary work (such as public hearings or written submissions). A total of 85 per cent of the surveyed parliaments occasionally or frequently consulted with women's CSOs. Other groups were less frequently consulted, such as gender officers/focal points in ministries, trade unions representing women, women business owners and associations, international and/or academic gender experts, and marginalized groups of women.

Examples from the European Parliament, Kenya, Namibia, Uganda and Uruguay describe positive outcomes of consulting with women's movements.

Women's voices are often underrepresented in consultation processes. Data from the UK shows that participation is gendered by topic, with women more likely to participate on issues like health and home affairs, and less likely on issues like climate change and defence.

Different consultation methods, including site visits, round table discussions and citizens' assemblies, provide opportunities to equalize women's representation. The Irish citizens' assemblies on gender equality issues are an example of how potentially divisive issues, such as divorce, abortion and same-sex marriage, can be debated by citizens outside of parliamentary processes. But the Irish example shows the need for a clear relationship between assemblies' recommendations and government legislative proposals.



The Story of Change from Germany shows how ‘critical actors’ can bring seldom-discussed gender issues onto the political agenda through public engagement.

In Germany, an estimated nine million women aged 45–55 are affected by menopause. Inspired by their engagement with citizens and activists, two women MPs organized an event in the Federal Parliament to highlight the medical, personal, economic and societal challenges caused by menopause. The 150 attendees included gynaecologists, professional menopause societies, activists, community groups and citizens. The events raised awareness among MPs of the scientific evidence and lived experiences of persons affected by menopause, and provided networking opportunities that led to ongoing discourse. As a result, two committees issued a joint declaration calling for changes in medical fees and university curricula to provide more funding for menopause research.

In terms of **educational activities**, few parliaments in the survey arrange tours or visits specifically for women or girls, while 50 per cent arranged cultural events and expositions specifically targeting women, women’s issues and/or gender equality. Five held **‘women’s parliaments’** to engage women with politics. Women’s and men’s parliaments in Catalonia, Montenegro, Northern Ireland and South Africa are explored in more depth.

Training and mentoring schemes to educate women on the workings of parliament and normalize the idea of women being in parliament are rarely organized by the surveyed parliaments. Some may provide guidance to women acting as experts or witnesses for parliamentary committees—for instance, by counselling first-time participants. Others strengthen the capacities of women aspiring to a career in politics by addressing topics such as (digital) campaigning, public speaking, fundraising, networking and media training.



The Story of Change from Cyprus shows the role that parliaments can play in inspiring and empowering the next generation of women to become political leaders through mentoring.

The Speaker introduced a new mentoring scheme in 2022 for 17- and 18-year-old girls. They had the opportunity to shadow the President and other women MPs, alongside touring the House of Representatives and learning how laws are made. The programme was extended in 2023, with more training available to the mentees, and a wider group of students. In a male-dominated parliament, teaching young students, particularly girls, about the history of the parliament and how it works, as well as showcasing the presence of women within the institution, is crucial to making the House of Representatives more equal and gender-sensitive.

Few parliaments in the survey target women directly through their information and communication channels. A focus on targeting women could include using gender-sensitive language in communications materials, as well as highlighting gender issues or disseminating achievements related to gender equality in the parliament.

There are challenges and opportunities for parliaments to engage with the public in a gender-sensitive way. They include: engagement initiatives that purposely target (specific groups of) women; consideration of citizens' gendered and diverse experiences and perspectives, and (re-)designing public engagement to include this; involving women but also people of other genders; and informal initiatives to help to address issues that are not regularly discussed through formal channels.

GENDER SENSITIVITY IN PARLIAMENTARY INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE ORGANIZATION OF PARLIAMENTARY WORK

In gender-sensitive parliaments, the parliamentary infrastructure and organization of work reflects the needs and experiences of all genders, and supports their presence in parliament.

Among the parliaments surveyed, the vast majority had altered buildings to ensure access for people with disabilities and ensured bathroom facilities for people of all genders. Two-thirds had held exhibitions focusing on women or gender issues, but fewer had changed the traditional display of portraits and statues, or the naming of rooms.

While women require two to three times the provision of **bathroom facilities** needed by men, most parliaments provided, at best, equal numbers of toilets for women and men.

Some parliaments also opt to create specific **women's spaces**, which highlight women's importance in politics through either art or information, or office or meeting spaces reserved for women. Examples of women's rooms that highlight women's political leadership in Italy and Sweden are cited.

Physical symbols and names of rooms and buildings serve important functions, as they put certain figures in the spotlight, to bring awareness to their contributions. Parliaments in Belgium and Croatia have changed room names to acknowledge more women. Official flags that symbolize inclusion are also used in some parliaments, such as the Pride flag, which is flown by the German Bundestag on selected dates.

The **art exhibited in a parliament** signifies who and which contribution is considered important. Exhibitions can be made more gender-sensitive in a range of ways.



The Story of Change from Trinidad and Tobago shows how art exhibitions can highlight the work and contributions of women to a parliamentary and public audience.

The parliamentary art gallery gives an opportunity to artists to exhibit their work in a prestigious environment and to expose their work to a wide array of people. Since International Women's Day 2020, the Rotunda Gallery at the Parliament has hosted exhibitions focusing on women every year. The gallery also supports the work of women artists, by giving them a platform and helping them move on to commercial galleries and further their careers. In 2023, the exhibition was on 'women in science', which included art alongside information and biographies.

Facilities for childcare and baby feeding are an increasingly important concern for parliaments, but only a third of those surveyed provided such facilities. Parliamentary rules can also be changed to accommodate parents, as in Australia, Italy, the Netherlands and Niger.

Parliaments, like other workplaces, are gendered organizations that must deal with the challenges of inequalities and discrimination. **Parliaments can change rules, procedures and practices to become more gender-sensitive.**

Family-friendly measures include: discontinuing night sitting hours or aligning them with school calendars; proxy voting; flexible working hours; and financial support for care duties. The most common practice is paid parental leave. Almost half of the surveyed parliaments aligned parliamentary sittings with school calendars and have adopted a system of more flexible working hours, including in France, Ireland, Portugal, and Trinidad and Tobago.



The Story of Change from Australia tracks the history of family-friendly sitting hours.

In 2021, there was an independent investigation following allegations of serious sexual misconduct in the Parliament. The report included a recommendation to review sitting hours, highlighting a link between alcohol consumption at night and sexual misconduct. In 2022, the new Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced his intention to 'run a family-friendly parliament', as a record of about 45 per cent of all MPs elected across both chambers were women. The new government announced two measures: to avoid parliamentary sessions during school holidays, and to introduce deferred divisions (which meant that late-night votes would be deferred to the next sitting day). This shows that, where reforms can be presented as having benefit for broader groups of people, such as parents, then there has been a greater chance of success.

Violence against women and gender-based violence is a widespread and worldwide problem. In 2018, the IPU found that 85 per cent of women parliamentarians worldwide had experienced psychological violence, almost 25 per cent had been victims of sexual violence and 58 per cent had experienced online abuse. Violence particularly affects certain groups, including disabled women, younger women (<40 years) and unmarried women, while minority women are more often affected, as are women from the political opposition and gender equality advocates.



The Story of Change from the European Parliament describes its approach to dealing with sexual harassment.

In the wake of the #MeToo movement in 2017, the European Parliament adopted a non-binding resolution in 2017, which laid out recommendations for preventing 'sexual harassment in parliaments, including the European Parliament'. A group of staff collected stories of harassment and violence in the European Parliament and pushed for reform. They demanded changes to the composition of the anti-harassment committee, an external audit to review the committee's work, and mandatory training for Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and staff on sexual harassment. Reforms were introduced in the aftermath of these demands, but these were seen as weak and symbolic. Further reforms in 2024 include a new mediation service and new mandatory training for MEPs on the topic of how to maintain a well-functioning team, including on anti-harassment.

Measures to combat violence against women in politics can include: national legislation; formal rules or policies in parliament; codes of conduct or policies, information and training on sexism, sexual harassment and gender bullying; and complaints procedures. These measures existed in at least one third of the parliaments surveyed.

Gender-sensitive infrastructure and parliamentary work can emerge through: cross-fertilization and inspiration from other parliaments; communicating gender-sensitive changes as being good for a wide group of people beyond women; making small changes which unfold broader effects; leaders who champion gender sensitivity; and making the most of windows of opportunity for reforms.

PARLIAMENTS' RESPONSES TO CRISES AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

The strength and durability of democratic systems becomes contested during crises, such as pandemics, natural disasters, violent conflicts or democratic backsliding.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, parliaments made important decisions and changed their practices and procedures, some of which had gendered implications. Many allowed remote participation of MPs and committee experts or allowed remote voting. This led to a restatement of the importance of gender-sensitive parliaments, to ensure the participation of all representatives in emergency decisions, but also to address the gendered dimensions of the pandemic. Examples of the latter are cited, from Colombia, Mexico and the UK.

Remote participation can increase women's representation in some ways, particularly allowing MPs with caring responsibilities to have their voice heard even when they cannot attend parliament in person. It also opens opportunities to hear from a broader range of people in committees if they do not have to travel long distances to attend hearings. It can, however, lead to a

two-tier system where those MPs attending parliament in person can do so 'as usual', whereas those participating remotely are not able to fully participate, particularly in the informal work of parliaments.

Proxy voting was introduced by some parliaments for MPs who could not attend parliament because of illness, caring, bereavement or other situations. Some decided to adopt proxy voting beyond the pandemic as a gender-sensitive measure.

Gendered decision making was also an issue during the pandemic. While women-dominated sectors, such as health and social care, were seen as critical infrastructure, men dominated the decision making. Studies show that a combination of a high women's representation in parliament and a high degree of democracy enabled the chance of gender issues being on the political agenda during the pandemic, particularly gender-based violence.

Parliaments seeking to become more gender-sensitive may be challenged by other events, such as electoral wins of parties questioning or even opposing gender equality. Parties and movements at the forefront of illiberal and anti-democratic sentiments embrace ideologies that perceive feminist, pro-choice and LGBTQIA+ movements and rights as threats to traditional values. Opposition to women in parliaments, as a backlash against women's growing political presence and power, occurs through processes of stereotyping, silencing and othering, as well as, in severe cases, through expressions of violence—all of which particularly affect women of colour.

Parliaments can take measures to combat anti-gender movements, including: more deeply embedding the institutionalization of the participation of diverse women's organizations and civil society actors; campaigns to counter disinformation and anti-democratic rhetoric to help expose undemocratic discourses and actions hidden behind seemingly democratic language; and developing counter-narratives.

OUTLOOK: THE FUTURE OF GENDER EQUALITY WITHIN AND THROUGH PARLIAMENTS

Gender-sensitive parliaments have become an emergent international norm, which democratic parliaments strive to achieve. To attain the goals of a gender-sensitive parliament involves the following transformative changes:

1. ensuring the **equal presence** and **power-sharing** between women and men in the institution, alongside removing structural barriers that may hinder this;
2. embedding **considerations for women's interests and gender equality concerns** within the core **activities** of parliaments, namely law-making and oversight;

3. supporting a **working environment** within the parliament's **internal organization** that recognizes, accommodates and values the diverse needs of individuals of different genders; and
4. establishing an **external outreach** that involves connecting with diverse publics and CSOs, particularly those from marginalized communities.

Gender-sensitive parliaments are dedicated to establishing gender equality within parliaments' own rules, processes, practices and outputs. Some initiatives appear to be more common than others.

The use of **effective gender quotas** has become a widespread tool to increase women's presence in parliaments. Yet **initiatives aimed at improving women's presence in positions of parliamentary power** are only present in a small number of parliaments. Initiatives aimed at **addressing the underrepresentation of marginalized groups of women or other gender groups** are mostly absent.

Parliaments rely more commonly on **consultations with relevant gender experts or women's organizations and on specialized bodies in parliament**

to support the representation and consideration of women's interests and gender equality in law-making and oversight. **Formal commitments** (such as gender equality policies or gender action plans) are less common, as are other legislative initiatives, such as **impact assessments, checklists, budgeting tools, and monitoring the impact of laws on gender equality**.

Parliaments have made **changes to their internal organization and infrastructures**. Such initiatives support gender equality in parliament by challenging gender stereotypes and transforming gender hierarchies within the institution.

In relation to gender-sensitive engagement, consultations with expert stakeholders and civil society are more widespread than initiatives fostering the participation of and communication with women citizens.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to making parliaments more gender-sensitive. Numerous pathways exist, shaped by committed core parliamentary actors, available resources, and the phase of the process.

Different actors and factors influence outcomes, including: different actors (particularly 'critical actors', parliamentary leaders, and men); 'critical networks' among actors within and outside parliament; cross-fertilization of ideas between parliaments; the availability of financial, human and logistic resources, along with access to gender expertise and information; contextual factors; windows of opportunity; and institutional alterations.

Gender-sensitive changes are **not isolated events but ongoing journeys**.

The adoption, implementation and realization of actual change may take time and necessitate continuous efforts. The personal motivations and resources of critical actors must align with institutional changes to rules, processes, structures and cultures.

But the positive outcomes of gender-sensitive parliamentary reform are numerous:

- improving **democratic representation** by supporting the descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation of women in politics;
- supporting **democratic outcomes** by producing, amending and improving gender-sensitive legislation;
- improving **core parliamentary functions** by introducing gender budgeting, gender-sensitive law-making and oversight to ensure that gender concerns are embedded in all decisions that affect people's lives;
- generating conditions for **accountability** by fostering dialogues, collaborations and consultations with CSOs and women's movements;
- generating conditions for **responsiveness**, by empowering women and making their voices and concerns heard in various stages of the policymaking process;
- fostering **democratic engagement** by supporting women's involvement in and with politics, including their political interest, knowledge, efficacy, participation and leadership skills;
- fostering **democratic legitimacy** by informing, educating, consulting and involving citizens on gender equality issues;
- supporting opportunities for **citizen participation** and active citizenship; and
- supporting **transformative changes** and gender-equal social change—by challenging systemic biases, dismantling discriminatory structures and defying gender stereotypes, gender-sensitive parliaments open the way to transformative change and contribute to a society that respects and values the diversity of its members.

It is also clear that gender-sensitive changes in parliaments not only benefit women MPs, but also extend to a broad spectrum of individuals and groups within and outside parliaments.

Gender-sensitive changes are not isolated events but ongoing journeys.

But **gender-sensitive parliamentary changes are contingent on various other factors** like domestic politics and socio-economic factors. The effects of gender sensitivity are not solely within the control of parliaments.

Sustained support from other political and societal actors, including governmental bodies, political parties, bureaucracies, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, civil society actors, experts and citizens, is essential.

The examples show that even **small changes** in parliaments' gender sensitivity can have far-reaching effects on gender equality and democracy. While significant political, institutional and infrastructural changes may be necessary in the long term, smaller adjustments can yield tangible effects in the short term. **Incremental changes** to rules and procedures may have substantial effects, perhaps not immediately, but over time.

Transforming parliaments into gender-sensitive institutions is a challenging endeavour. But the future of democracy relies on resilient institutions—**institutions that recognize that, without gender equality, a democracy has not realized its full potential.**

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

**GENDER EQUALITY IN AND
THROUGH PARLIAMENTS**

**'Real change,
enduring change,
happens one step
at a time.'**

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

For decades, women's rights and gender equality have been essential global, democratic and social norms. They are promoted through international agreements, such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) from 2015: 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls', to name but a few.

Significant strides have been made towards gender equality in recent years, particularly in the realm of politics. The *Women in Parliament in 2022* report by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) marked a historic moment, declaring that 'not a single functioning parliament in the world is male-only' and highlighting the unprecedented diversity and representation of women in parliamentary representation (IPU 2023: 1–2). Women's presence in parliaments has increased across all regions, compared with 10 years ago, with new highs in governmental and parliamentary leadership positions (IPU 2023).

Despite these remarkable improvements, global assessments from organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Economic Forum and the World Bank emphasize the need for further efforts. Gender inequalities persist in all countries, and challenges posed by anti-gender actors threaten gender equality, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ rights. Gender equality advocates at different levels of the governance system continue to develop strategies for positive change. The journey continues, guided by the collective commitment to make equality work for all.

1.1. PARLIAMENTS AS DRIVERS OF CHANGE

In this context, the role of parliaments as core democratic institutions moves into focus, with the ability to serve as important vanguards in securing lasting change towards gender-equal societies. As noted by the IPU's *Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments*, 'parliaments aim to reflect society, and so they must reflect the changing dynamics of their electorates' (IPU 2012: 8).

This handbook, *Beyond Numbers: Stories of Gender Equality in and through Parliaments*, is dedicated to this perspective and serves as a follow-up to the previous handbook, *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (initially published in 1998—Karam 1998; and updated and revised in 2005—Ballington and Karam 2005). Compared with previous editions, which primarily explored the challenges faced by women in parliament, and solutions and strategies to overcome them, the 2024 edition renews its focus on gender equality in and through gender-sensitive parliaments.

Gender-sensitive parliaments 'value and prioritize gender equality as a social, economic, and political objective, and reorient and transform [their]

institutional culture, practice, and outputs towards those objectives' (Childs and Palmieri 2023: 177). Consequently, the 2024 edition studies how parliaments actively support women in politics and advance gender equality as a key goal in their institutional culture, practices and outputs. It also examines the broader impact that gender-sensitive parliaments may have on advancing gender equality in politics and society. Overall, the 2024 handbook highlights examples of positive change from which other parliaments can take inspiration.

This publication compiles experiences and lessons in gender sensitivity from European Union member states and INTER PARES partner parliaments. A diversity of sources was consulted, ranging from factual data on women's presence in parliaments in 43 countries, to self-reported survey data on parliamentary initiatives in 24 chambers, written contributions from experts and parliamentary actors, and interviews with change-makers. The publication does not aim to provide a comprehensive compendium, but to offer a varied sample of experiences and stories from parliaments in different regions of the world (see Annex A for the methodological design).

Together, these stories offer new and original perspectives on how gender equality develops in relation to a parliament's core functions (representation, law-making and oversight) and its gender-sensitive organizational structures, infrastructures and engagement in various contexts. The handbook offers an overview of parliaments' efforts to enhance gender sensitivity, and specific examples of inspiring 'Stories of Change' developed through vignette-style case studies in the different chapters.

This introductory chapter outlines the topic, clarifies the key concepts and articulates the goals of the handbook. Additionally, it offers an appraisal of previous publications while situating the current handbook within existing literature.

1.2. FROM 'WOMEN IN PARLIAMENTS' TO 'GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS'

Gender equality in the realm of parliaments has many dimensions, and the focus has changed over time. Several approaches concentrate on how to improve women's presence in politics.

Given that women's numerical representation is still far from equal in most countries, the focus is on 'how to bring (more) women in', and then, once numbers start to increase, 'how to keep women in,' and 'how to further their careers in politics'—to 'shatter the glass ceiling'. The impact of gender quotas has been extensively studied in this regard, with studies exploring the broad range of effects gender quotas can have on women in politics (Dahlerup 2005; Franceschet, Krook and Piscopo 2012) and on gendered policy outcomes and democratic engagement more broadly (Clayton 2021; Hinojosa and Kittilson 2020).

International IDEA's 1998 handbook, *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, was a landmark report, taking stock of core issues in an accessible manner (Karam 1998). Covering global trends, it discussed how to increase the numbers of women in parliament, illustrated women's impact on political processes, acknowledged the specific needs of women parliamentarians, and highlighted the areas where further assistance and information were needed. Overall, the handbook, building on statistics and case studies, shed light on how the political, public, cultural and social environment, together with candidate recruitment and electoral systems, often disadvantaged women, even where gender quotas existed. The 2005 revised edition of the handbook updated the data to examine progress, emphasized the need for a focus on increasing the effectiveness of women parliamentarians and of women elected to powerful positions, and addressed the role of men in gender equality (Ballington and Karam 2005).

Perspectives on women in parliaments have diversified, emphasizing that the responsibility for advancing gender equality cannot rest solely on women. It is unfair to impose the burden of breaking down gender barriers and advocating for gender equality policies exclusively on women. Repeatedly, studies have emphasized that men have crucial contributions to make, as well as responsibilities as allies and critical agents of change (Childs and Krook 2009; Palmieri 2018).

The question of what impact women have once they are elected Members of Parliament (MPs)—and whether they can actually change existing rules, practices, policies and outcomes—still shapes current debates. While the idea of a direct 'critical mass' effect is strongly debated, studies affirm that 'critical acts' by women who are 'critical actors' significantly affect the representation of gendered interests (Dahlerup 1988; Childs and Krook 2009; Joshi and Echle 2023). Unquestionably, men can also become critical actors and contribute through critical acts.

Early studies on the topic, such as Lena Wängnerud's from 2002, revealed that women politicians in Sweden were more likely to advocate for gender equality and social welfare policies than their male counterparts during campaigns. Over time, gender differences have emerged in parliamentary activities, where women tend to have a greater focus on issues such as social welfare, education, work–family balance, childcare and environmental policies (Catalano Weeks 2022; Ramstetter and Habersack 2020). Additionally, women politicians are inclined to articulate women's interests during parliamentary debates (Clayton, Josefsson and Wang 2017) and pursue feminist legislation aimed at fostering gender equality in society (Childs 2004).

Over time, it has become evident that increasing the number of women in parliaments is not enough to achieve gender equality in politics and policy. Even when present, women may not be fully acknowledged as equals and integrated into the institution. Women's vertical mobility within parliaments, including their representation in powerful committees and leadership positions, often remains more limited than men's (Beauvallet and Michon 2013; Dingler and Fortin-Rittberger 2022).

Infographic 1. Definition of gender-sensitive parliaments

GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS

Building strongly on the definition by Childs and Palmieri (2023), this handbook defines a **gender-sensitive parliament** as one **that values and prioritizes gender equality as an important objective by changing institutional rules, practices, cultures and outputs towards this goal**. Such transformative changes encompass:



i.

Ensuring equal **presence** and **power-sharing** between women and men in the institution, and removing structural barriers that may hinder this.



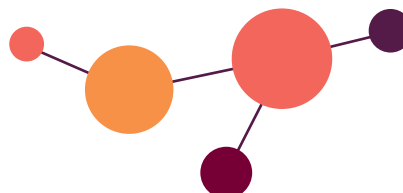
ii.

Embedding considerations for women's interests and gender equality concerns within the core **activities** of parliaments, including law-making and oversight.



iii.

Supporting a working environment within the parliament's **internal organization** that recognizes, accommodates and values the diverse needs of individuals of different genders.



iv.

Establishing an **external outreach** that involves connecting with diverse publics and civil society organizations, particularly those from marginalized communities.

Changes (or the lack thereof) towards gender equality are not solely the result of the (in)ability of political actors to 'make a difference'. Institutional frameworks play a critical role in maintaining or changing gender relations. Parliaments, historically dominated and led by men, are marked by enduring masculine cultures and traditions (Rai and Spary 2019). Once established, parliaments, like other political institutions, develop entrenched patterns of rules, norms and daily practices, making them rather resistant to change. In this context, initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality (or diversity and intersectionality, for that matter) require not only individual actions or political 'goodwill' but sustained efforts to embed these changes in the rules, practices and 'organizational memory' of the institution (Erikson and Freidenvall 2023).

This perspective aligns directly with the central concept of this handbook: gender-sensitive parliaments. A gender-sensitive parliament framework suggests that parliaments as *institutions* should actively create opportunities and take responsibility for achieving gender equality (Childs and Palmieri 2023: 177, 'emphasis added'). While a crucial aspect of gender-sensitive parliaments is to support the equal presence of women and men in the institution, the concept extends beyond gendered representation. Wängnerud (2015: 9) defines 'a fully gender-sensitive parliament' as 'one where women and men have equal opportunity to influence internal parliamentary working procedures, where there is generous room for women's interests and concerns on the political agenda, and where gender-sensitive legislation is produced in a satisfactory way'. This definition underscores the importance of women's equal access and influence over parliamentary decision making and the articulation of women's interests in political processes and outcomes.

The gender-sensitive parliament landscape

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) was the first international organization to advocate for gender-sensitive parliaments (CPA 2001), and the IPU early on defined a gender-sensitive parliament as one 'that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and work' (IPU 2011: 6).

Ever since, the IPU has highlighted the significance of mainstreaming gender equality and gender budgeting into parliamentary workings (IPU 2011, 2012, 2016, 2021). Other supranational organizations, including the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and UN Women, have adopted similar positions (EIGE 2018, 2019; OSCE/ODIHR 2017, 2021; OECD 2016, 2023; Childs and Palmieri 2020). They are united in their attempt to foster change processes in parliaments, be it through self-assessment tools, guidance or best practice exchange through events and publications.

This handbook starts from Childs and Palmieri's definition already mentioned above: 'Gender-sensitive parliaments value and prioritize gender equality as a social, economic, and political objective, and reorient and transform (their) institutional culture, practice, and outputs towards those objectives' (2023: 177). In line with previous definitions, the principle of gender equality should permeate all layers, processes, cultures and outcomes of parliamentary institutions. More importantly, the definition emphasizes the active role of parliaments in valuing and prioritizing gender equality, and the idea that this requires reorientation and transformation in terms of outlook. In other words, upholding the status quo will not contribute to promoting gender equality in or through parliaments.

1.3. GENDER EQUALITY IN AND THROUGH PARLIAMENTS

Building on prior definitions, this handbook defines a gender-sensitive parliament as one that values and prioritizes gender equality as an important objective by changing institutional rules, practices, cultures and outputs towards this goal. Such transformative changes encompass:

- ensuring the **equal presence** and **power-sharing** between women and men in the institution, and removing structural barriers that may hinder this;
- embedding considerations for women's interests and **gender equality concerns** within the core **activities** of parliaments, including law-making and oversight;
- supporting a **working environment** within the parliament's **internal organization** that recognizes, accommodates and values the diverse needs of individuals of different genders; and
- establishing an **external outreach** that involves connecting with diverse publics and civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly those from marginalized communities.

The handbook thus focuses on how gender equality is supported not only *within* but also *through* parliaments, underscoring the double role and commitment of gender-sensitive parliaments.

On the one hand, gender-sensitive parliaments are dedicated to establishing **gender equality in parliaments**—within parliaments' own rules, processes, practices and outputs. Initiatives can cover a broad range. For instance, parliaments can adopt rules and practices to support women's access to parliamentary positions of power. They can mainstream gender in law-making and in budgetary processes, establish parliamentary bodies to scrutinize parliamentary work and government actions, and deliberate on gendered issues. With a view to parliaments as workplaces, they can make efforts to cultivate a gender-sensitive working culture which supports people with different care responsibilities and guarantees accessible, safe and violence-free working conditions.

These examples showcase the varied approaches that gender-sensitive parliaments may adopt to prioritize gender equality: some are directed at augmenting women's presence and power, others at emphasizing the institutional changes required to support gender-equal outcomes.

On the other hand, gender-sensitive parliaments also function as institutions **through which gender equality in politics and society is enhanced**. The impact they can have on society extends to democratic representation, legitimacy and specific gender-positive outcomes such as laws, policies and budgets.

Gender-sensitive parliaments also function as institutions through which gender equality in politics and society is enhanced.

For instance, according to the IPU, a gender-sensitive parliament serves as ‘a positive example or model to society at large ... by promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment among society both nationally and internationally’ (2017: 5). Parliaments may yield this impact through voting for, amending and changing legislation. Visibly supporting gender equality as an objective also sends a strong symbolic message to diverse audiences outside parliament, influencing people’s connection with the institution and their sense of belonging (Lombardo and Meier 2019; Williams 1998). Seeing members of historically marginalized groups in parliaments, or seeing their experiences validated, may contribute to people’s trust in politics and nurture (young) people’s political engagement (Hinojosa and Kittilson 2020). Engaging with and involving diverse women’s groups and CSOs not only fosters group advocacy but also strengthens accountability (Celis and Childs 2020).

1.4. STORIES OF CHANGE ACROSS PARLIAMENTS

This handbook situates itself within the growing literature on gender-sensitive parliaments. The first exploration of this topic was the CPA’s *Gender-Sensitizing Commonwealth Parliaments* (CPA 2001). Since then, a multitude of European organizations (EIGE 2018, 2019; OSCE/ODIHR 2017, 2021) and international bodies (IPU 2011, 2012, 2016, 2022; OECD 2016; Childs and Palmieri 2020), along with individual parliaments and parliamentary associations (e.g. Childs 2016; Scottish Parliament 2023; CPA 2020, 2022), have undertaken studies on gender-sensitive parliaments.

Together, these studies display a variety of approaches, goals and methodologies. Some systematically map gender-sensitive rules and practices across multiple countries to take stock of existing initiatives, identify best practices and encourage cross-country learning. Others conduct in-depth studies of specific parliaments to instigate change within those institutions. While some studies provide reviews, others focus on developing assessment tools, field guides or guidelines. They are united in their commitment to making parliaments more gender-sensitive and to sharing experiences and insights from different regions and different kinds of parliamentary systems.

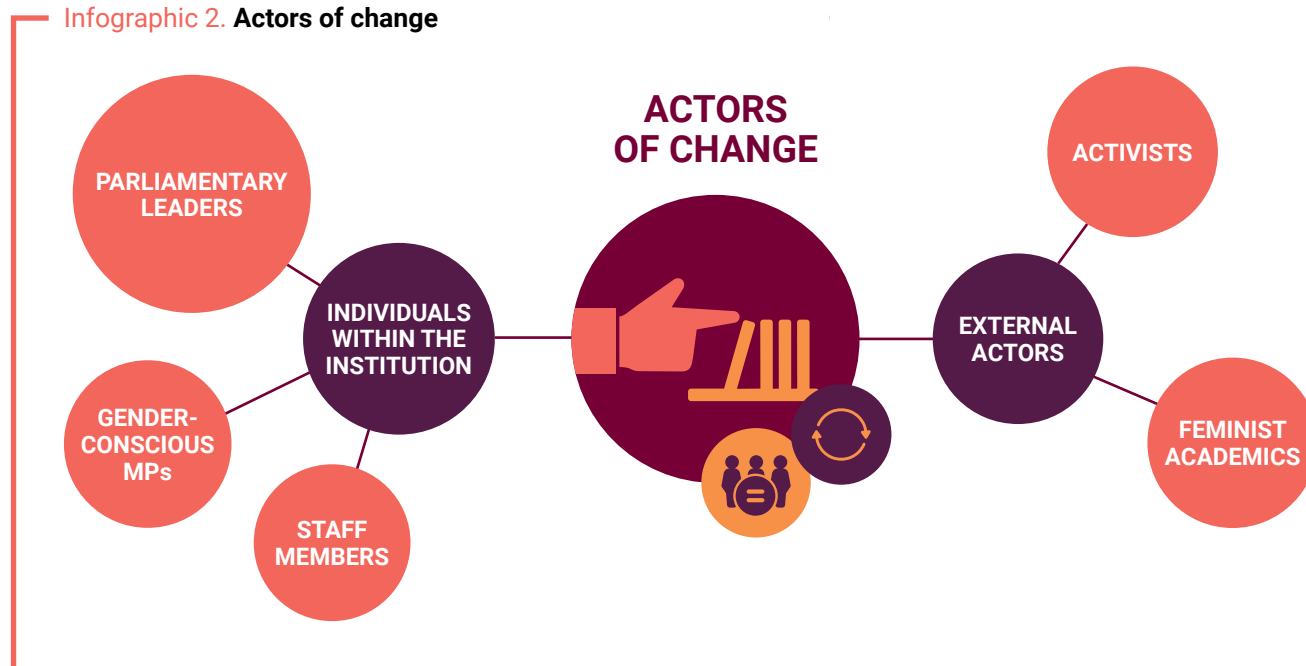
This handbook contributes to the literature by offering a study of gender sensitivity in a wide selection of EU member states and INTER PARES partner parliaments, building upon the cross-national tradition of studying gender-sensitive parliaments. It distinguishes itself by combining efforts to map recent initiatives with an innovative **‘story of change’ approach**, which enables an understanding of parliaments in their specific context. The approach scrutinizes significant gender-sensitive changes adopted by a given parliament, exploring when and why these changes occurred (Davies and Dart 2005), the processes leading up to them (including which actors were involved, who was opposed, and what the institutional opportunities and obstacles were), and the effects of these changes. The stories primarily originate

from the parliaments themselves and, on several occasions, they are selected by the researchers in consultation with parliamentary bodies, staff and academic experts.

While not exhaustive, this handbook aims to provide an overview of parliaments' noteworthy achievements, hoping to inspire other parliaments to instigate changes of their own, instead of developing tools or guidance for gender sensitivity across parliaments. It also demonstrates the variety of measures that can be taken to become more gender-sensitive, and the reality of how these play out.

The Stories of Change in this handbook describe the roles played by both individual agents of change and institutional change. This aligns with previous work on gender-sensitive parliaments, emphasizing the significance of both actors and institutions. Within this perspective, the publication aims to contextualize parliaments by acknowledging different starting points and broader societal settings. Where possible, it attends to intersectional aspects, such as those concerning age, class, "race", ethnicity, sexual orientation, care responsibilities or gender identity.

Infographic 2. Actors of change



Actors and factors of change

Changes towards gender equality often hinge on the efforts of critical actors (Childs and Krook 2009) or equality champions (Chaney 2006), who are strategically positioned and attitudinally motivated to drive change. These agents of change can include individuals within the institution, such as gender-conscious MPs, staff members and parliamentary leaders (Palmieri and Baker 2022), as well as external actors such as feminist academics or activists (Childs and Challender 2019). Previous research also underscores

the role played by women's caucuses and specialized parliamentary bodies in supporting the representation of women's interests and gender equality in parliaments (Grace and Sawer 2016; Sawer 2023).

Changes towards gender equality also necessitate institutional changes, regardless of how small or incremental these might seem initially. Institutional changes ensure that gender-sensitive parliaments are not solely reliant on individual actors within the institution, but are ingrained within the institutional rules and practices, even if only gradually. In addition, fostering a gender equality-oriented culture is emphasized, recognizing that even with institutional changes, initiatives may still face obstacles and opposition if core values and norms are not accepted by all actors involved.

Consequently, gender-sensitive changes in parliamentary cultures play a crucial role in shaping how gender equality initiatives are received, valued and supported, both within the institution and in broader society (Childs and Palmieri 2023).

Given the diverse selection of parliaments studied, this handbook refrains from using fixed indicators to measure gender sensitivity across parliaments and countries. Gender sensitivity—while considered a fixed end goal—comprises core elements as outlined above, yet parliaments may well take different pathways (see also Childs and Palmieri 2023). Parliaments operate in different contexts and institutional frameworks and occupy distinct positions on gender equality and democracy indexes. Consequently, the notion of 'change' may mean different things across different countries. The goal, therefore, is not to compare or to rank parliaments but to acknowledge their varying starting points concerning 'valuing and prioritizing gender equality as an objective', recognizing that 'integrating this goal into their institutional rules, processes, practices, and outputs' will require different efforts and means (Childs and Palmieri 2023: 177).

For similar reasons, the focus is not solely on whether parliaments are 'formally' committed to gender sensitivity (e.g. through the adoption of a gender action plan or the initiation of a formal process for becoming gender-sensitive). Many parliaments are still on a journey towards formally committing to becoming a gender-sensitive institution. Therefore, all initiatives that parliaments may undertake to enhance their gender sensitivity are surveyed, including committees, caucuses, party groups and informal networks. The study is particularly interested in the many **formal and informal** gender-sensitive rules and practices established by parliaments. Formal rules and procedures are codified in written form and operate with precise enforcement mechanisms. Informal rules and practices encompass customary routines, traditions, values, beliefs and norms of behaviour—usually not documented but deeply embedded in everyday parliamentary practices.

1.5. TERMINOLOGY AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Although this handbook uses the term ‘gender equality’ alongside ‘women’ and ‘men’, it should be clear that such references do not mean to suggest that gender should be understood in a binary way. People experience a range of gender identities, which are an integral part of our understanding of gender equality, even though current data collection in most cases does not yet reflect the diverse gender identities that people experience.

Moreover, while the focus is on gender equality and gender sensitivity, it is important to acknowledge that gender interacts with other social categories and identities, including but not limited to “race”, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age and ability. Where possible, this handbook reflects on the initiatives that parliaments have taken to foster an intersectionality-inclusive approach to gender equality and sensitivity.

1.6. STRUCTURE OF THE HANDBOOK

The handbook is divided into nine chapters, including this introduction. The chapters are followed by Annex A, covering a brief summary of the methodology used in this publication and explanations of the different data collection efforts, and Annex B, the INTER PARES survey questionnaire.

Chapter 2 delves into shifts in women’s presence and power within parliaments in recent decades, discussing the structural barriers that still exist, as well as the changes brought about by structural measures such as gender quotas.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of formal commitments towards establishing a gender-sensitive parliament and the different formal and informal paths chosen by parliaments.

Chapter 4 looks in depth at specialized gender equality bodies, and their role in driving gender-sensitive changes within parliaments and through them. It also addresses their benefits and challenges.

Chapter 5 concentrates on gender-sensitive law-making and oversight. The chapter explores how parliaments integrate gender equality into their primary functions, and how these efforts shape the outcomes of legislation, ultimately improving the lives of people concerning gender-related issues.

Chapter 6 focuses on parliaments’ external outlook and the extent of their engagement with citizens and civil society. The emphasis is on how parliaments connect with the broader public and how this may foster a greater diversity of individuals considering political engagement.

Chapter 7 looks closely at gender sensitivity in parliamentary infrastructure and the organization of parliamentary work. The focus is on how parliaments cultivate an inclusive work environment that recognizes, accommodates and values gendered experiences.

Chapter 8 sheds light on parliaments' responses to crisis situations and their gendered effects, specifically regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and the future of democracy.

Chapter 9 provides a conclusion and offers insights into the future landscape of gender equality *in* and *through* parliaments.

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CHAPTER 2

WOMEN'S PRESENCE IN PARLIAMENTS: INCREASING NUMBERS WITHOUT EQUAL REPRESENTATION

A healthy democracy relies on gender-balanced political participation.¹ Women's full and equal participation in political decision making is crucial for their own empowerment and for social justice, but it also has important consequences for political outcomes and democratic legitimacy.

The representation of women's interests and the development of gender equality policies improve when women are present in parliaments. Women voice different concerns, prioritize different issues and articulate different interests from men. Yet gendered change also depends on the active engagement of men. Gender-balanced parliaments, where women are equally represented and share responsibilities, influence and power, are therefore the most effective at promoting gender equality and representing society at large.

Around the world, there are many efforts to improve women's representation in politics and their access to elected office. While these differ in their outcomes and reach, and are sometimes met with resistance, they have gradually changed the landscape of women's presence and power in parliaments.

This chapter offers an appraisal of this changing landscape. It gives an overview of women's presence in parliaments and in positions of parliamentary leadership, and discusses the changes that have occurred since 1995. It also reflects on some of the factors that account for variations in women's presence across countries and parliaments, as well as over time.

This chapter builds on the insights developed in previous publications, and most notably on the 1998 and 2005 editions of the handbook *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (Karam 1998; Ballington and Karam 2005), which were published as part of International IDEA's work on women and political participation.

2.1. WOMEN'S PRESENCE IN PARLIAMENTS SINCE 1995: AN OVERVIEW

From a 'small minority' to a 'large minority'

In the 26 years since the original handbook, *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, was published in 1998, and the 19 years since the revised version in 2005, women's political presence has changed considerably.

Women make up, on average, 26.9 per cent of the elected members of the lower and single houses of parliaments worldwide in 2024 (IPU Parline 2024a). This is an increase of 15 percentage points on 1995 and 11 percentage points on 2005 (see Figure 2.1). By reaching the 25 per cent threshold, women in parliaments have moved from being a 'small minority' to a 'large minority' (Dahlerup 2016: 64).

¹ The authors would like to thank Merel Fieremans for her valuable contribution to this chapter.

Women's increased presence is not limited to elected office but reaches, to some extent, positions of parliamentary power and executive office. In 2024, women speakers make up 23.8 per cent of all speakers, leading 64 parliamentary chambers worldwide, which is a record number since 1995 (IPU Parline 2024b). In addition, 28 women serve as heads of government or state worldwide (IPU 2024).

The growing presence of women in politics is the result of continued efforts from women's organizations and electoral innovations through gender quotas (discussed later in this chapter), but also growing international efforts aimed at improving women's participation in public life.

The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN 1995) was a turning point in articulating the need for women's participation in political decision making. Since then, demands for a balanced participation of women and men in political decision making have only grown stronger. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development identifies achieving gender equality and women's empowerment as one of its key objectives, with women's equal participation and political leadership as an intrinsic part. The European Union Gender Action Plan III defines among its key areas of engagement the advancement of equal participation and leadership, calling specifically for an increase in the level of women's participation, representation and leadership at all political levels and for an enhancement in women's capacity as political leaders (European Commission 2020).

While national and international efforts have been successful in increasing women's political presence and generating change, progress has sometimes been slow and incremental.

Still a long way to women's full and equal representation

In 1990, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) recommended a target of 30 per cent of women in leadership positions by 1995, and 50 per cent by 2000 (UN 1995). Neither of these targets was achieved. While the share of women has increased since 1995, in some cases quite drastically, the world average remains below 30 per cent in 2024, and is still far removed from women's equal parliamentary representation.

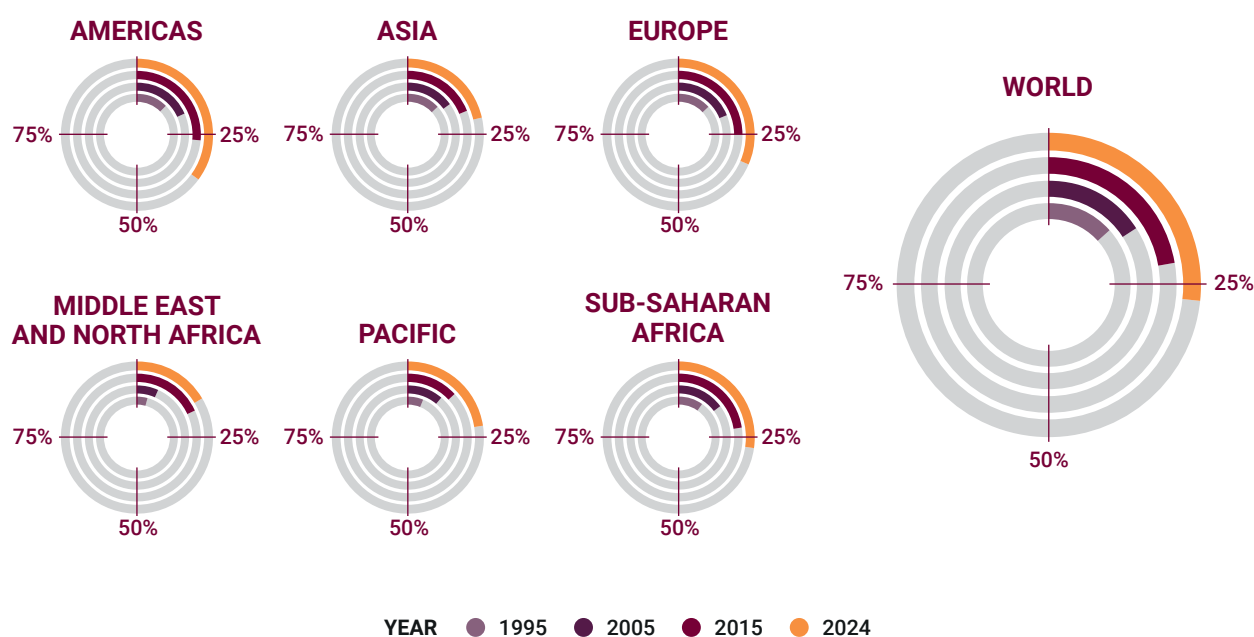
Global progress is unequal

Global averages mask considerable variation across regions and individual countries, as data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) show in Figure 2.1.

The highest percentages of women in parliament in 1995 were found in Europe, Asia and the Americas. While Europe led the pack, the only countries that achieved the 30 per cent mark for women Members of Parliament (MPs) were Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden (IPU 1995). This situation changed over the next decade, and by 2015 Europe had been surpassed by the Americas, where women's representation rose to 26.5 per cent. The trend has continued in recent years, with only the Americas and Europe achieving regional averages at the 30 per cent mark in 2024. Asia has shown the lowest increases in women's presence in parliaments. However,

those regions that were lagging behind at the time of the Beijing Declaration in 1995 have seen (fast) increases. While sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and the Pacific saw levels of women in parliament below 10 per cent in 1995, over the years women's presence has reached close to 20 per cent and even 30 per cent in the case of sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 2.1. World and regional averages of women in lower and single houses of parliaments in 1995, 2005, 2015 and 2024



Note: The percentages do not include countries for which data is unavailable.

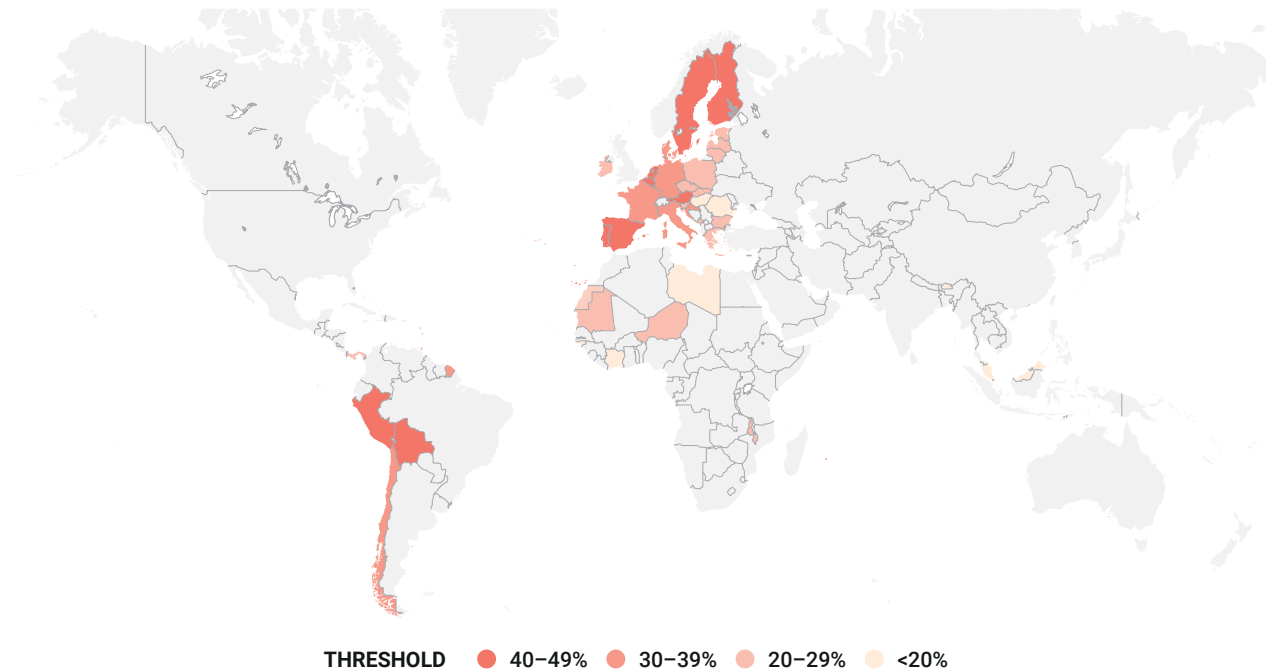
Sources: IPU Parline archives and monthly ranking: 30 June 1995 (IPU 1995), 31 December 2004 (archive), 1 January 2015 (archive) and 1 January 2024 (monthly ranking); Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Women in Parliaments 1945–1995: A World Statistical Survey* (Geneva: IPU, 1995), <http://archive.ipu.org/PDF/publications/women45-95_en.pdf>, accessed 11 July 2024; IPU Parline, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>.

Increase but also stagnation

Figure 2.2 provides more detail on the percentage of women MPs in the national parliaments of the 43 countries that are the focus of this handbook (see Annex A for the methodology). The data are from 2022 as they correspond with the timeframe of data collection for this study (2022 to 2023).

The results reveal that, while none of the countries have yet met the 50 per cent target, some are coming close—namely, Bolivia, Finland and Sweden, each with parliaments comprising more than 45 per cent women. Six other parliaments—Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Peru, Portugal and Spain—have more than 40 per cent women, whereas seven parliaments have reached the 30 per cent target. The largest group of parliaments, however, have only between 20 and 29 per cent women. A final set of 11 countries have struggled to reach the 20 per cent mark. In these last countries, women face a severe numerical underrepresentation in national parliamentary politics.

Figure 2.2. Percentages of women in lower or single houses of parliament in the 43 selected countries (1 January 2022)



Source: IPU Parline, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>, 1 January 2022.

Figures 2.1 and 2.2 furthermore show changes in the percentage rates of women MPs in parliaments since 1995. In most countries, women's presence is higher in 2022 than it was in 1995. Belgium, Bolivia, France, Peru and Portugal have witnessed the largest percentage point increases, each with a difference of more than 30 percentage points between 1995 and 2022, as shown in Figure 2.1.

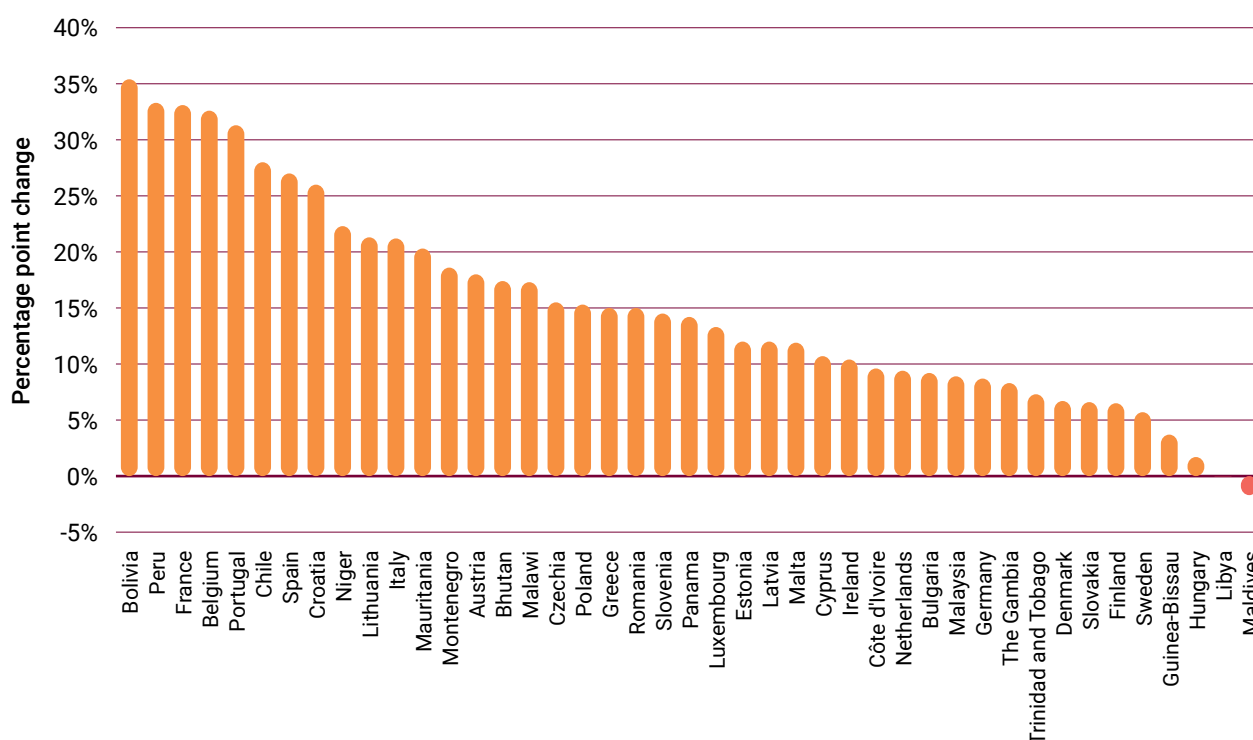
The largest increase of 35.4 percentage points took place in Bolivia. This significant change was supported by the adoption of a 30 per cent legislative candidate quota in 1997, and gender parity laws in 2009 (Htun and Ossa 2013).

Similarly, the significant increases in women's presence in Belgium, France, Peru and Portugal are all (at least partially) related to the adoption and implementation of gender quotas, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

However, this positive trend has not been equally experienced. In some countries in Africa and Eastern and Northern Europe, the increase in women's presence is more limited and remains well below 10 percentage points.

In some of these countries, the limited percentage point increases are related to the already high share of women representatives in national parliaments in 1995 (e.g. 40.4 per cent in Sweden and 39 per cent in Finland), which does not leave much room for continued growth. In other countries, women's presence has not changed, or has decreased slightly.

Figure 2.3. Percentage point change in women's presence in lower or single houses of parliament in the 43 selected countries (1995–2022)



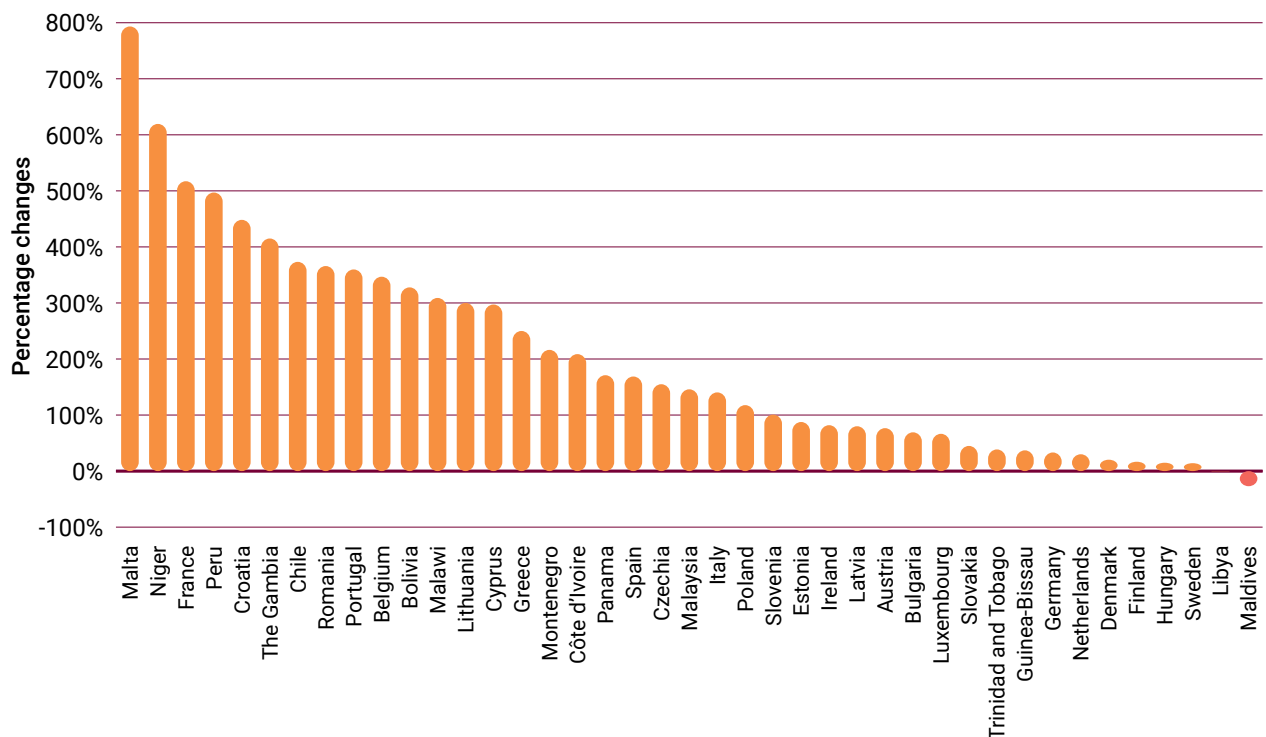
Notes: Percentage point changes are calculated as the difference between the percentage of women elected in 2022 and the percentage of women elected in 1995 in each country. Exceptions data comparison: The Gambia 2022 vs 1997; Montenegro 2022 vs 2006; Libya 2022 vs 2015.

Sources: IPU Parline archives and monthly ranking: 30 June 1995 (IPU 1995) and 1 January 2022 (monthly ranking): Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Women in Parliaments 1945–1995: A World Statistical Survey* (Geneva: IPU, 1995), <http://archive.ipu.org/PDF/publications/women45-95_en.pdf>, accessed 11 July 2024; IPU Parline, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>.

Considering changes in percentage points alone (Figure 2.3) does not provide the full picture of changes to women's presence in parliament. Looking at percentage changes (Figure 2.4), there is a positive average change rate of 203.2 per cent. The largest growth of 793.3 per cent is found in Malta, which initially had 1.5 per cent women representatives in 1995 and 13.4 per cent women representatives in 2022. While the actual numbers remain low, the relative evolution since 1995 is significant.

Croatia, France, Niger and Peru also underwent remarkable changes, and in January 2022 each country had a percentage of representatives who were women at close to 30 per cent or 40 per cent, from a baseline of between 3.6 per cent and 6.7 per cent in 1995.

Figure 2.4. Percentage change in women in lower or single houses of parliament in the 43 selected countries (1995–2022)



Notes: Exceptions data comparison: The Gambia 2022 vs 1997; Montenegro: 2022 vs 2006; Libya 2022 vs 2015. Bhutan and Mauritania were excluded due to the division by 0. Percentage changes were calculated as follows: $((\text{proportion of women in 2022} - \text{proportion of women in 1995}) / \text{proportion of women in 1995}) * 100$.

Sources: IPU Parline archives and monthly ranking: 30 June 1995 (IPU 1995) and 1 January 2022 (monthly ranking): Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Women in Parliaments 1945–1995: A World Statistical Survey* (Geneva: IPU, 1995), <http://archive.ipu.org/PDF/publications/women45-95_en.pdf>, accessed 11 July 2024; IPU Parline, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>.

The current status of women's representation in national parliaments and the changes that have occurred since 1995 are diverse. To understand why some countries have higher percentages of women representatives than others, and why some countries have undergone more rapid or significant changes than others, this chapter turns to look at how institutional, political and societal factors shape women's political representation in the next section.

2.2. UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S PRESENCE: THE ROLE OF ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Women's parliamentary presence varies between countries and parliaments, and over time. But what explains these variations?

The literature on women's political representation refers to a wide set of factors influencing women's presence—in terms of numbers—in parliaments, including:

- socio-economic and cultural factors shaping the conditions for women's presence, including the impact of women's movements, the role of religion and social norms regarding gender equality in society (Lovenduski 2005; Paxton and Hughes 2017);
- electoral and political institutions affecting women's access to elected office (Leyenaar 2004; Norris 2004), particularly the electoral system and party system, the type of parliament, and the role of gender quotas and affirmative action (Dahlerup 2005; Franceschet, Krook and Piscopo 2012; Lang, Meier and Sauer 2022);
- political parties acting as gatekeepers to elected office through their central role in the recruitment and selection of political candidates (Kittilson 2006; Lovenduski and Norris 1993);
- voters' decisions to vote for women candidates and their attitudes towards women in political office (Dolan 2014; Holli and Wass 2010); and
- the political ambitions and resources of women, including: time, money and access to political networks (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Lawless and Fox 2005; Smrek 2022); whether women are encouraged to run for political office (Piscopo and Kenny 2020); and how society values women's engagement in politics (Bos et al. 2022).

Because a detailed description of each of these factors would stray too far away from the focus of this chapter, the focus of this section is the role of electoral and institutional factors, as these are particularly useful for understanding variation in women's parliamentary presence between countries. The role of gender quotas will be considered in the next section (2.3: Enhancing women's presence: The role of gender quotas).

Some electoral systems result in higher representation of women

Electoral system design is one of the major factors affecting women's political representation (Leyenaar 2004; Norris 2004).

In general terms, there are three broad types of electoral systems (Blais and Massicotte 2002):

1. **Proportional representation (PR):** PR systems allocate seats in elected bodies proportionally to a party's share of votes. Utilizing multi-member districts, PR systems elect multiple representatives per electoral district.
2. **Plurality/majority systems:** In majority systems, a candidate or party wins when the most votes have been secured, often through single-member districts where only one representative wins.

3. Mixed systems: These combine elements from plurality/majority systems and PR systems.

PR systems have often been praised for increasing the political representation of women (Norris 2004; Matland 2005). Under PR rules, parties are usually more responsive to societal gender equality norms and demands, for various reasons.

PR systems operate with larger electoral districts, usually multi-member districts, where more than one representative can be elected. This means that it is not necessary to balance between men and women on candidate lists, and women face less competition with the (usually incumbent) men for a few available slots (Matland and Studlar 1996; Matland 2005).

In contrast, single-member districts in plurality/majority systems only allow for the election of one representative (Matland 2005). Consequently, the newcomers stand in direct competition with the incumbents for their party nomination and election (Golder et al. 2017).

Additionally, the use of party lists in PR systems influence parties' strategic considerations regarding the nomination of more women. Parties fearing gender discrimination by voters may perceive a lower risk when lists do not single out individual candidates.

Moreover, under PR systems a 'contagion effect' is more likely to take place, where the nomination of women candidates on a party list pressures other political parties to follow the example (Lépinard and Rubio-Marín 2018; Matland and Studlar 1996; Matland 2005).

The result is that the choice of electoral system significantly influences women's parliamentary representation, as also shown in Figure 2.5 for the 43 selected countries.

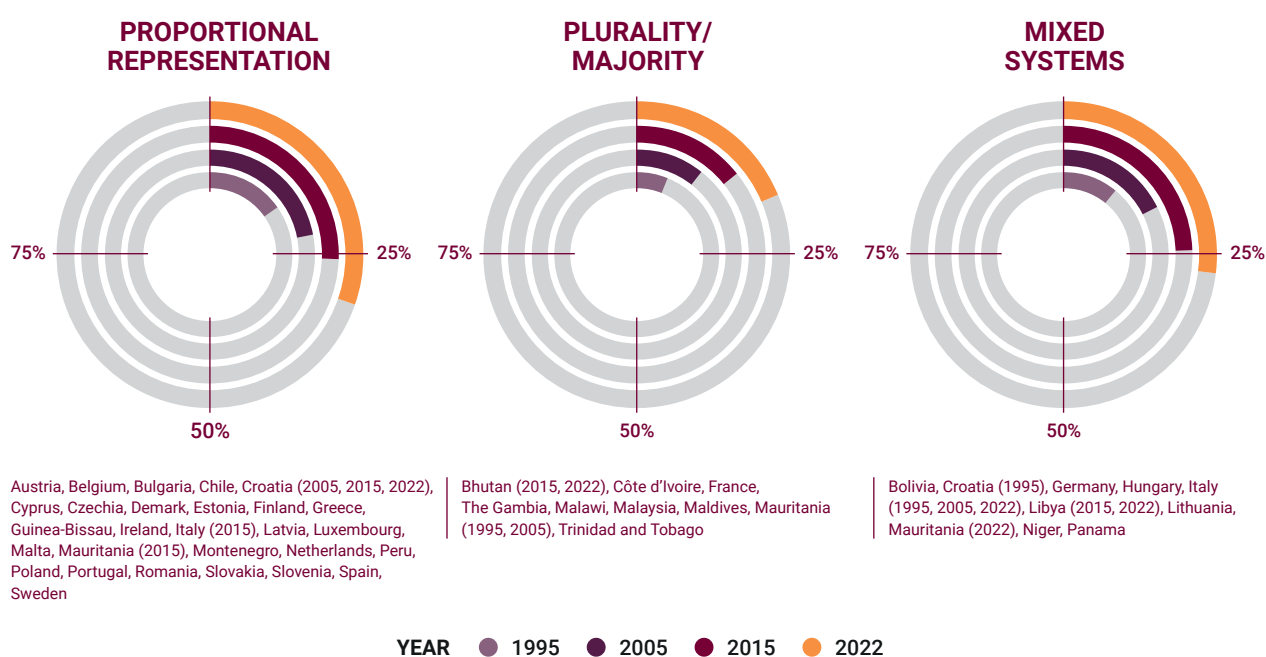
In 1995, the percentage of women in PR systems (15.3 per cent) was more than twice as high as the percentage of women in plurality/majority systems (6.2 per cent). In 2022, the difference has slightly diminished, yet remains substantial with 30.4 per cent of women representatives under PR in contrast to 18.8 per cent under plurality/majority systems.

The role of the electoral system in women's presence in parliaments is also clearly shown in countries that shifted from one type of electoral system to another. For example, in 1995 and 2005, Mauritania had a plurality/majority electoral system, and its percentage of women MPs was 0 per cent and 3.7 per cent in 1995 and 2005 respectively. However, in 2015, the country adopted a PR electoral system and the percentage of women MPs drastically increased to 25.2 per cent. This percentage dropped slightly in 2022, to 20.3 per cent, when Mauritania shifted to a mixed system. This exemplifies that electoral reforms are a viable option for increasing the share of women in parliament (Matland 2005).

The interaction between electoral systems and other factors

However, there are nuances to this positive impact, as electoral systems interact with other conditions, such as party ideologies and strategies, the presence of women activists in parties, and gender quotas (Norris 2006; Kittilson 2006). For instance, despite the often less favourable majority system, in France women's representation reached 39.5 per cent in the National Assembly due to the gender quota. PR systems can also differ from one another in their design features. PR systems with lower proportionality, smaller districts and without party lists (such as single transferable vote) also produce lower levels of women representatives (Galligan 2008). Nevertheless, the general cross-national trends in Figure 2.5 do confirm that, overall, PR systems lead to a higher presence of women in parliaments.

Figure 2.5. Percentage of women MPs across lower or single houses of parliament in the selected countries, by electoral system (1995–2022)



Notes: The percentages do not include countries for which data is unavailable. Montenegro: 2006 was used instead of 2005. The Gambia: 1997 was used instead of 1995. Libya: No data was available for 1995 and 2005. Bhutan: No data was available for 1995 and 2005.

Sources: Inspiration for this figure came from Ballington, J. and Karam, A., *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, revised edn (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2005), <<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/women-in-parliament-beyond-numbers-a-revised-edition.pdf>>, accessed 14 July 2024. Data came from: IPU Parline archives and monthly ranking: 30 June 1995 (IPU 1995) and 1 January 2024 (monthly ranking): Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Women in Parliaments 1945–1995: A World Statistical Survey* (Geneva: IPU, 1995), <http://archive.ipu.org/PDF/publications/women45-95_en.pdf>, accessed 11 July 2024; IPU Parline, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>.

How does the number of chambers in a parliament affect women's representation?

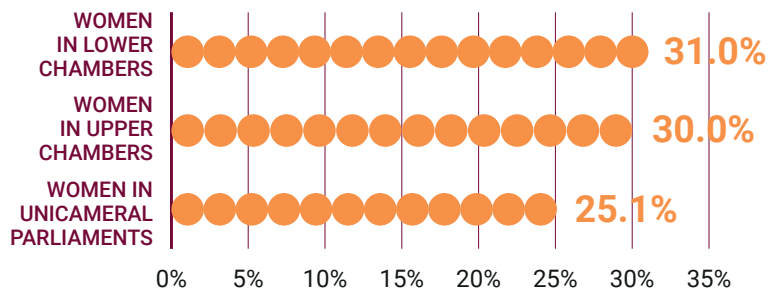
It is also relevant to look at how the institutional features of parliaments influence the representation of women.

Two such features relate to the difference between unicameralism (where the parliament consists of one single chamber) and bicameralism (where the parliament consists of two chambers, usually a lower and upper chamber), and the distinction between upper and lower chambers in bicameral parliaments.

Although research on this topic is more scarce, previous studies reported differences in women's presence, and posited that this was directly related to the impact of the institution. For example, the idea was put forward that bicameralism, as an institutional mechanism that supports consensus and minority rights, might also support women's political representation (Lijphart 1999; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2010).

Other studies refer to a more indirect link—for instance, the fact that differential advances in women's presence in upper and lower chambers in bicameral systems are linked to differences in the electoral rules and procedures used in both chambers (Meier 2012).

Figure 2.6. Percentage of women in parliament in the 43 selected countries, by chamber (January 2022)



Source: IPU Parline, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>, 1 January 2022.

The selection of parliaments allows the comparison of the percentage of women by parliament and by chamber, but only at one point in time. The share of women is somewhat higher in bicameral parliaments than unicameral parliaments in 2022, but differences remain small. Also, no differences are found between upper and lower chambers in bicameral systems in Figure 2.6.

Do stronger parliaments have more women?

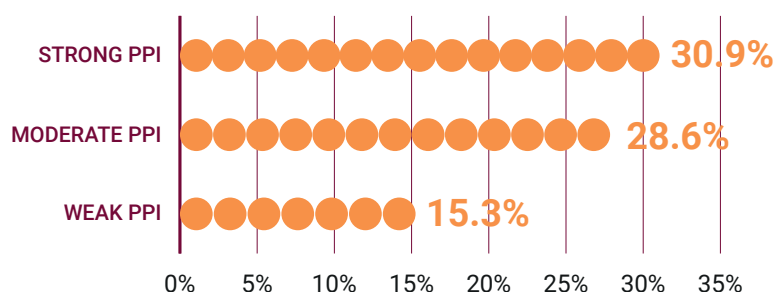
Given that the number of chambers does not give a proper indication of the official power vested in each parliament, it is useful to consider a parliament's overall strength. This can be done using the Parliamentary Powers Index (PPI), developed by Fish and Kroenig (2009).

The PPI measures parliamentary power by considering the parliament's influence over the executive, its institutional autonomy, specified powers and institutional capacity (Fish and Kroenig 2009; Schwindt-Bayer and Squire 2014).

Previous studies have shown that the degree of parliamentary power affects the share of women representatives in a negative manner, especially when women are newcomers in politics (Schwindt-Bayer and Squire 2014).

In parliaments where MPs have more opportunities for policy influence and career advancement, incumbents will try to hold on to their position of power, which could negatively affect newcomer women's chances of obtaining a seat in parliament (Matland and Studlar 1996; Schwindt-Bayer and Squire 2014). Also, elections for such parliaments are usually more competitive and costly in terms of the time and resources political candidates need to invest. Studies have indicated that this is to the disadvantage of (newcomer) women (Schwindt-Bayer and Squire 2014).

Figure 2.7. Percentage of women in parliament in the 43 selected countries, by strength of parliamentary power (January 2022)



Notes: In bicameral parliaments, the total percentage of women MPs has been used. Data missing for: Luxembourg, Maldives, Malta and Montenegro. The classification of the PPI dates back to 2009. PPI scores range from 0 to 1 (weak = 0–0.33, moderate = 0.34–0.67, strong = 0.68–1).

Source: IPU Parline, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>, 1 January 2022.

However, applying this analysis to the 43 selected parliaments shows a different picture. More powerful parliaments have a *higher* percentage of women than less powerful parliaments (see Figure 2.7). One possible explanation for this is that women's disadvantage in powerful parliaments only holds when women are still relative newcomers in politics. Once women become incumbents, which is the case in a growing set of parliaments, the initial incumbency advantage of men might disappear.

The role of gendered social rules in women's representation

Women's political representation is also shaped by informal rules, which are (often) unwritten but nevertheless socially shared and enforced (Helmke and Levitsky 2004).

These informal rules include, for example:

- gender norms and practices that work in parliament (Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín 2019; Bjarnegård 2013; Erikson and Verge 2022; Kantola 2022) and in the wider public sphere, including gendered divisions of labour in parliamentary work, lack of work–life balance, and social norms about masculinity and politics as a 'male business';
- gendered notions of what makes a competent political candidate or political leader (Murray 2010; Besley et al. 2017); and
- gender stereotyping and implicit bias (Devroe 2019) or social norms about acceptable levels of gender equality in politics and society (Dahlerup and Leyenaar 2013).

Deep-rooted beliefs about women's place in politics not only shape the electoral process and women's chances of being elected but also affect 'how politics is done' and the day-to-day functions of key representative institutions, such as parliaments (Erikson and Verge 2022).

This hinders not only women's entrance into politics but also their positional power, their impact on policies, and their decisions to either stay in politics or leave altogether (Hawkesworth 2003; Josefsson 2020).

2.3. ENHANCING WOMEN'S PRESENCE: THE ROLE OF GENDER QUOTAS

Different types of gender quotas

Over the past two to three decades, the use of gender quotas has swiftly extended around the globe and has become widespread in a variety of societies (including old and new democracies, partial and non-democracies) (Dahlerup 2005, 2007; Krook 2009). In 2022, 137 countries out of 193 around the world have adopted some type of gender quota (International IDEA 2022).

At a basic level, gender quotas require a certain proportion of women to be present either on candidate lists or directly as representatives (Krook 2009). There are differences in gender quotas based on who mandates them.

Legally binding quotas are mandated either by electoral laws or by the constitution. These mainly consist of two types—legislative candidate quotas and reserved seats (Krook 2009). Legislative candidate quotas legally demand the presence of a specific share of women candidates on the ballot. Reserved seats require that a certain proportion of parliamentary seats be filled by women.

On the other hand, voluntary quotas are adopted on a voluntary basis by political parties. As political parties themselves decide whether to do this, the number of parties adopting such quotas differs per country (Krook 2009).

While the use of gender quotas has become widespread across the globe, there is regional variation in the types of quotas that are preferred. Legislative candidate quotas are more common in Latin America and some parts of Europe (Piatti-Crocker 2019). Reserved seats are more often used in African countries, the Arab region and South Asia (Dahlerup 2007). Voluntary party quotas are most common in early adopter countries, such as the Nordic countries, but are also found in certain parts of Africa (e.g. South Africa) (Dahlerup 2007).

Some kinds of quotas are more effective than others

The impact of gender quotas on women's presence in parliaments has been widely studied. The effectiveness of gender quotas (the extent to which they foster women's presence in politics) depends on their:

- compatibility with party strategies and the broader political context (see, for example, Ahrens et al. 2020; Lang, Meier and Sauer 2022; Murray 2015); and
- institutional design features, including the actual quota percentage, the application of rank order rules and the application of sanctions for non-compliance (see, for example, Krook 2009; Franceschet, Krook and Piscopo 2012).

Gender quotas are most effective when they: are binding; use a quota percentage close to 50 per cent; apply rank order rules which specify the distribution of men and women on candidate lists or in winnable constituencies; and demand strict sanctions that do not only depend on financial penalties (Dahlerup 2016; Krook 2009).

Figure 2.8 shows the percentage of women elected to lower or single houses of parliament in the 43 selected countries, by quota type. A distinction is made between parliaments with effective legally binding quotas,² other (less effective) legally binding quotas, and no legal quotas (although voluntary quotas³ might be present).

In 1995, quotas were scarce. In line with the general situation at the time, the percentage of women in parliaments tended to be low.

By 2005, more countries had amended their electoral laws and constitutions, which also influenced the gender distribution among elected representatives. On average, the parliaments with the highest percentage of women were those in countries operating under effective legally binding quotas (26.5 per cent), compared with countries with other legally binding quotas (14.4 per cent) and countries without legal quotas (19.1 per cent).

In 2022, countries with effective legally binding quotas had, on average, the highest presence of women in their lower or single chambers (30.6 per cent) compared with countries with other legally binding quotas (26.1 per cent) and countries with no legal quotas (25.8 per cent). Within the last category, differences between countries with only voluntary quotas (27.0 per cent) and countries without quotas (26.6 per cent) are also absent.

This confirms that the mere existence of gender quotas does not guarantee women's presence in parliament, but that *effective* gender quotas do make a difference.

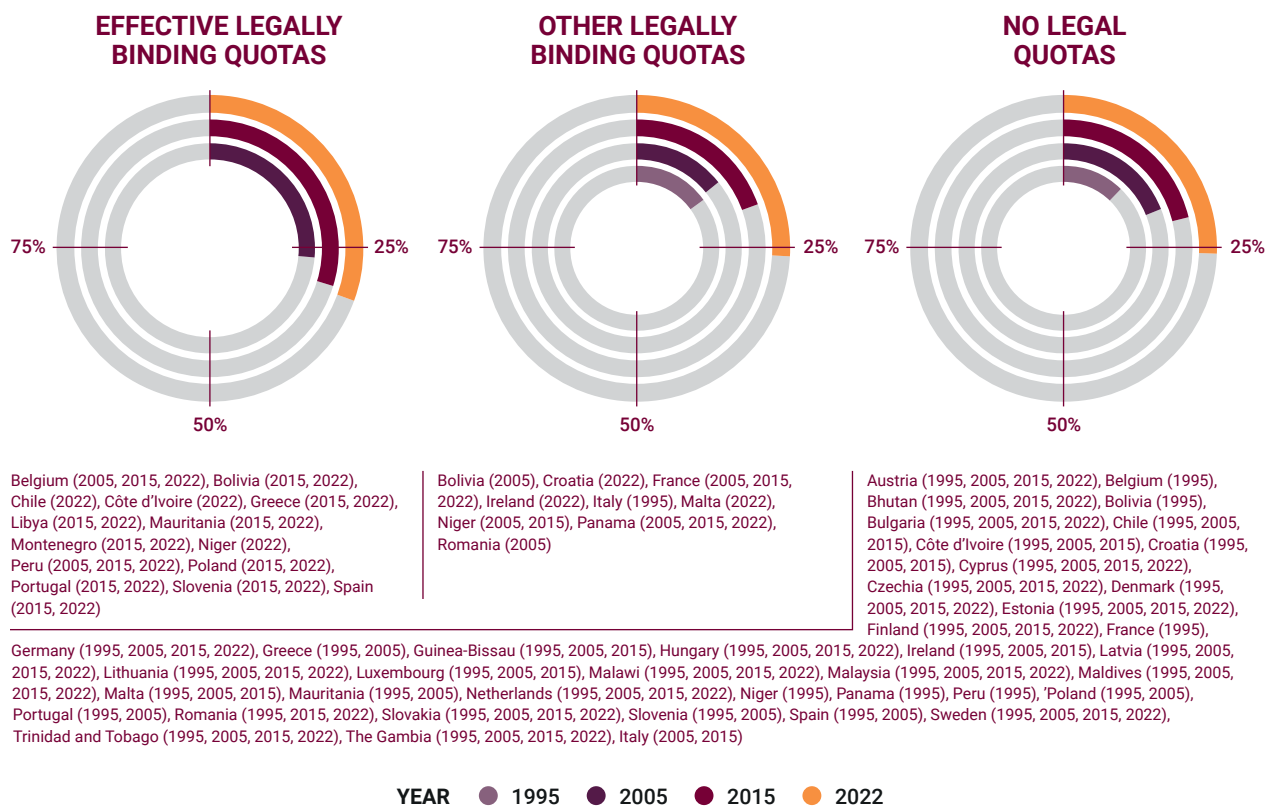
2 Legally binding quotas are found to be effective when they minimally achieve a 10 per cent de facto threshold; and when: (a) candidate quotas have placement rules meeting or exceeding the quota threshold and/or legal sanctions removing parties from elections when ignoring quota rules; or (b) reserved seats distribute the seats according to a legal mechanism (Hughes et al. 2019).

3 Voluntary party quotas are not included as a separate category because data for this type of quota were only available for 2022.

At the same time, the gap between countries with effective quotas and countries without such quotas has somewhat diminished in recent years and is small in 2022.

Figure 2.8 shows that the average percentage of women MPs in countries with effective quotas has hardly increased since 2005. An important question is whether even effective quotas can sustain a consistent and continued growth in the number of women elected after the first initial boost.

Figure 2.8. Percentage of women MPs in lower or single houses of parliament in the 43 selected countries, 1995–2022, according to quota type



Notes: Data from the International IDEA gender database. No data was available for voluntary party quotas before 1 January 2022. There were no effective legally binding quotas among the cases in 1995. The legislated gender quotas also include countries that have voluntary quotas besides legislated quotas. Montenegro: The country became independent in 2006, so 2006 was used for Montenegro instead of 2005. The Gambia: 1997 was used instead of 1995. Libya: No data was available for 1995 and 2005. Bhutan: No data was available for 1995 and 2005. No data was available on the effectiveness of the quotas in 2022 for: Guinea-Bissau, Italy and Luxembourg. No data was available on 'voluntary quotas 2022' for Maldives.

Source: Inspiration for this figure came from Ballington, J. and Karam, A., *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, revised edn (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2005), <<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/women-in-parliament-beyond-numbers-a-revised-edition.pdf>>, accessed 14 July 2024.

Countries following a more 'incremental' track to women's representation, such as the Nordic countries, are currently seeing a 'flattening' of the curve. This is described as 'saturation without parity' (Dahlerup and Leyenaar 2013)—the percentage of women varies at a high level, but never achieves full equality. The question is whether effective quotas can boost the number of women beyond this point of saturation.

Gender quotas also have the potential to influence politics on a broader scale, triggering significant changes in policy and society. Research indicates that gender quotas can elevate the consideration of women's interests and perspectives within the legislative process, thus bridging the gap between women's presence in politics and the representation of women's interests. For instance, in parliamentary settings where gender quotas have been implemented, there has been a noticeable increase in attention towards issues related to women's rights, public health and poverty (Clayton 2021). Furthermore, gender quotas can shape the symbolic representation of women by legitimizing their political role, influencing public perceptions of women in politics and also strengthening young women's political engagement (Bauer 2012). This last effect is vividly illustrated in the following Story of Change.



Story of Change: When more women are in politics—the societal impact of gender quotas in Uruguay

When legislatures debate the merits of adopting gender quotas, they often focus on how increasing the number of women in office will shape policy—women officeholders will provide a different perspective and focus on different issues. Such discussions rarely focus on anything beyond the policy implications from greater women's representation. But how might gender quotas for elected office transform the ways that people engage with the political process and connect to their governments?

Women's representation in the Uruguayan Parliament, composed of the Senate (upper chamber) and the Chamber of Representatives (lower chamber), has historically been low and lagging behind much of Latin America. The 10 per cent mark was only crossed in 1999 in both chambers and barely increased in the decade after, with women holding only 12.1 per cent of seats in the lower and 12.9 per cent in the upper chamber in 2009.

Addressing the severe underrepresentation of women in politics started early in the late 1980s by mobilizing for an electoral gender quota, but Uruguayan feminists only succeeded in 2009. Law #18,476, the gender quota law, states that 'candidates of both sexes must be represented in every three places on electoral lists, either throughout the list or in the first 15 places. Where only two seats are contested, one of the two candidates must be a woman'. Electoral lists not complying with the law would be rejected by the Electoral Court, and the law also forbade counting alternate positions (substitutes stepping in for elected representatives in case of illness, travel or resignation) as a means of meeting the quota. Uruguay operates with closed-list proportional representation in 19 multi-member constituencies for the lower chamber and a single nationwide constituency for the upper chamber.

The gender quota was an effective tool to increase women's representation in the 2014 elections. Women's representation in the upper chamber doubled from 13.3 to 26.7 per cent and also increased in the Chamber of Representatives (although to a lesser extent, rising from 15.2 to 18.2 per cent). Yet, through substitutions, the share increased further and in February 2016 women occupied 33.3 per cent of the seats in the upper chamber and 20.2 per cent in the lower chamber.

Using the Uruguayan case, Magda Hinojosa and Miki Caul Kittilson investigated whether gender quotas for elected office transform the ways that people, particularly women, engage with the political process and connect to their governments and democratic processes. They examined how a sharp rise in women's political representation due to the use of a gender quota in Uruguay affected citizens.

The effects of the gender quota were tested in a unique research setting by surveying 1,200 Uruguayan citizens about their political engagement at two specific periods in time: a few weeks prior to the first application of a gender quota in the 2014 elections and a few weeks after the 2014 election results had been announced but before the new legislature took office (to ensure results were not influenced by government formation and changed policy priorities). The surveys gauged citizens' awareness of measures to increase women's representation (instead of asking directly about the quota), political engagement, and knowledge and participation in political discussion.

Their research revealed a consistent pattern: women were more politically engaged after a surge of women had been elected to parliament. Previous gender gaps in political interest, political knowledge, perceptions of understanding issues and political discussion disappeared. And, while Uruguayan men and women were about equally trusting of elections, confident of democratic institutions and supportive of democracy before the 2014 elections, after the dramatic increase in women's political representation, women citizens' levels of political support ascended higher than that of men citizens.

Importantly, the diminishing of gender gaps was mainly due to the increased visibility of women politicians, not necessarily because of the gender quota as such. Simply put, the election of women to political office and their increased visibility strengthened the connection between women and the democratic process.

Seeing more women in office made women citizens more politically engaged and more supportive of their governments. Women's traditionally lower levels of political engagement in the democratic process are not rooted in deficiencies to be overcome by women, but rather reflect the exclusionary signals of the political arena—where politics has been treated as 'a man's game'. The historic exclusion of women from elected office and their persistent underrepresentation serve as symbols about who should and should not be interested in, attentive to and confident in their assessments about politics. When citizens see more women in office, it starts to change the message. We could imagine that increasing women's visibility in political office through a variety of means—from greater coverage in national and local media and in parliamentary communication to public outreach—could be an essential element in creating more connected citizens and improving our democracies.

Magda Hinojosa and Miki Caul Kittilson, Arizona State University, USA

For full details, see: Hinojosa, M. and Kittilson, M. C., *Seeing Women, Strengthening Democracy: How Women in Politics Foster Connected Citizens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020)

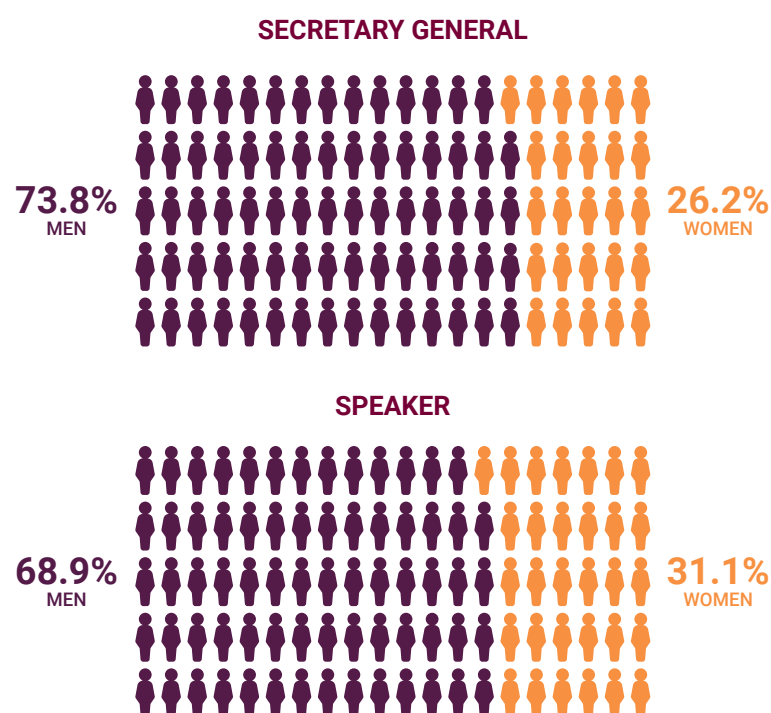
2.4. WOMEN IN PARLIAMENTARY LEADERSHIP

Despite the increase in women's parliamentary representation from 1995 to 2022, women remain underrepresented in parliamentary leadership positions. Figure 2.9 shows the gender composition of two parliamentary leadership positions: secretary general and speaker.

The results show that men outnumber women in these positions. Only 31.1 per cent of parliaments in the selected 43 countries had a speaker who was a woman in 2022, and this percentage was even lower for the position of secretary general (26.2 per cent).

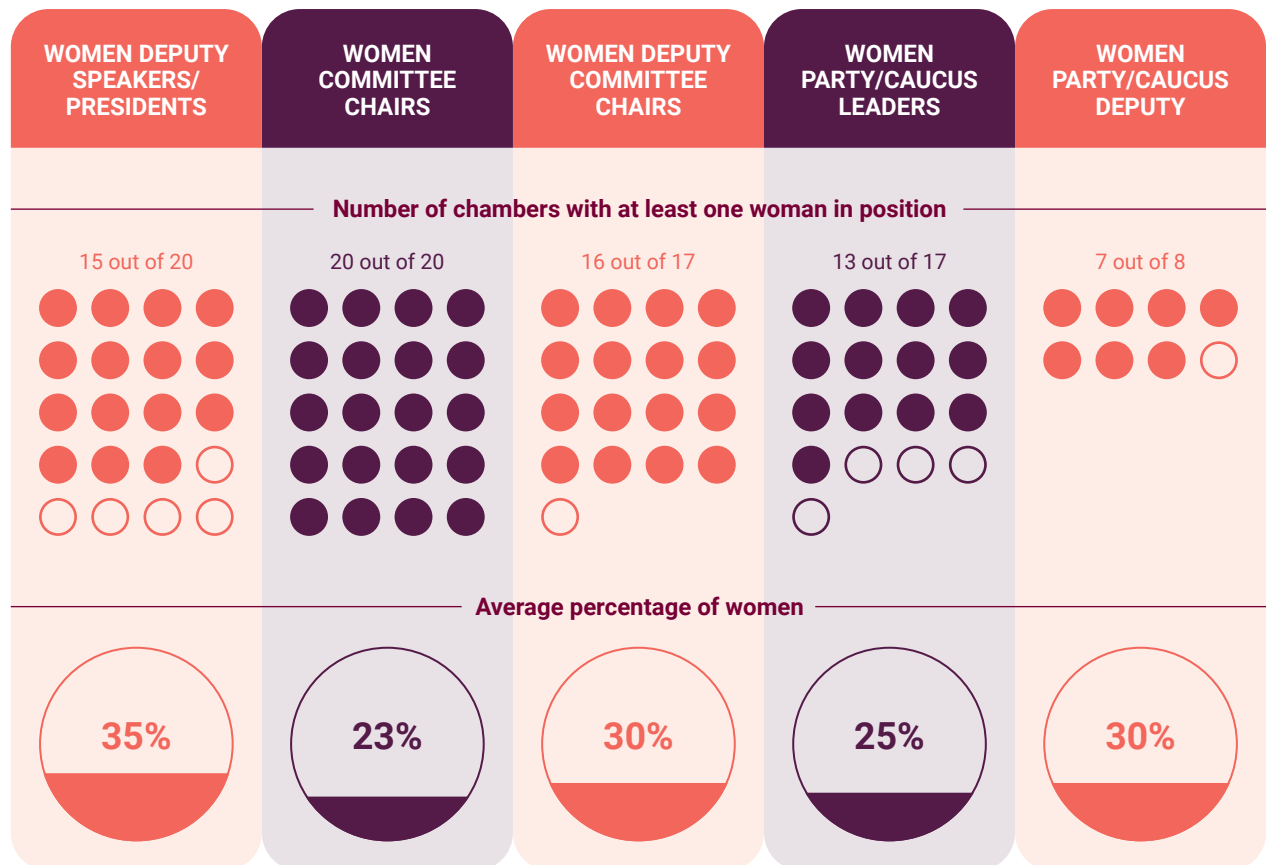
Based on the results of the INTER PARES survey (see Annex B), Figure 2.10 further examines women's presence in other positions of parliamentary power, namely as deputy speakers and presidents, committee chairs and deputy committee chairs, and leaders and deputy leaders of parliamentary party groups and caucuses. Although most chambers have at least one woman in these leadership positions, the average share of women remains low. This confirms earlier work on parliaments as 'gendered institutions', where a vertical division of labour still exists. Women are also less likely to be appointed as deputy speakers or presidents and as party leaders or deputy leaders. Women MPs also remain underrepresented as chairs and deputy chairs of parliamentary committees.

Figure 2.9. Percentage of women and men secretary generals and speakers in the 43 selected parliaments, both houses combined (January 2022)



Source: IPU Parline, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments,, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>, 1 January 2022.

Figure 2.10. Women in positions of leadership in the parliament in the INTER PARES survey (December 2022 to March 2023)



Note: The following chambers completed the information: Belgium (Chamber of Representatives, Senate), Bhutan (National Assembly), Croatia (Parliament), Cyprus (House of Representatives), Czechia (Senate), France (National Assembly, Senate), The Gambia (National Assembly), Germany (Federal Parliament, Federal Council), Ireland (House of Representatives), Italy (Senate), Lithuania (Parliament), Luxembourg (Chamber of Deputies), Malawi (Parliament), Maldives (People's Majlis), Malta (House of Representatives), Niger (National Assembly), Portugal (Assembly of the Republic), Trinidad and Tobago (Parliament).

Source: Data from INTER PARES survey (see Annex B).

2.5. DIVERSITY, INTERSECTIONALITY AND WOMEN'S PRESENCE

Comparing women's presence in parliaments is important because it sheds light on how gender as a social category and system of inequality shapes the functioning of parliaments.

At the same time, gender is not separate from other social identifiers, such as age, "race", ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and (dis)ability. Processes of exclusion and marginalization affect not only women in parliaments, but also other groups—including ethnic and racial groups, young people, people with lower levels of education, and sexual minorities (Hawkesworth 2003). Without suggesting that these groups share a similar or common experience

of marginalization, they do have a history of political exclusion and still face structural barriers in politics today.

Women and men have complex experiences, which are not easily captured by their gender alone. Analyses rooted in intersectionality, which consider gender together with age, ethnicity, “race”, sexuality, social class and so on, offer a better understanding of the complexity of social experiences (Crenshaw 1990; Hancock 2007). Intersectionality shapes political representation in a variety of ways (Montoya et al. 2022; Celis et al. 2014; Hughes 2011; Smooth 2011). Previous studies show that women of colour and minority women in politics are subject to distinct forms of bias and discrimination, which transcend the sum of racism and sexism (Black 2000). Yet experiences of (dis)advantage of different groups are also shaped by the broader historical, institutional, political and societal context (Bejarano 2013; Celis et al. 2014; Hughes 2016). Krook and O’Brien (2010), for instance, show that different countries have distinct histories of inclusion and exclusion of specific social groups. These historical legacies still influence how different groups are represented today, whether or not actions are undertaken to address inequalities in politics, and if so on behalf of which groups.

Institutional systems affect intersectional representation

Institutions such as electoral systems and gender quotas may have differential effects on intersectional representation. In a cross-national study, Melanie Hughes (2016) finds that PR electoral systems are more beneficial than majority/plurality systems for the representation of Muslim ethnic minority women in the West, but that ethnic minority men’s representation is less determined by electoral system design overall.

This is because parties act differently in terms of their strategies, under different electoral rules. In PR systems with multi-member districts, political parties aim to compose a list of candidates that is in some way representative of the broader segments in society and holds appeal to a larger and more diverse set of voters. By selecting minority women, parties can signal their commitment to representing gender and ethnic diversity on candidate lists and maximize the representativeness of their lists when positions for newcomers are scarce (Celis et al. 2014).

In single-member districts, only one candidate is selected. The identity features of this candidate are often closer to those of the (male) archetypical political candidate (Durose et al. 2013), with negative implications for minority women.

Gender quotas and intersectional representation

A similar argument holds for the effect of gender quotas. Studies show that different quota policies generate different effects on the political representation of majority and minority men and women.

Gender quotas, both legally binding and voluntary party quotas, are found to benefit majority women more than minority women (Hughes 2011; Celis

et al. 2014). Quotas can reproduce intra-group hierarchies and inequalities (Mansbridge 2005).

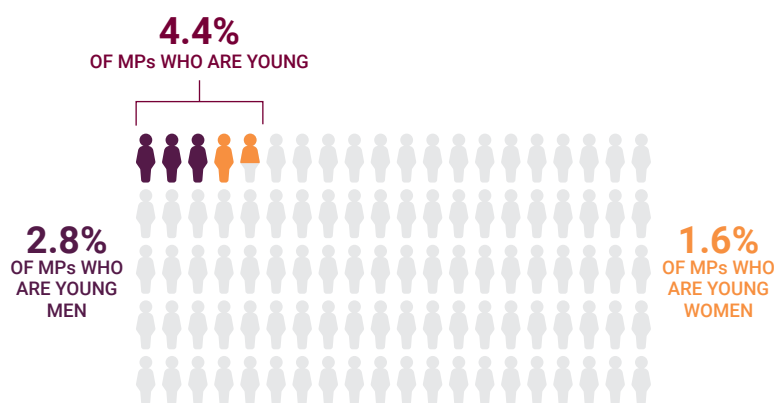
Similarly, minority men are elected in higher numbers than minority women when minority quotas are in place (Hughes 2011). Minority women's political presence only increases when legally binding gender quotas combine with minority quotas in so-called 'tandem quotas' (Hughes 2011). As standalone policies, gender quotas are more beneficial for women from dominant groups, while minority quotas are more beneficial for minority men.

There is no 'magical formula'

Together, these studies indicate that PR electoral systems and legally binding gender quotas may not offer one 'magical formula' that benefits all women equally (Janssen 2021: 17).

They also raise questions regarding the meaning of gender equality in political representation. While gender quotas may foster an increase in the presence of majority women, they may not have the same effect on minority women. Freidenvall (2016: 356) argues that in discussions of gender equality the question should be not only *whether* women are represented, but also *which women*, and *which men*, get selected to stand for election and get elected. Measures aimed at improving women's representation that, in practice, only or mostly benefit majority women are seen as insufficient for the advancement of gender equality.

Figure 2.11. Percentage of MPs who are young (under age 30) in lower or single houses of parliament in the selected countries, by gender (January 2022)



Note: Data missing for: Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Mauritania, Niger, Panama and Peru.

Source: IPU Parline, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>, 1 January 2022.

Understanding the interaction between age and gender

Cross-country data which would allow the study of gender in relation to ethnicity, "race", class or sexual orientation are currently lacking. However, data from the IPU do provide an opportunity to explore the interaction between gender and age in more detail.

Figure 2.11 shows the percentage of young MPs (those under the age of 30), young men MPs and young women MPs in 2022. On average across countries, the percentage of young representatives is 4.4 per cent. The percentage of young men MPs is, on average, higher than the percentage of young women MPs, although there is variation across

countries. In some parliaments, young men MPs are present in much higher numbers (e.g. all the young MPs in The Gambia National Assembly are men). In other countries, such as Bhutan, Bolivia, Chile, Denmark and Italy, young women MPs outnumber young men MPs.

While Figure 2.11 shows the percentage of total young MPs who are young men and young women in the 43 selected countries, Figure 2.12 presents the share of each gender group who are young MPs. In this regard, young women have a higher relative presence than young men within their respective gender group. Hence, while women's overall lower presence in parliaments also extends to young women compared with young men, young women are generally better represented than young men within their respective gender groups.

One reason for this might be that some parliaments have witnessed a more recent increase in the presence of (newcomer) women, who are more likely to be younger and at the beginning of their political careers. Another explanation is that political parties select young women candidates because their 'intersectional identity mix' is maximally complementary to those groups embodied by the incumbents (Celis and Erzeel 2017; Stockemer and Sundström 2021).

Conditions that support women's representation do not necessarily benefit intersectional representation

Do conditions that foster the political representation of women in general (PR electoral systems and well-designed gender quotas) do the same for minority women?

In a recent study using data for 100 countries, Stockemer and Sundström (2021) found that gender quotas do not benefit the parliamentary presence of younger women, and neither do age quotas. Young women

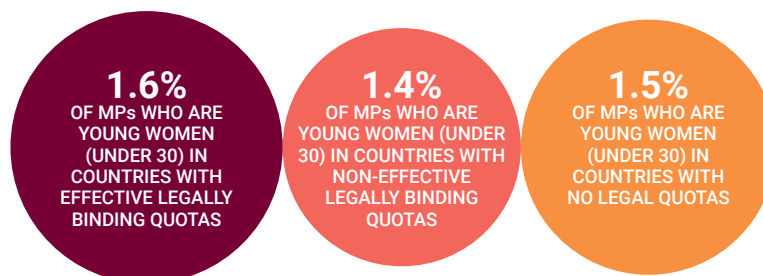
Figure 2.12. Percentage of each gender group who are young MPs (under age 30) in lower or single houses of parliament in the selected countries (January 2022)



Note: Data missing for: Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Mauritania, Niger, Panama and Peru.

Source: IPU Parline, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>, 1 January 2022.

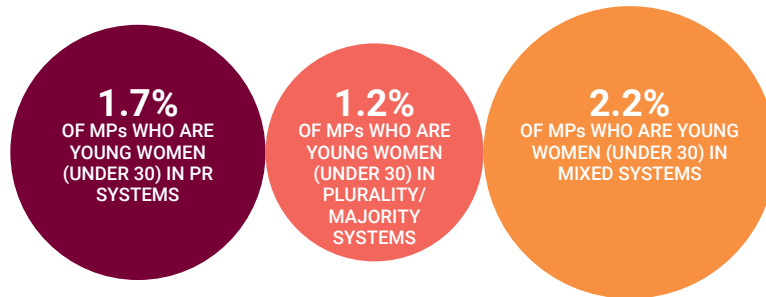
Figure 2.13. Percentage of MPs who are young women (under age 30) in lower or single houses of parliament in the selected countries, according to quota type (January 2022)



Note: Data missing for: Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Mauritania, Niger, Panama and Peru.

Source: IPU Parline, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>, 1 January 2022.

Figure 2.14. Percentage of MPs who are young women (under age 30) in lower or single houses of parliament in the selected countries, according to electoral system (January 2022).



Note: Data missing for: Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Mauritania, Niger, Panama and Peru.

Source: IPU Parline, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>, 1 January 2022.

under the age of 40 are more strongly underrepresented in parliaments than women over the age of 40, whether or not there is a quota in place.

Figure 2.13 supports the findings of Stockemer and Sundström (2021) for young MPs under the age of 30. There are almost no differences in the presence of young women MPs between countries with effective legally binding quotas, countries with other legally binding quotas and countries with no legal quotas.

However, electoral system type does make a difference, as shown in Figure 2.14. In the selected 43 countries, more women under the

age of 30 are present in parliaments with mixed electoral systems and PR systems compared with plurality/majority systems. Therefore, mixed systems and PR systems create more opportunities for the representation of young women and for parties to increase the representativeness of candidate lists (Celis et al. 2014).

2.6. CONCLUSION

The data regarding women's presence in parliaments presented in this chapter show signs of positive change as well as reasons for caution and continued action. Over the past decades, women's political representation has come a long way. Women have moved from being a 'small minority' to a 'large minority' in parliaments (Dahlerup 2016: 64). Yet world and regional averages remain far from gender balanced. Even in the 43 countries that are the focus of this handbook—many of which can be identified as frontrunners in terms of women's political presence—the majority of parliaments have less than 30 per cent women in 2022. At the current pace, gender equality in parliament is still far off.⁴

Global progress is also unequal. While some parliaments are closing in on equal representation, others are still far removed or have stagnated without reaching a gender balance. Variations in women's presence between countries and over time are (still) clearly related to differences in electoral system design and the presence of effective gender quotas, whereas parliamentary features play a much smaller role.

⁴ According to recent estimations from UN Women (2024), at the current pace, a gender-balanced parliament will not be achieved before 2063.

Women's presence is highest in PR electoral systems. Gender quotas, when effectively designed, can boost women's presence in parliaments and their visibility, which in turn positively affects women citizens' political engagement, as shown in the Story of Change from Uruguay. However, there is no magic formula for designing institutions that benefit all women equally, at least not when demands for intersectional approaches to group representation are taken seriously. Conditions that support majority women's representation do not necessarily benefit minority women's representation to the same extent.

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CHAPTER 3

FORMAL COMMITMENTS ON THE PATH TO A GENDER- SENSITIVE PARLIAMENT

Formal commitments are key steps in the path to becoming a gender-sensitive parliament. They can encompass different procedures, rules and bodies, and cover different scopes, stages and timelines, all of which need to be tailored to the national context and the specific parliamentary setting. Formal commitments can include gender equality policies or strategies, gender action plans, obligatory gender mainstreaming training for Members of Parliament (MPs) and staff, and other more specific approaches such as updating single rules or procedures. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

As well as formal commitments, informal processes and agreements can provide additional support for, or be an alternative to, formal commitments. Several parliaments have become more gender-sensitive through bottom-up mobilization by MPs and staff, who have promoted strategies on gender equality, diversity and inclusion.

This chapter explores the options available to parliaments to begin their journey towards becoming gender-sensitive, and is illustrated by Stories of Change and INTER PARES survey data (see Annex B).

3.1. GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGIES, GENDER ACTION PLANS AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING TRAINING

The survey asked about three formal commitments to gender equality and gender sensitivity, namely: current gender equality policies or strategies, gender action plans, and obligatory gender mainstreaming training for new staff and MPs. The results are summarized in Figure 3.1.

Only a handful of parliaments reported having a gender equality policy or strategy, namely the National Assembly in France, the Belgian Senate, the Montenegrin Parliament and the Swedish Parliament. The same countries also answered that they had adopted a gender equality action plan (the France National Assembly, the Swedish Parliament, the Montenegrin Parliament) or were in the process of developing one (Belgian Chamber of Representatives). Obligatory gender mainstreaming training was not found in use at all.

Gender mainstreaming policies affect different organizational levels of a parliament in specific ways: the whole parliament; its committees and commissions, delegations and other kinds of working groups; each parliamentary party group, caucuses and networks; and also the back office, both policy-focused and administrative (OECD 2023). Alongside visible political will, expressed through leadership statements, gender mainstreaming in parliaments requires the delineation of clear responsibilities and powers to enforce implementation. These can rest with a gender-focused parliamentary body, with a newly established specialized body or with all actors.

Figure 3.1. Formal commitments to gender equality and gender sensitivity



As the survey indicates, both Belgian chambers adopted (or are about to adopt) comprehensive formal commitments. Notably, both chambers had speakers who were women, and who were key actors in initiating gender audits that led to coordinated strategies (see Story of Change from Belgium below). Starting a joint process between two chambers is unprecedented, and sets an important example for countries with bicameral systems. It facilitates the continuous exchange between institutions who operate in the same national context, and can help in tailoring context-specific solutions that can potentially have an impact on the whole political system and not just one institution.

Story of Change: The gender audit in the Federal Parliament of Belgium

The Federal Parliament of Belgium has two chambers: the Chamber of Representatives (lower chamber) and the Senate (upper chamber). Both chambers have a composition that is close to gender balanced: in 2023, 43 per cent of the seats in the Chamber of Representatives and 45 per cent of the seats in the Senate were held by women. Increases in women's presence in recent decades are attributed to the adoption of legally binding gender quotas, which apply to all parties taking part in elections and are enforced through strict sanctions.

Despite this near balance in terms of representation, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) ranking on the gender sensitivity of parliaments placed the Belgian Federal Parliament in the middle grouping. Surprised by this result, the two women Speakers of the two chambers, Eliane Tillieux (Chamber of Representatives) and Stephanie D'Hose (Senate), decided to grasp this opportunity to launch a gender equality momentum in March 2021. It was the first time in the history of Belgium that the Speakers of both chambers were women. On 8 March 2021—to mark International Women's Day—both Speakers proclaimed the ambition to turn the Belgian Federal Parliament into one of the most gender-sensitive parliaments in Europe by 2030.

Several initiatives are part of this ambition: both Speakers aim to improve gender-sensitive communication, work against gender stereotyping in committee allocations and develop a gender action plan. A first step in this direction was their decision to carry out a gender audit with the methodological support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and inspired by the self-assessment tool from EIGE. The aim of this audit was to capture the current state of equality between women and men within the chambers. This provided an overview of the institutions' strengths and weaknesses, with a view to improving their gender sensitivity and inclusiveness. The audit aimed to provide a reflection on the gender sensitivity of the Federal Parliament and to be able to think about gender equality in a more structured way.

Although two separate audits were published by the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate, the two chambers worked closely together. A working group met twice a month for over a year. This working group was made up of six members from the various departments of the Senate, six members of the staff of the Chamber of Representatives and staff from the library of the Federal Parliament. An expert from IPU gave methodological support.

On the recommendation of the audit, it was decided to appoint a gender and diversity officer for the Chamber of Representatives and for the Senate. This expert will develop an action plan outlining the Federal Parliament's commitment to gender equality and detailing a clear set of objectives and steps to achieve these commitments.

To carry out the audit, the two chambers used a similar methodology as in the United Kingdom. This method of analysis, known as Red-Amber-Green (RAG) analysis, is used to measure a parliament's sensitivity to gender diversity at a given time or over a given period. The RAG method is based on traffic light colours and can be used to document gender insensitivities and indicate whether a parliament is bad ('red'), good ('green') or needs some improvement ('amber').

The RAG analysis evaluated data on:

- political life and representation: distribution of responsibilities between men and women, organization of committees, presence of MPs;
- legislation: quota laws and the Constitution;
- internal and external communication: use of gender-neutral language in public posts;
- personnel management: gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion; and
- infrastructure and heritage: gender-neutral toilets, representation of women artists.

Gathering data in these different areas of the parliamentary structure provides an understanding of the challenges, gaps, imbalances and barriers faced by different gender groups in both chambers. Moreover, presenting its data in tabular form where the different areas of parliamentary structure are listed and colour-coded allows stakeholders to quickly assess the current and general state of gender sensitivity in both chambers. This clear, visual representation provides a communication tool for identifying and prioritizing issues of concern.

Although recognizing the value of the audit, the Belgian Senate states that this is only the start: '... so it's actually a beginning. With the audit it is the idea of taking a picture of what is there and seeing what needs to be improved but this is only the beginning! We have to start somewhere ... but the work is not finished. So the recommendations of the audit are to continue the momentum!'

Belgian Senate

As the Belgian example demonstrates, using a window of opportunity to initiate the process for a more gender-sensitive parliament can be helpful. But there are multiple ways to begin, as outlined below.

3.2. STARTING AND STOCKTAKING: DIFFERENT PATHS, SIMILAR GOALS

Infographic 3. Types of gender audit



Different paths can be taken to arrive at formal commitments, including both formal and more informal procedures. One of the most formal approaches is to conduct a gender audit or other form of stocktaking that can function as the basis for developing a gender action plan.

Gender audits will typically evaluate documentation (including the rules, procedures and policies of a parliament), and conduct surveys and interviews with MPs and staff. Less frequently, they also involve gathering external views on the parliament's gender sensitivity (for example, from the perspective of groups or citizens engaging with the parliament).

Gender audits can take different forms, some of which are briefly summarized below:

- **Cooperation with and external support by an external organization:** International organizations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) or the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) have been crucial to making gender-sensitive parliaments an international norm over the last 20 years and have played an essential role in defining early on the key areas of gender sensitivity and how to evaluate a parliament (CPA 2001; IPU 2011, 2012; Childs and Palmieri 2023; see also Chapter 1). Toolkits include:
 - ◊ In 2016, the IPU published its self-assessment toolkit, which emphasizes the self-ownership of such processes by the parliament (IPU 2016). Over this whole period, the IPU has offered practical support to diverse countries across the globe, including, among others, Bangladesh, Chile,

Colombia, Georgia, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Serbia, Sweden, Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda and the UK (Childs and Palmieri 2023).

- ◇ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) produced in 2016 a self-assessment tool, the Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality, with a specialized section on parliaments (OECD 2016; updated version OECD 2023).
- ◇ The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and particularly its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), started supporting parliaments in Europe and has been key in stocktaking gender sensitivity in parliaments (OSCE/ODIHR 2021; see Box 3.1 and the Story of Change from Montenegro below).
- **Cooperation with and external support by (academic) gender experts:** Several national and subnational parliaments cooperated with or commissioned academic experts to study the gender sensitivity of national parliaments. In this case, while still working closely and agreeing the details with parliamentary actors (Childs and Challender 2019), the assessment can provide a more independent and external view on the parliament, allowing for the acknowledgement of challenges and for recommendations to be provided that the respective parliament can then decide upon. Well-known examples of parliaments that have commissioned such assessments are the Swedish Parliament (Erikson and Josefsson 2019; Freidenvall and Erikson 2020; Erikson and Freidenvall 2023), the UK House of Commons (Childs 2016, 2017; Childs and Challender 2019), and the regional Parliament of Catalonia (Verge 2022a, 2022b).
- **Conducting an internal self-assessment using systematized free tools:** Self-assessment tools are available from the IPU and the OSCE/ODIHR, as mentioned above. Since 2018, EIGE also has provided an online self-assessment tool, directed mainly at European countries (EIGE 2018). Parliaments can register as either regional or national parliaments, or carry out a general self-assessment without registration, but the programme automatically provides different questionnaires for the regional and national levels. When data are publicly available, the tool automatically completes those sections of the questionnaire. Importantly, EIGE can use the data to compare parliaments, allowing the parliaments to better estimate their positioning in Europe (EIGE 2019).
- **Proposing starting measures by parliamentary bodies:** While all forms of starting out and stocktaking require commitment and mobilization by parliamentary actors, not all involve the above-mentioned steps. Instead, they might consist of specific internal proposals for measures that address only some limited elements of gender-sensitive parliaments. Often, gender-focused parliamentary bodies or parliamentary leadership take up particular issues—for instance, the implementation of gender mainstreaming (e.g. the European Parliament, see Chapter 4), or an intention to become more family-friendly (see Chapter 7). Such gradual

change can be the result of a difficult political setting where not all parliamentary actors are committed to a comprehensive approach, or where resources are lacking to carry out a full assessment, or where specific aspects of gender sensitivity appear on the agenda through other means, such as high-profile incidents with media attention. Such starting points provide fertile ground for extending measures.

Starting out on the pathway to a gender-sensitive parliament and stocktaking often combine different approaches over time, as the Story of Change from Belgium (see above) and the Story of Change from Montenegro (see below) illustrate.



Box 3.1: Focus on... Gender audits in national parliaments

- **House of Representatives, Malta:** In 2021, the Maltese House of Representatives started its process of becoming more gender-sensitive by carrying out a gender audit workshop with the support of the OSCE/ODIHR (Department of Information Malta 2021). Participants comprised MPs, parliamentary staff, representatives of political parties and non-governmental organizations. The House of Representatives adopted different steps that are currently being implemented, such as the revision of the Standing Orders.
- **Assembly of North Macedonia:** Following its 2019 gender audit (supported by the OSCE Mission to Skopje and OSCE/ODIHR), the Assembly of North Macedonia, the Sobranie, adopted a gender action plan to initiate an institutional change process. The Women Parliamentarians Club played a key support role, alongside the Equal Opportunities of Women and Men Committee, in the process. In 2023, the Sobranie implemented one important step and hired a full-time Gender Advisor, who now leads gender mainstreaming processes by supporting the Secretary General. Allocating resources to such a position is extremely rare in European parliaments. The Sobranie is currently implementing its second consecutive gender action plan. (Source: Saša Gavrić, Associate Gender Officer, OSCE/ODIHR)

3.3. FROM STOCKTAKING TO FORMAL COMMITMENTS

Gender audits are useful but need to be put into practice through further commitments—for instance, by using them as the basis for a gender action plan or other measures (see EIGE 2018). The Stories of Change and the example boxes in this chapter illustrate the close connections between audits, formal commitments and tangible change.

Of course, parliaments cannot change established rules and procedures immediately. Processes of change need to be carefully planned to secure the continued support of parliamentary actors. Likewise, some measures may be dependent on others being carried out first. Some other measures require a long-term perspective, such as making changes to infrastructure (see Chapter 7). In any case, a gender action plan lays out the commitment,

who is in charge of what, until when, and how this will be monitored and—if necessary—adjusted.

Parliaments undergoing transitions provide great opportunities to embed gender equality from the beginning, even if resistance and long-term routines and practices persist. Many parliaments across the world must deal with post-conflict situations or with moving from authoritarian and non-democratic political systems to democracy. The parliaments are sometimes only (re-)established in the aftermaths of such crisis situations and must deal with multiple challenges at once. Support by international organizations can be crucial in navigating these conditions, and is particularly valuable if the organization understands the regional context of the post-crisis setting and can offer comparable best practices from other countries in the region (Palmieri 2013; see the Story of Change from Montenegro below).



Story of Change: Developing a gender action plan with external support in the Parliament of Montenegro

In the last few years, the Skupština Crne Gore, the Parliament of Montenegro, has increasingly paid attention to gender equality and becoming more gender-sensitive. One important factor was developing and implementing its gender action plans.

The Parliament of Montenegro developed its first gender-sensitive parliament (GAP) for 2016–18 in close coordination with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The second gender action plan (2022–24) resulted from a cooperation of the Gender Equality Committee with the OSCE Mission to Montenegro. The support of ODIHR and the OSCE Mission originate from the commitment to help national parliaments in matters of gender sensitivity. The gender action plans benefited from the work of the Gender Equality Committee of the Skupština Crne Gore, which was established as the first national gender equality mechanism for gender equality in 2001. The cooperation between the Gender Equality Committee and ODIHR as well as the OSCE Mission to Montenegro was crucial for the development of the gender action plans.

A Women's MP Club was formed in 2020 as an initiative of an MP, the then Deputy Speaker, proving that individual actors can be crucial in fostering gender equality in parliaments. All women MPs are members of the Club, and it aims to promote greater visibility of women on the political scene. Importantly, the Women's MP Club has one adjoined man member.

The OSCE Mission to Montenegro also supported the Parliament of Montenegro in other ways. In 2022 the parliament developed the 'Instruction for safe reporting and processing of cases of discrimination and sexual harassment based on sex and gender in Parliament as a working place' and also the 'Welcome booklet to gender-sensitive Parliament' to guide new MPs regarding gender equality in the Skupština Crne Gore. Overall, the cooperation encompasses a variety of areas. These are selected and steered by the Parliament of Montenegro, including projects, procedural changes, and logistics (for example equipment for live broadcasting of committees' sessions), with regional and international exchanges and methodologies.

Based on these actions, the Parliament of Montenegro is well-positioned to further improve its gender sensitivity, for instance, by expanding the Gender Equality Committee's jurisdiction to other laws than gender equality laws or to actively use instruments for ex-ante and ex-post gender assessment of legislations, which would foster gender mainstreaming.

The example of the Skupština Crne Gore illustrates the value of cooperating with international organizations like the OSCE Mission to Montenegro and OSCE/ODIHR to improve gender sensitivity in their institution. These can also transfer experiences from other parliaments to develop comprehensive and feasible gender action plans.

OSCE Mission to Montenegro

Not all parliaments have the resources to conduct a gender audit and develop a comprehensive gender action plan, not least if the political situation within the parliament prevents a broad consensus. In such a setting, opting for selected measures is a possibility, as a way of initiating gradual change, with eventual impact. Likewise, during the implementation and monitoring phases, measures like gender action plans may need to be adjusted, if the actions do not result in the expected outcomes. Securing continuous change is important.

3.4. SECURING GRADUAL CONTINUOUS CHANGE: FORMAL AND INFORMAL PROCESSES

While formal commitments to gender equality policies or strategies and to gender action plans are often seen as the ‘gold standard’ on the path to a gender-sensitive parliament, smaller changes to rules, measures and procedures can also generate large impacts (Chappell and Mackay 2017; Chappell and Waylen 2013). Likewise, as the Montenegrin example demonstrates, guidance on gender action plans can trigger additional demands and measures independent of the plan.

Many parliamentary rules of procedures, Standing Orders and Statutes contain rules with gendered effects, not least because many of them originate back in a long parliamentary history. Typical rules that involve gender concerns include, for instance, dress codes (see Chapter 7; Childs 2016; Palmieri 2011). Other rules are seemingly gender-neutral, but have gendered effects, for instance when parliamentary decision-making bodies must be composed of party group leaders or when certain leadership positions are always first in plenary debates. While such rules do not directly exclude women, many leadership positions are still occupied by men (see Chapter 2) and thus women are informally excluded (Kantola and Miller 2022). Changing parliamentary rules with the aim of securing gender balance—for instance, in plenary debates—not only changes numbers but also sends out important symbolic signals to the broader public.

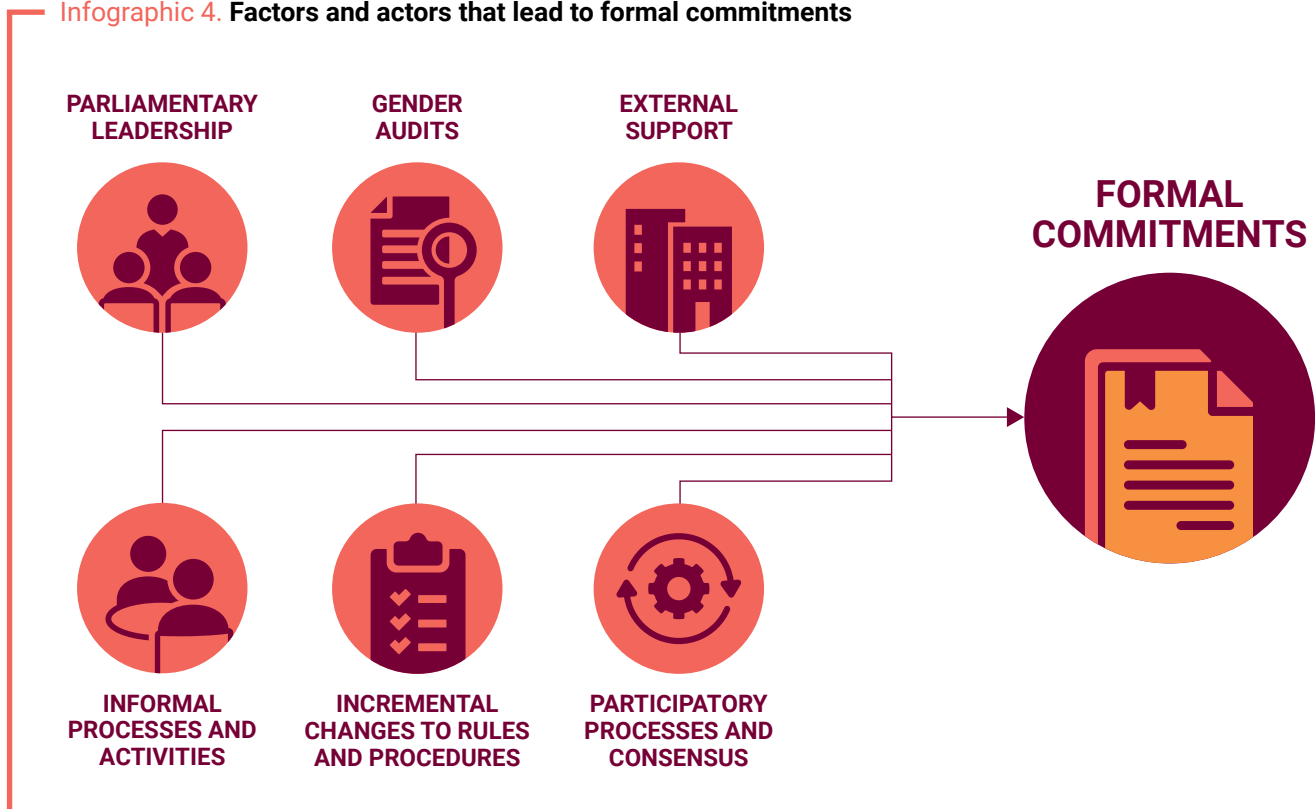
Other measures include training for MPs and/or staff—for example, on gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting or gender impact assessments, on preventing sexual harassment, racism or homophobia, or on other subjects, such as empowering women in politics through mentoring or other approaches (see subsequent chapters for more on all of these).

Gradual but continuous change can also be initiated by parliamentary bodies. The Speaker's Gender Equality Group in the Swedish Parliament was founded in 1995 as an informal network of women MPs dealing explicitly with issues affecting women in parliament, but without formal legislative power (Freidenvall and Erikson 2020). Over time, the group became a permanent and gender-balanced body, dealing with gender equality and lately also diversity issues. The Speaker's Group was crucial in establishing parliamentary gender action plans from 2006 onwards and contributed to the Swedish Parliament's sustainable gender equality work over the course of three decades (Erikson and Freidenvall 2023).

The Swedish example demonstrate that, even without starting with gender audits or gender action plans, specific measures can generate large impacts, and can then be widened when new issues come to light.

3.5. CONCLUSION

Infographic 4. Factors and actors that lead to formal commitments



Formal commitments are an important step for parliaments as they progress to becoming more gender-sensitive. Parliaments use different paths and there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach, but some core **factors and actors that lead to comprehensive formal commitments** can be delineated:

1. **External support** for gender audits and gender action plans can lead to **cross-fertilization**. Parliaments can benefit from experiences and ideas generated in other parliaments that would have been unlikely to come up in their own context.
2. **Gender audits can be tailored to the needs and interests** of parliaments. External support by international organizations or (academic) gender experts, internal self-assessments and parliamentary bodies as initiators are the most common approaches.
3. **Participatory processes and consensus** are important for **sustainable change**. Cross-party and cross-status (MPs and staff) mobilization seems to be particularly well-equipped at keeping the process going even if the parliamentary composition or leadership changes.
4. **Incremental changes to rules and procedures** may have a **big impact**. The impact might not be detectable immediately but can appear over the long run, in the form of triggering additional changes or entering into a more comprehensive gender equality strategy.
5. **Informal processes and activities provide wiggle room** and not everything must become a formal rule. It is crucial, however, to initiate dialogue between the proponents, sceptics and opponents of an idea, to find a common ground and get started.
6. **Parliamentary leadership** plays an important role in any stage of commitment. Leaders can initiate gender audits or informal dialogue. They can visibly support processes and delegate tasks, as well as pushing to extend informal or incremental changes.

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CHAPTER 4

SPECIALIZED GENDER EQUALITY BODIES IN PARLIAMENTS

The commitment to becoming more gender-sensitive (Chapter 3) is not the end of a transformation process, but the beginning. Parliaments choose to implement their promises in different ways, depending on the political will and resources available.

Specialized parliamentary gender equality bodies have emerged as a popular institutional mechanism to turn commitments into action. But how successful are they? And what conditions do they need to succeed?

This chapter explores the range of specialized bodies established by parliaments, how they can support gender-sensitive transformation and the challenges they face. Subsequent chapters will explore how gender can be mainstreamed into the core parliamentary functions of law-making, oversight and representation, and into parliament as a workplace.

4.1. PREVALENCE AND FORMS OF SPECIALIZED GENDER EQUALITY BODIES

Specialized gender equality bodies can be a powerful force for driving gender-sensitive transformation. They can unite women Members of Parliament (MPs) across political boundaries to: advocate for gender-sensitive changes to the parliament; put gender issues on the political agenda; propose or amend laws to address gender issues; engage with women citizens, civil society movements and gender experts; and oversee governmental progress on gender equality. But they work in different ways and face various challenges.

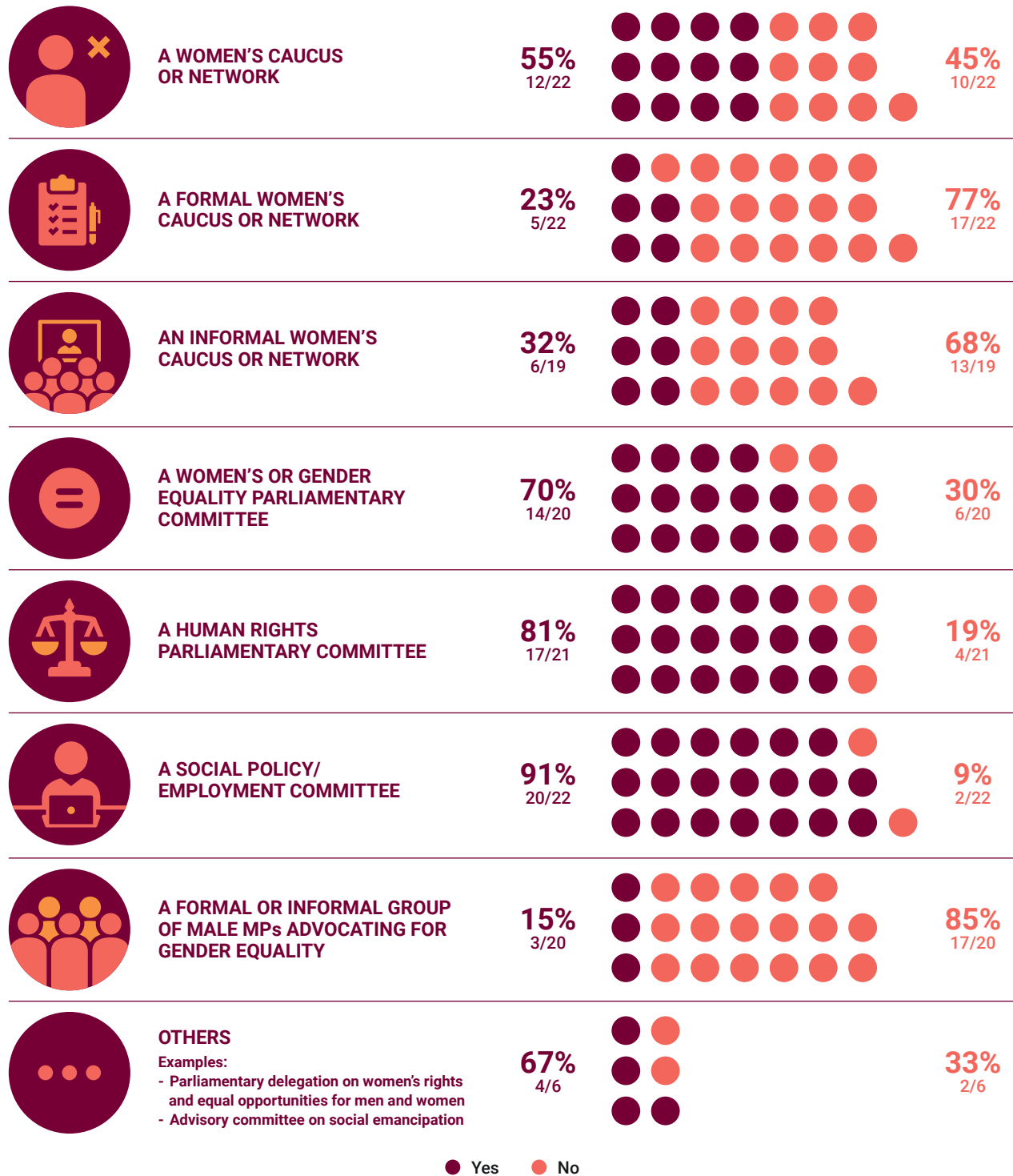
Most parliaments promote gender equality and women's empowerment through specialized bodies, such as committees, caucuses and all-party groups focused on women's issues (Sawer 2020, 2023). These bodies play a central role in gender-sensitive law-making and oversight (Chapter 5), provide opportunities for women MPs and civil society groups to support each other, and can influence decision making (Chapter 6) and the gender-sensitive transformation of parliamentary infrastructure and work (Chapter 7). While they are often overlooked in mainstream politics, they are a crucial element in gender-sensitive parliamentary transformation, representing women's interests, needs and perspectives (Sawer and Turner 2016; Sawer, Palmieri and Freidenvall 2013).

Gender-focused parliamentary bodies also facilitate interaction between parliaments, government and women's movements, and encourage specialization in gender equality (Woodward 2003).

The survey asked about the presence of specialized bodies focusing on women's concerns and gender equality. As well as women's caucuses, women's networks and women's or gender equality committees, the survey also asked about committees, informal groups for men MPs advocating for gender equality, and other examples that might exist. Figure 4.1 shows the results.

Gender-focused parliamentary bodies also facilitate interaction between parliaments, government and women's movements, and encourage specialization in gender equality. (Woodward 2003)

Figure 4.1. The presence of specialized bodies focusing on women's concerns and gender equality



Most parliaments surveyed (70 per cent) have a women's or gender equality parliamentary committee; they are almost as common as human rights parliamentary committees and social policy/employment committees. More than half of the parliaments surveyed (55 per cent) reported a women's caucus or network, and six parliaments mentioned other formations in addition.

Most of the parliaments (86 per cent) have either a women's caucus or a gender parliamentary committee. Women's caucuses or networks exist in parliaments in countries as diverse as Bhutan, France, The Gambia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malawi and Montenegro. Some of these caucuses and networks have a formal status and are recognized in parliamentary rules and statutes. Others exist on a more informal basis. But few caucuses have formal law-making or oversight powers.

Only three parliaments surveyed do not have a caucus or committee. Some parliaments combine both, for example the National Assembly of Bhutan, the Senate in France, the National Assembly of The Gambia, the Irish House of Representatives, the Italian Senate and the Montenegrin Parliament.

4.2. WOMEN'S CAUCUSES AND NETWORKS

Caucuses or networks can be established as a formal parliamentary structure or (more often) as an informal group. Functions of such bodies vary but can include (IPU 2013):

- promoting solidarity among women MPs, and with women citizens;
- influencing policy and legislation from a gender perspective;
- raising awareness of gender equality issues in parliament;
- increasing capacity of women MPs;
- monitoring implementation of gender equality policy and legislation; and
- holding events, discussions and public engagement activities.

The impact of these bodies is as varied as their functions. For example, cross-party women's caucuses in Uganda and Uruguay spurred public debates on women's issues, made significant legislative gains, facilitated networking and collaboration with the women's movement, and built strategic alliances with male colleagues (Johnson and Josefsson 2016).

Women's caucuses thus affect decision making and shape women's political representation in broad terms (see Box 4.1 for examples). As an example, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Fiji Group provides a space for women MPs to share experiences and advocate for causes across party lines.



Story of Change: Working across party divides—the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Fiji Group

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Fiji Group was established in 2019 as a dedicated structure to raise the profile of gender equality and women's empowerment issues in the Parliament of Fiji. All women MPs are permanent members of the group, and it is chaired by a government member and deputy chaired by an opposition member.

When it was first established, the group included 10 women MPs. However, due to the significant decrease in the number of women elected to parliament in 2022 the group currently includes just five women across three political parties. The group is also open to men MPs.

The group has developed an action plan and communications plan, organized outreach activities, and strengthened internal capacity on issues such as reproductive health. It organized gender-sensitization training for all MPs, and awareness raising events for breast and cervical cancer. The group has been instrumental in interacting with global and regional initiatives targeting women MPs, including the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The CWP Fiji Group has been actively supported by the New Zealand Parliament, currently holding the regional secretariat for the CPA in the Pacific.

The establishment of the group was inspired by an international exchange visit. In February 2019, eight women MPs undertook a study visit to the New Zealand Parliament to meet the CWP group. Following the visit, the Speaker of the Fiji Parliament made a number of public statements relating to supporting women MPs in Parliament.

The Fiji parliamentary secretariat subsequently provided a briefing paper for the Speaker on options for developing a women's caucus or a CWP group, and the possible scope of work that such a group could undertake. It suggested the women MPs consider four key factors: the resources required to sustain a caucus or group; the political dynamics of the parliament within which the group would need to work; the importance of finding champions among both women and men in the parliament; and recognition of the significant existing demand on MPs' time and how much more might be required of them from such a body.

In weighing these issues, the parliament decided to follow the existing model of a CWP group. The CWP, founded by women delegates at the 1989 plenary conference of the CPA, aims to promote and mainstream gender equality in the work of the CPA and across the association; encourage women to stand for election to parliaments and legislatures across the Commonwealth; and facilitate the professional development of women members for the advancement of gender equality across the Commonwealth.

This model has proven successful. Before the 2022 general elections, the group sponsored a hybrid mentoring workshop across three cities (Suva, Nadi and Labasa) for aspiring women politicians. Under the CWP Fiji Group banner, women MPs were able to work together across the political divide to support women interested in running for parliament. At the time, the then chair of the group, Hon. Veena Bhatnagar, noted: 'We all came from different backgrounds but we all made it to Parliament. Hence, it is just proper that we take this opportunity to empower and equip, interested and courageous individuals as yourselves to take on the leadership roles in our nation's political arena.'

The CWP Fiji Group intends to continue focusing on strengthening the role of women MPs in all parliamentary work, particularly in more systematically interacting with standing committees' investigation of legislation and other issues that have implications on gender equality issues, in line with the gender equality requirement in Standing Orders.

Sonia Palmieri, Australian National University

As Box 4.1 and the Story of Change from Fiji illustrate, women's caucuses have been crucial in settings where women's representation is still low and/or where gender inequalities persist. Yet women's caucuses or parliamentary women's networks remain important even in countries that attain high scores for gender equality, such as Finland. The cross-party women's network comprising all women MPs in the Finnish Parliament was established in 1991 and continues to discuss political issues of particular concern to women. It works on promoting gender equality and women's rights in policymaking, for instance by drafting legislative amendments. It also organizes seminars and meetings, sends representatives to international meetings on equality and women's rights and cooperates with women's representatives from other countries.



Box 4.1: Focus on... Impact of women's caucuses and networks

- Côte d'Ivoire Parliament:** The Women Deputies' Caucus of Côte d'Ivoire was created in 2013 by the National Assembly in collaboration with the IPU. All women MPs are members of the caucus. Because the caucus was established to help overcome the low representation of women in the National Assembly, the caucus engages in several activities to promote gender equality in politics and society. One of its key achievements is the adoption of the 2019 law on the representation of women in elected assemblies. The women's caucus also collaborates with ministers to influence the drafting of legislation, and intends to develop a closer relationship with the newly created Women's Caucus of the Senate. (Source: INTER PARES peer-to-peer exchange on the role of women's caucuses and women deputies, November 2022)
- National Assembly of Malawi:** The Parliamentary Women's Caucus in Malawi was created in 2002 as a cross-party initiative and brings together women MPs from all political parties in the National Assembly. The caucus is funded by the National Assembly and since 2010 is recognized as a full committee. The Parliamentary Women's Caucus has specific areas of focus—girls' emancipation, women's political participation and women's economic empowerment. The caucus engages in a wide set of activities both in and outside of parliament. The caucus has considered a number of policy issues and gender-related laws, such as the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act 2010, the Deceased Estates (Wills, Inheritance and Protection) Act 2011 and the Gender Equality Bill 2013. The caucus lobbied the Department of Reproductive Health and the Ministry of Finance for an increase in the budget allocation on family planning in Malawi, in an attempt to reduce the problem of maternal mortality in the country. Other caucus activities range from community engagement and awareness-raising, consultation meetings, providing learning materials to schools and providing scholarships and village savings loans, to developing 'He for She' allies in parliament. (Sources: INTER PARES survey; INTER PARES peer-to-peer exchange on the role of women's caucuses and women deputies, November 2022)
- The Irish House of Representatives:** The Irish Women's Parliamentary Caucus tabled a motion in 2019 about period poverty and called on the Irish Government to provide free period products through various public services. This led to a growing awareness of the issue in the political and public consciousness. As a result, the Programme for Government committed to providing a range of free period products in all publicly funded educational settings in Ireland. A private member's bill was also introduced, aiming to make period products freely available to all those who need them. The government established a working group and published a discussion paper with recommendations. This led to a range of actions, including a pilot initiative to provide free products in further education and training colleges. Dublin City Council and Lidl Ireland have made period products available for free in council-owned buildings and in Lidl stores. (Source: INTER PARES peer-to-peer exchange on the role of women's caucuses and women deputies, November 2022)

4.3. PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

Parliamentary committees focused on gender or women usually enjoy more formal powers and access to resources than informal groups do. Their status and activities, however, still vary from country to country.

Gender equality and women's rights committees are well positioned to highlight persistent gender inequalities, including from an intersectional perspective. Three different types of action usually characterize such committees (see Box 4.2):

1. overseeing relevant government actions on gender equality (see also Chapter 5);
2. providing MPs with specialized knowledge on gender equality; and
3. interacting with civil society (see also Chapter 6).



Box 4.2: Focus on... Parliamentary committees and delegations on women's rights and gender equality

- **Danish Parliament:** The Danish Parliament set up a multi-portfolio committee on political economy and gender equality in 1972, which was replaced by a single-portfolio committee on gender equality in 2011 (Ligestillingsudvalget). This institutional change from a multi-portfolio to a single-portfolio committee significantly increased parliamentary oversight of the government and fostered better interactions between parliament and civil society organizations (CSOs). (Sources: Expert survey with Mette Marie Staehr Harder; Staehr Harder 2017)
- **United Kingdom House of Commons:** In 2015, the UK House of Commons voted to change the Standing Orders to create a new Select Committee, the Women and Equalities Committee. The new body was tasked with holding the Government Equalities Office to account, and rectified the institutional deficit of not having either a women's committee or caucus in the UK's parliament. Cross-party mobilization by women MPs and their new relations with officials and the external parliamentary actors were crucial for establishing the committee. (Sources: Expert survey with Sarah Childs; Childs 2023)
- **French Parliament:** A Parliamentary Delegation on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women was created in 1999 (La Délégation aux droits des femmes et à l'égalité des chances entre les hommes et les femmes; Law No. 99-585, 12 July 1999) in the National Assembly and Senate. It is the body most responsible for gender-sensitive oversight. Its mission is to inform the parliament of the policies followed by the government with regard to its consequences on the rights of women and on equal opportunities between men and women, and to ensure the follow-up of law enforcement in this area. The delegation can request to hear any person whom it deems useful for information on a particular issue or bill, including ministers. In the past, it has conducted hearings on topics related to violence against women, gender and working conditions, precarious work, professional equality between women and men, health at work, and the balance between work and parenthood. (Source: INTER PARES survey)

The focus of these committees differs. For example, the Finnish and Danish committees can both interact with relevant CSOs; however, while the Finnish committee largely influences legislative output, the Danish committee engages mostly in overseeing government (Holli and Staehr Harder 2016).

Some parliamentary committees have a mandate to conduct oversight on gender and intersectional issues across all policy areas. For example, the Welsh Parliament's Equality and Social Justice Committee has a mandate to investigate any area of policy from the perspective of the cross-cutting issues within its remit, including equality and human rights.

The European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) also plays a role in mainstreaming gender across other committees too (see Box 4.3).



Box 4.3: Focus on... Gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament

In 2003, the European Parliament became one of the first parliaments in the world to formally commit to gender mainstreaming. The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) is the key actor who defines the measures and establishes the scope of reporting duties for gender mainstreaming, both of which responsibilities allow the FEMM committee to constantly expand the breadth and depth of parliamentary gender mainstreaming (Ahrens 2016, 2019).

In the European Parliament, there are now two gender mainstreaming networks (for Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and committee staff) interacting with all the committees and delegations. Committees are required to adopt Gender Action Plans and the European Parliament administration is in charge of gender mainstreaming measures for its staff. In 2019, gender mainstreaming was added to the Rules of Procedure; and even some political groups mandated themselves to mainstream gender (Elomäki and Ahrens 2022; Shreeves and Hahnkamper-Vandenbulcke 2021).

As demonstrated by the examples above, parliamentary committees on gender and women can operate in different ways. Some have a narrow focus on the oversight of gender as a policy area, and others take responsibility for mainstreaming gender across all policy areas and committees.

4.4. GENDERED MEMBERSHIP OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

While women's caucuses and networks are dominated by women by design, the gendered membership of parliamentary committees is a different issue. Parliamentary committees are 'gendered institutional spaces', which is manifested through their leadership and membership.

Research from many parliaments around the world highlights the gendered segregation in committee membership. For example, a 2019 study on the European Parliament found that the committees with the highest representation of women were culture and education, women's rights and gender equality, petitions, internal market and consumer protection, and human rights. The committees with the weakest representation of women were foreign affairs, economic and monetary affairs, and transport and tourism (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019).

The gendered segregation of committees and in leadership positions can be addressed by aiming for equal representation to include views of women and men across all policy areas (Erikson and Josefsson 2023). Given that party groups vary in the number and proportion of women, and that most parliaments are far from gender parity, formal commitments to equal representation may be impossible or may simply increase women MPs' workloads. Informal procedures may be an alternative to enable the fair representation of women. The Finnish Parliament constitutes an inspiring example of how to: first, collect the necessary data; second, find an informal setting to discuss solutions; and third, quickly implement the solution (see the Story of Change from Finland).



Story of Change: Leadership and parity in parliamentary committees of the Finnish Parliament

In 1906, Finland instituted universal suffrage, granting both men and women the right to vote and run for office. Becoming a global forerunner, 19 women were elected out of 200 MPs in 1907. Over time, Finland has made strides towards gender parity, reaching a critical mass of 30 per cent of women's representation in 1983, 40 per cent in 2007 and achieving near-parity in 2019, without relying on electoral or party quotas.

Inspired by the Swedish Parliament's process for becoming more gender-sensitive, the Finnish Parliament (the Eduskunta) commissioned a study in 2017 to assess equality in parliamentary work. Supported by a parliamentary steering group, an external consultancy combined surveys and interviews to explore MPs' experiences and perceptions regarding gender equality in parliamentary culture. The study revealed a generally positive perception of gender equality in the Eduskunta, but also highlighted persistent challenges, particularly in committee leadership and membership (Björk, Paavola and Vainio 2019).

It found men were overrepresented in prestigious committees, such as international affairs and finance, and women held only 21.7 per cent of committee chair positions despite comprising 41.5 per cent of MPs.

The study showed that 'seniority' was often cited as a critical rule in accessing the most-wanted committees and leadership positions (alongside interest and expertise). Seniority was defined by the number of years of experience in the parliament ('parliamentary age').

Interviewees discussed seniority as if it was a gender-neutral way of assessing experience and competence of MPs. But further scrutiny revealed that, informally, seniority also included the accumulated leadership experience of an MP (as the chair of a committee, party or parliamentary group, as a minister, or through experience in the European Parliament).

This meant that, while the average actual parliamentary age of women MPs was often higher than that of men MPs, they were still less likely than the men to have acquired leadership experience, pointing to differences in how experience accumulated in different contexts was judged. This posed a barrier to their advancement, despite their higher average parliamentary age.

Following heightened public awareness on leadership positions during the 2019 elections, Finnish parties committed to addressing gender imbalances. Guided by the Finnish Equality Act—which was not legally binding for the Eduskunta—parties informally negotiated to promote parity in committee leadership and membership, alongside considerations like seniority and regional representation.

Two strategies emerged for achieving parity: larger parties internally ensured gender balance, while smaller and men/women-dominated parties collaborated with complementary groups to achieve overall parity. Subsequent studies in 2020 (Siukola, Kuusipalo and Haapea 2020) and 2022 (Paavola, Tiensuu and Björk 2022) revealed significant progress, with a record 10 committees achieving 40–60 per cent gender balance. The remaining seven committees had 30–35 per cent shares for either women or men, except for the traditionally men-dominated defence committee, which comprised only 18 per cent women. Committee chairs reached an all-time high with 56 per cent held by women, even though the finance, foreign affairs, defence and the economic and monetary affairs committees continued to be chaired by men, since 2007.

Informal agreements among party groups thus significantly improved gender representation in the Eduskunta. By fostering gender parity, these changes also pave the way for women to gain informal seniority, enhancing their prospects for broader leadership roles in politics and society.

The Finnish experience underscores the importance of scrutinizing perceived gender equality and employing informal mechanisms to address disparities. By commissioning external studies and prioritizing consensus over conflict, the Eduskunta demonstrates a proactive approach to fostering gender equity and inclusivity in parliamentary governance.





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For more details on the 2017 study, see: Björk, A., Paavola, J.-M. and Vainio, A., *Realisation of Gender Equality in the Finnish Parliament* (Helsinki: Publication of the Parliamentary Office, 2019), <https://www.congreso.es/docu/docum/ddocum/dosieres/sge/sge_2/pdfs/25.pdf>, accessed 15 July 2024

4.5. CHALLENGES FACED BY SPECIALIZED BODIES

Specialized bodies take many forms, have varied powers and mandates, and undertake different activities, and therefore have varied outcomes and face diverse challenges (Palmieri 2020). Some of these challenges are outlined in Figure 4.2, alongside potential solutions.

Figure 4.2. Challenges and possible solutions for specialized bodies

CHALLENGE	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
 <p>Lack of power and resources</p> <p>Caucuses, groups and networks are often informal bodies that do not have an official status in a parliament. These bodies may rely on secretariat support from an already-stretched staff of MPs. This informality can be a strength, because they can advocate for causes and undertake work on their own initiative, but it also limits their power compared to formal committees. If the power of these bodies is limited, their impact will also be limited.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caucuses can advocate for access to formal parliamentary resources (such as staff or budget) to do their work. Linking back to formal parliamentary commitments to gender equality can help support such arguments. • Civil society organizations can also provide secretariat support for caucuses or cross-party groups (as in the UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament, and Welsh Parliament). • International organizations can also be a source of support. • MPs can advocate for caucuses to become official parliamentary structures (for example see Malawi in Box 4.1, where the caucus is recognized as an official committee), or to gain specific powers (for example, the power to call witnesses or hold public hearings).
 <p>Isolation</p> <p>Even when specialized bodies like committees have formal power and institutional support, they can be isolated. Their work may be seen as less important because of its gender focus, and its work may be given less priority in debates or schedules as a result. The presence of a specialized body can also paradoxically lead to less effective gender mainstreaming, if other committees consider that gender is only the domain of the specialized body, rather than a responsibility of them all (Johnson 2022).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation of gender issues can be overcome through a clear message from parliamentary leadership that gender should be mainstreaming across all committees. Formal rules of procedure can help to ensure gender is on the agenda of all committees, as in Fiji (see Chapter 5). • Opening up membership of caucuses to men MPs has benefits and drawbacks, but can help to create new ambassadors for gender equality beyond existing advocates, and open up new networks of influence.
 <p>Partisanship</p> <p>While specialized bodies (both formal and informal) are credible actors because of their cross-party formation, this can also bring challenges. While MPs may come together because of a shared interest in gender equality, they still may have different ideas about how to solve problems and how to prioritize work. Political party groups as a whole may disagree with the views of MPs on specialized bodies, forcing them to conform. Members of governing parties may also be reluctant to criticize government actions or progress on gender equality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplans of specialized bodies can be negotiated to gain consensus. All members should have an equal say and there should be an agreed process to decide priorities fairly. • Focusing on less politically controversial issues, especially at the start of a body's work, may help to avoid disagreements and deadlocks and help members learn to work together.
 <p>Low numbers of women MPs and turnover of membership</p> <p>In specialized bodies designed to bring all women MPs together (caucuses and networks), the low numbers of women MPs result in a small body with limited influence. Turnover of membership can also be an issue, where one or two passionate MPs drive the work. When they leave parliament, the momentum may fade.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing men and external participants to join specialized bodies is one way of increasing the size and influence of a body. • Turnover and momentum challenges can be overcome by ensuring that bodies are established as formal parliamentary structures, ensuring their sustainability. Members of such groups have succession plans in place should leaders leave, and so that new generations of MPs are brought into the group.

4.6. CONCLUSION

Gender-sensitive transformation of parliaments (Chapter 3) can lead to structural changes to the allocation of responsibility for gender mainstreaming. Specialized bodies are present in most parliaments, in the form of caucuses, networks or committees, but their impact and durability varies. Such bodies can maximize their effectiveness by considering the following conclusions:

- **Specialized bodies should not be a substitute for a whole-parliament approach to gender mainstreaming.** Parliaments may be tempted to see such bodies as a single ‘solution’ to becoming gender-sensitive, but they should form part of a wider requirement for all structures and people working in the institution to embed gender in their work. The creation of a specialized body does not achieve gender sensitivity in and of itself.
- **Specialized bodies, in all forms, should be given the powers, status and resources to function effectively.** This will be different in each parliamentary context, but critical actors within institutions (whether MPs, staff or external influencers) can use examples from other parliaments to demonstrate the impact of such bodies, in creating fairer, more representative and more effective parliamentary outcomes. External support and resources can be leveraged to this effect too.
- **Gendered membership of specialized bodies can reinforce the misleading idea that gender issues are the responsibility of (and only for the benefit of) women only,** rather than everyone. While equal representation on such bodies may not be possible, transparency about the membership of groups and committees is important. Given political parties’ roles in assigning committee membership, negotiations and informal agreements among party groups (as in Finland) can also help solve this issue. Other solutions include making commitments to ensure that women and men are represented on all committees (i.e. no single-gender committees), opening up women’s/ gender caucuses and networks to men, and demonstrating clear leadership messages that gender is relevant in all policy areas and is everyone’s responsibility to consider (all MPs, committees, structures, departments and staff).

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CHAPTER 5

GENDER-SENSITIVE LAW-MAKING AND OVERSIGHT

Law-making and oversight of government actions and spending are core functions of all democratic parliaments.⁵ Members of Parliament (MPs) represent the interests of citizens by scrutinizing the potential and actual impact of laws, policies and budgets on their lives.

Gender-sensitive parliaments ensure that the needs and experiences of all genders are considered in parliamentary outputs and legislation (Celis and Childs 2020; OSCE/ODIHR 2021). Promoting and embedding gender equality in law-making and oversight can transform gender inequalities and make societies more democratic (IPU 2022).

Parliaments are in a unique position to ensure that laws, policies, programmes and spending are designed and implemented to advance gender equality. They choose issues to explore, collecting information from public bodies, academics, civil society organizations (CSOs), businesses, unions, citizens and others to highlight how state actions affect people of different genders in different ways, and propose solutions to address inequalities. Parliaments also exert political pressure to hold governments to account on their gender commitments at an international and national level.

This chapter discusses the core aspects of gender-sensitive law-making and oversight. It provides inspiring Stories of Change and additional examples from the INTER PARES survey.

Parliaments are in a unique position to ensure that laws, policies, programmes and spending are designed and implemented to advance gender equality.

5.1. GENDER MAINSTREAMING THROUGH LAW-MAKING AND OVERSIGHT

Gender mainstreaming is 'the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels'. It is 'a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated' (UN Women 1997: 2).

The law-making and oversight functions of a parliament are an important space for gender mainstreaming. Gender-sensitive law-making and oversight (sometimes called 'gender-sensitive scrutiny') aims to:

- put gender-related policy issues on the political agenda (through debates, questions, committee inquiries, etc.);
- ensure governments are held to account on their commitments to gender equality;

⁵ The authors would like to thank Hannah Johnson for her comprehensive contribution to this chapter.

- examine all proposed laws, policies and budgets from a gender perspective to highlight and avoid unintended, negative gender impacts;
- monitor the actual impact of laws, policies and spending on people of different genders, once they are implemented; and
- gather gender-disaggregated data and information from a wide range of sources, including the lived experiences of citizens.

Infographic 5. Objectives of gender-sensitive law-making and oversight



The law-making and oversight functions of a parliament are an important space for gender mainstreaming. Gender-sensitive law-making and oversight (sometimes called 'gender-sensitive scrutiny') aims to:

- Put gender-related policy issues on the political agenda (through debates, questions, committee inquiries etc.)
- Ensure governments are held to account on their commitments to gender equality
- Examine all proposed laws, policies, and budgets from a gender perspective to highlight and avoid unintended, negative gender impacts
- Monitor the actual impact of laws, policies and spending on people of different genders, once they are implemented
- Gather gender-disaggregated data and information from a wide range of sources, including the lived experiences of citizens

There are a range of tools and checklists available to help parliaments integrate a gender perspective into law-making and oversight, which are outlined in section 5.5: Tools for gender-sensitive law-making and oversight. But a fundamental purpose of these tools is to unpick assumptions that laws, policies, programmes and budgets affect everyone in the same way (i.e. that they are 'gender-neutral'). Instead, the tools support parliaments to systematically examine how different groups of people are affected by state actions in different ways, because of their different needs, experiences and contributions to society (Johnson 2022a).

Gender-sensitive law-making and oversight strengthens the representation of gendered interests, challenging societal norms and stereotypes. Recognizing intersectionality can highlight and address challenges faced by individuals positioned differently in terms of gender, "race", ethnicity, class and

disability. Gender-sensitive oversight also enhances the fulfilment of formal commitments to gender equality, scrutinizing and improving strategies and mechanisms towards this goal.

Mandates and origins of gender-sensitive law-making and oversight

Gender-sensitive law-making and oversight activity can emerge from institutional-level gender mainstreaming policies or specific procedural mandates or rules, or can evolve organically from critical actors.

There are few examples of specific procedural mandates to undertake gender-sensitive law-making and oversight. One example is the Fiji Parliament's Standing Orders, illustrated by the Story of Change from Fiji below.



Story of Change: Embedding a gender lens into committee work in Fiji

The Fiji Parliament's Standing Orders require committees to 'ensure that full consideration will be given to the principle of gender equality so as to ensure all matters are considered with regard to the impact and benefit on both men and women equally' (Fiji Parliament 2023b).

Under the leadership of the then Speaker, Dr Jiko Luveni, in 2017 the parliament produced a guide to scrutinizing legislation from a gender perspective with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP Pacific 2017), and ran training sessions for all committee chairs. Committee reports have since included a 'gender analysis' section, and the parliament hosts a gender data hub.

While these institutional changes and commitments put gender on committees' agendas, the level of detail and quality of analysis vary. This means that there is a need to maintain the momentum of cultural change and the role of critical actors. Gender-sensitive scrutiny cannot be achieved through rules and processes alone. As new staff and MPs come into the parliament, they may not be aware of the imperative of embedding gender into their work and the effectiveness of the rules diminish.

As an example, a 2018 Committee Report on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities Bill from the Standing Committee on Social Affairs mentioned gender 34 times (Fiji Parliament 2018). It also suggested an amendment to ensure gender balance and increased representation of people with disabilities on the National Council for Persons with Disabilities. This amendment was accepted and became law—the Rights of Persons With Disabilities Act 2018.

However, the gender analysis sections of more recent committee reports include all Sustainable Development Goals, but only briefly mention gender (e.g. Fiji Parliament 2021). Other reports assume that gender-neutral language in draft legislation means that there are no differential gender impacts (e.g. Fiji Parliament 2023a).

This example shows that, while procedural mandates can help to 'get gender on the agenda', they need to be accompanied by cultural change and ongoing momentum to effectively embed gender into law-making and oversight. Critical actors, whether MPs, parliamentary staff or external actors, are key to persuading others of the benefits of gender mainstreaming, and finding practical, sustainable solutions to do so on a consistent basis.

Hannah Johnson, Senior Gender Advisor, INTER PARES

Law-making and oversight involves formal and informal processes, spaces and routines where actors negotiate decisions (Smith 2022). While formal practices (such as processes, structures, rules and bodies) are easy to identify, informal practices (which might include customs, habits and norms) are less easily identified and accessible (Chappell and Waylen 2013; Chappell and Mackay 2017; Waylen 2017). Women are often underrepresented in these informal networks, partly due to their lower numbers in parliaments and leadership positions (see Chapter 2). Yet informal practices for gender equality can prove effective, offering opportunities to challenge formal rules (Ahrens and Kantola 2022; Kantola 2022).

Even in the absence of institution-level commitments or specific rules, everyone working in and with parliaments (MPs, political staff, parliamentary officials and those engaging with parliaments) can take responsibility for gender-sensitive law-making and oversight, as individuals or as part of groups.

The following sections explore examples of gender-sensitive law-making, oversight and budgeting, alongside some of the tools and practices used.

5.2. GENDER-SENSITIVE LAW-MAKING: CREATING FAIRER REGULATION

Gender-sensitive law-making integrates a gender perspective in different stages of the law-making process, including developing, drafting, introducing, debating, amending, adopting and publishing laws (OSCE/ODIHR 2021). It aims to eliminate gender-based discrimination and promote equality by supporting the creation of an inclusive legal framework and legislation.

Gender-sensitive law-making in parliament can involve:

- proposing new laws or legislative amendments to address gender inequalities and discrimination;
- systematic consideration of all laws from a gender perspective, through gender analyses or gender impact assessments (see section 5.5: Tools for gender-sensitive law-making and oversight);
- collection of gender-disaggregated data and consultation with gender experts and people affected by proposed and existing laws (see also Chapter 6); and
- monitoring compliance of new and existing laws with international women's human rights law and national gender commitments.

The survey asked about initiatives to improve gender-sensitive law-making and oversight, ranging from formal requirements for committees, to data availability, the tools used in the process, and gender-sensitive language. The results are shown in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1. Initiatives to improve gender-sensitive law-making

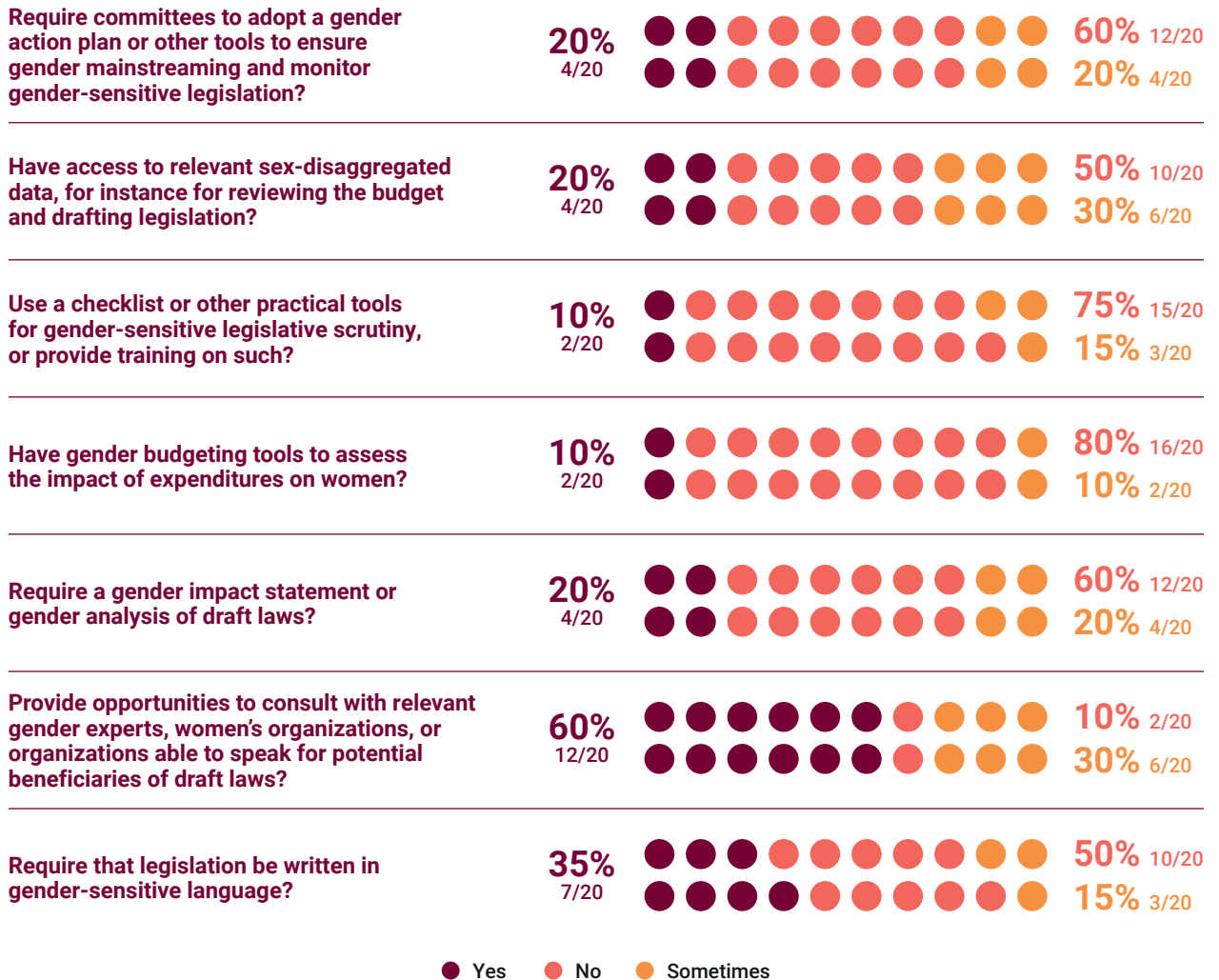


Figure 5.1 shows that the most common initiative is providing opportunities to consult with relevant gender experts, women's organizations or organizations able to speak for potential beneficiaries of draft laws. All other measures are less common—except for requiring legislation to be written in gender-sensitive language, which is used or occasionally used in half of the parliaments. Few parliaments mention that they use a checklist or other practical tools for gender-sensitive law-making (German Federal Parliament and Parliament of Montenegro being exceptions). Less than half of the parliaments require committees to adopt a gender action plan or other tools to ensure gender mainstreaming and monitor gender-sensitive legislation, or require a gender impact statement or gender analysis of draft laws.



Box 5.1: Focus on... Actors pushing for new gender equality legislation

- **Cyprus House of Representatives:** Three gender-sensitive legislative changes and oversight activities were initiated in recent years by different critical actors:
 - ◊ The President of the House, Annita Demetriou, tabled amendments to the Law on Violence against Women in 2021 and the Criminal Code in 2022 to include femicide as a specific offence. Femicide is now punishable by an up-to-lifetime jail sentence.
 - ◊ Three MPs from different parties tabled the Law on Combating Sexism and Sexism Spreading via Internet and Related Matters, which was adopted in November 2020.
 - ◊ The army was investigated regarding women's representation in leadership positions and promotions, on the initiative of a parliamentary committee. The investigation resulted in compensation for all women officers excluded from these promotions. (Source: INTER PARES survey)
- **European Parliament FEMM committee:** While the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) has a low status because of its voluntary membership and receives few legislative proposals, it has exploited parliamentary rules to maximize its influence through gender mainstreaming and networked relationships (Ahrens 2016, 2019; Elomäki and Ahrens 2022). FEMM influences other committees through opinions, a formal legislative procedure which allows the committee to give input on files falling within other committees' remits. It can also informally provide 'gender mainstreaming amendments' to other committees, to introduce a gender perspective on an equal footing with amendments made within the lead committee. However, its success is reliant on the willingness of other committees to accept its proposals. The committee also produces reports on its own initiative to highlight the gender dimension of different policy areas (for example, taxation, trade, climate change, green jobs, artificial intelligence and so on) and to collaborate with other committees. (Source: Elomäki and Ahrens 2022)

Practices in other parliaments include a newsletter three times a year by the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea on gender-sensitive legislation (disseminated across parliament and government gender bodies), accompanied by a gender legislation compendium for new MPs, parliamentary staff and academics (OECD 2023).

Australia's Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights reviews all legislation to check its compliance with seven international treaties to which Australia is party (including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)), and issues a report with comments to both houses (Australia 2011).

The Story of Change from Italy below shows another example of institutionalized gender-sensitive scrutiny.



Story of Change: A government–parliament approach to legislative gender impact assessments in Italy

Since the passing of Legislative Decree No. 90 of 2016, the Italian Government has been required to provide parliament with a gender budget report, which assesses the impacts of budgetary policy on women and men in terms of money, services, time and unpaid work. The Budget Committee of the Italian Chamber of Deputies (Camera dei Deputati) examines the gender budget report, by discussing the document and having a programme of hearings with gender experts and the government.

In 2020, the Chamber of Deputies further extended its role in gender-sensitive law-making and oversight. The Plenary of the Chamber passed a motion to request the inclusion of a paragraph on gender impact analysis in the documentation files prepared by the Research Service on draft legislation under consideration by the standing committees. The motion specified that such documentation should be produced on an 'experimental and selective basis'.

In compliance with the motion, the Research Service (Ordine del Giorno 2020) now provides a gender impact analysis on draft laws of parliamentary initiative, on an experimental basis. The analysis takes into account the context of the proposed provisions, and data related to the regulatory intervention, using the statistical indicators and the methodology tested in gender budgeting (which relates to the ex-post evaluation phase and focuses on expenditure).

The analysis is also part of the provisions of article 1 of the Equal Opportunities Code, which requires the objective of equal treatment and opportunities to be taken into account in the formulation, at all levels, of laws, regulations, policies and activities.

An early example of the gender impact analysis was on a proposed law on health and care inequalities. The parliamentary Research Service highlighted the potential gender impact of the law through presentation of gender-disaggregated statistics on people living with chronic conditions, acute hospitalization rates and caregiving responsibilities.

This example demonstrates that the availability of reliable and gender-disaggregated data is crucial in order to support ex-ante legislative scrutiny on gender impact assessments.

Mariadelle Cucinotta, Research Service, Italian Chamber of Deputies

5.3. GENDER-SENSITIVE OVERSIGHT: SURFACING GENDER ISSUES

Gender-sensitive oversight includes (but is not limited to):

- monitoring progress and holding governments to account on their commitments to gender equality (at national and international levels);
- putting gender issues on the political agenda through, for example, inquiries, consultations, debates, questions and motions; and
- exploring the potential and actual gender impact of government policies, programmes and actions.

The survey asked about initiatives to improve gender-sensitive oversight. The survey items covered several aspects, ranging from gender equality in plenary debates, to monitoring and enforcing the implementation of legislation,

monitoring compliance with international standards, and involving different actors—as presented in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2. Initiatives to improve gender-sensitive oversight

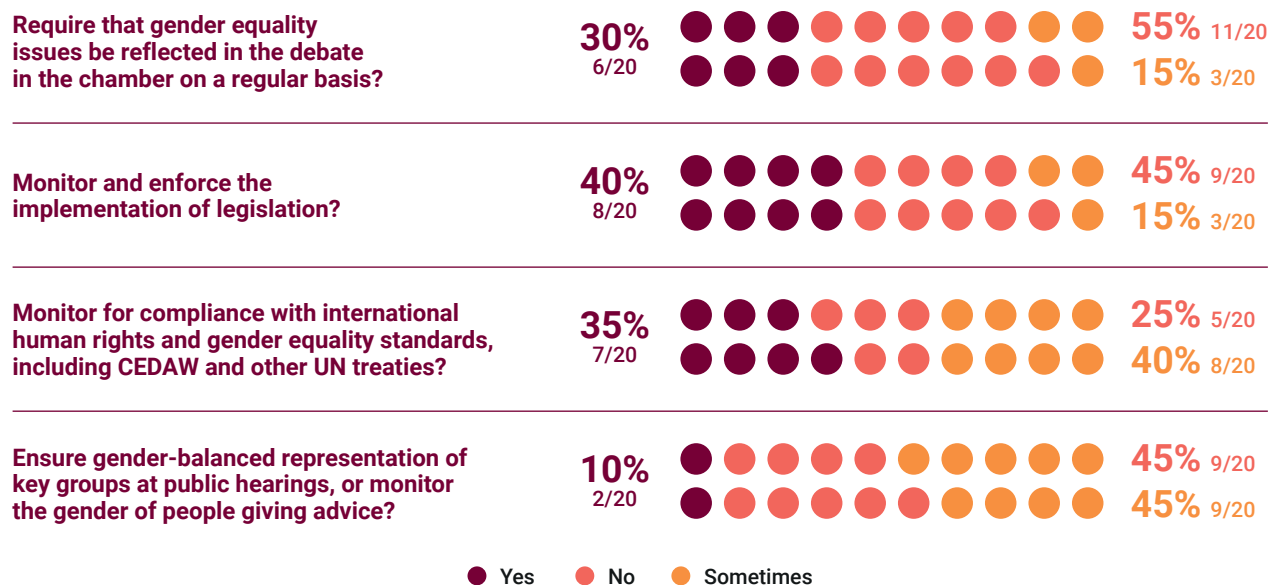


Figure 5.2 shows that many measures are not widely adopted in parliaments. Most parliaments monitor (occasionally) for compliance with international human rights and gender equality standards, including CEDAW and other UN treaties. Almost half of the parliaments monitor and enforce the implementation of legislation. Ensuring gender-balanced representation of key groups and of people giving advice is surprisingly rare; only Belgium and Montenegro reported that they did this regularly.

Parliamentary oversight often rests with specialized bodies in charge of women's rights and gender equality (explored in more depth in Chapter 4). But critical actors inside and outside of parliament play a key role in gender-sensitive oversight, by either highlighting gender issues in debates, asking gender-related questions of government ministers or pushing for committee inquiries on gender issues or for inquiries to include a gender perspective.

The power of these critical actors to advocate for gender equality is limited, however, if women's representation is low (numerically), or if the parliamentary culture does not value or prioritize gender issues. Low representation of women in key decision-making positions in a parliament (for example, committee chairs, or groups that decide parliamentary work) can also prevent gender-sensitive oversight.

The following examples of gender-sensitive oversight in Box 5.2 show that many different groups and individuals can take responsibility for initiating such work, not just specialized bodies.



Box 5.2: Focus on... Gender-sensitive oversight in practice

- In Italy, the first **joint parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into femicide** was initiated in the Senate in 2017. It produced a series of reports on the judicial system, anti-violence centres and refuges, after extensive evidence-gathering and public consultation. It found that information for victims was essential, so an article was introduced in the Code of Criminal Procedure, which provided for the victim to be informed about their rights so that they could access justice and be protected. Several prosecutors' offices used a template using clear language to provide information to victims of abuse. (Source: OHCHR 2024)
- The **United Kingdom House of Common's Women and Equalities Committee** has undertaken a series of oversight inquiries to gather evidence and highlight gender and intersectional inequalities and discrimination in various areas. These include: misogyny in the music industry, Black maternal health, health barriers for women and girls in sport, and attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings. (Source: UK Parliament 2024)
- The **Australian Senate's Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration** held an oversight inquiry into gender segregation in the workplace and its impact on women's economic equality in 2017. The government subsequently accepted several of its recommendations, including the development of gender-sensitive careers advice. (Source: Australia 2017)

Gender-sensitive post-legislative scrutiny

Post-legislative scrutiny provides a bridge between law-making and oversight. It can highlight the actual gender impact of laws when they are implemented and provide suggestions for adjustments to the law or its implementation to account for negative gender impacts.

Chile is a forerunner for such ex-post assessment, as the Story of Change from Chile below illustrates.



Story of Change: Post-legislative scrutiny and impact assessment in Chile

Post-legislative scrutiny gained prominence in the Chilean Chamber of Deputies (Cámara de Diputadas y Diputados) with the establishment of the Department of Evaluation of the Law in December 2010. The department evaluates laws and their implementation, assesses the impacts and effects of laws, and suggests corrections when needed. Its methodology comprises three phases: technical law analysis, citizen engagement through tools like forums, and the creation of an evaluation report. Throughout the process, various types of impact are assessed, such as economic, financial, social, cultural, environmental, institutional and legal.

Within this context, gender-sensitive post-legislative scrutiny gained momentum in recent years. The current approach to gender-sensitive post-legislative scrutiny emerged from collaborative efforts by the department with peers and experts in international partnerships, including INTER PARES. In 2021 and 2022, INTER PARES ran several workshops on legislative scrutiny in which members of the department participated. At first, it was a challenge to consider how gender-sensitive scrutiny would align with the department's existing methodology, as impact analyses did not explicitly account for gender.

In 2022, a gender-sensitive impact assessment template was developed, allowing the department to adapt its post-legislative scrutiny methodology and checklist to include a gender perspective. The department decided that gender considerations would be integrated transversally across various impact analyses rather than be treated as a distinct category. By adopting transversality as a key principle, the team explicitly acknowledges that gender should not be confined to certain policy domains but forms an integral part of all policies. Gender-sensitive evaluations have subsequently been conducted in policy domains such as (intrafamily) violence, health policies, education, and street harassment and sexual harassment in public places.

The process of gender-sensitive post-legislative scrutiny involves multiple phases. It begins with a request for evaluation from a parliamentary committee or its chair, or social organizations with support from a deputy. The second phase entails a comprehensive analysis of the law by the technical unit, involving the collection and analysis of pre-legislation documents and debates, legal texts and secondary legislation. The third phase integrates citizens' perspectives through various means including interviews, forums, (online) questionnaires, platforms or on-site visits. The department has also compiled a database of social organizations and other stakeholders, forming the basis for a Forum of Citizens. The fourth stage involves writing an evaluation report focusing on the integration of a gender dimension in the legislation's objectives (was gender included in the formulation of the goals? Were the different needs of men and women considered?), instruments (was gender included in the adoption of the operational instruments?) and language use (was inclusive language adopted and were different audiences considered?). In the final stage, recommendations are formulated and presented to the relevant parliamentary committee. The committee decides whether to discuss the recommendations and whether to amend the legislation. The process is inclusive in nature, not only in its objectives (i.e. examining gender disparities in the impact of laws) but also in its process (i.e. by involving a diverse array of stakeholders in the evaluation and conducting on-site visits).

The successful development of gender-sensitive post-legislative scrutiny in this example stems from key factors. The motivation and leadership of the parliamentary staff in the unit and department, along with the unit's autonomy and flexibility in adapting existing methodologies, played a key role. The department's efforts were augmented by support from gender advisors in the ministries, while INTER PARES's partnership contributed to capacity building, crucial for modifying the methodology. Initially, the gender perspective was incidental to evaluations, but it has now become mainstreamed across all evaluations and parliamentary committees.

The modification of the methodology yielded significant results in how the Chamber assesses laws. The new methodology systematically identifies where legislation falls short and how this can be remedied, supporting the elimination of gender discrimination in laws and enabling MPs to hold the government accountable. A notable success was the application of the gender-sensitivity methodology on the Law on Sexual Harassment in Public Spaces (Law 21.153) at the request of the Women and Gender Equality Committee. The evaluation led to a revision of the law and has also led to training for law enforcement officers. The changes in the department have also inspired broader awareness of gender-sensitive scrutiny, leading to increased requests for its application across parliamentary committees on a variety of topics. Moreover, the Chamber is using the gender-sensitive scrutiny tools to refine its agenda for a planned public consultation. The Senate has advanced on using a gender perspective in gender-sensitive evaluations of laws.

Establishing an effective gender-sensitive post-legislative scrutiny process requires a comprehensive approach. The Chilean experience offers several suggestions to other parliaments seeking a similar change:

- Developing a well-functioning system is a gradual process and may require time and dedication, but in the end the efforts will be rewarded because the quality of legislation will improve.
- Foster a culture that encourages evaluation. Effective post-legislative scrutiny depends on the willingness of members of parliament and government to evaluate oneself. It is important to make clear that it is not a tool to criticize the work of others, but to strengthen and update laws and legislation.
- Adapt methodologies when needed. The acceptance that societies and gender inequalities are evolving necessitates adaptive methodologies.

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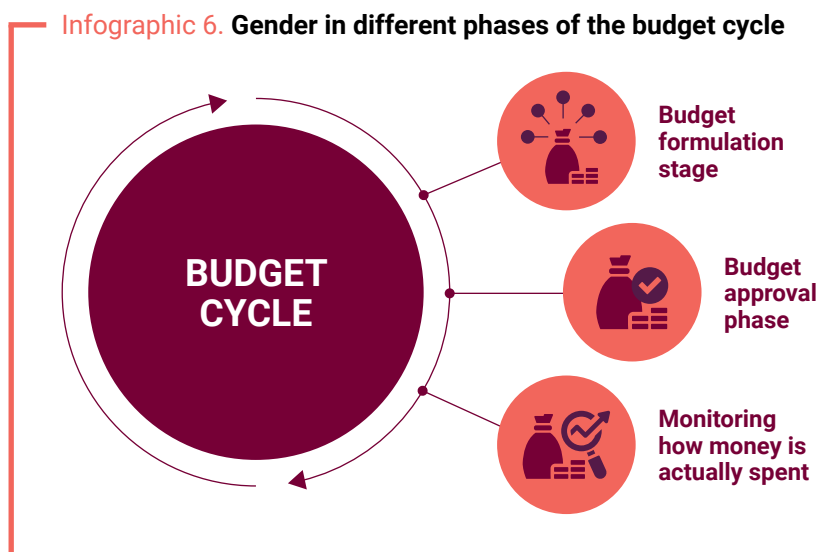
Chile's approach to gender-sensitive post-legislative scrutiny and impact assessment not only improved the quality of laws and legislation but, by incorporating the perspectives of citizens and stakeholders, it also fostered an accountable and more inclusive legislative process. It highlights how a small-scale, targeted gender-sensitive transformation in a single department can act as a catalyst for broader institutional change.

5.4. GENDER-SENSITIVE BUDGET SCRUTINY: RESTRUCTURING RESOURCES TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY

'Gender budgeting' is the application of gender mainstreaming to the budgetary process (Council of Europe 2005: 5). It aims to restructure resources to promote gender equality in any policy or action that receives resources.

Parliaments play an important part of the budget process by scrutinizing and voting on proposed allocations. However, embedding gender considerations into the parliamentary budget approval process has challenges. The period for budget approval usually has a

Infographic 6. Gender in different phases of the budget cycle



short timescale, MPs often have limited budget scrutiny training and skills, and there is a large amount of information to process. Adding in gender as an extra dimension to the process can appear to make this even more complex. But embedding a gender perspective on parliamentary budget processes (across all committees and topics) is critical, to ensure that people of all genders have equal access to resources and that gender equality aspirations are achieved.

Parliaments can prioritize gender in different ways during different phases of the budget cycle, not just the approval phase (Deveaux and Dubrow 2022):

- In the **budget formulation** stage, MPs and committees can highlight priority areas for spending that will contribute most to gender equality. This could be across all departments, or for specific funds, but will be different depending on the gender inequalities in a particular country. Committee inquiries, debates, questions, motions and media statements are some of the methods MPs can use to do this.
- In the **budget approval** phase, MPs and committees can scrutinize specific budget allocations to understand their likely beneficiaries and impacts. They can also examine any government-produced impact assessments, gather views from stakeholders, and ask questions about how gender inequalities have influenced budgetary decisions, and consider budgets' likely gender impact.
- MPs and committees also have a role in **monitoring** how money is actually spent, who is benefiting, and whether the budget allocations are reducing, maintaining or increasing gender inequalities in practice.

Given the specificity of national budget processes, gender-responsive budgeting requires tailored approaches. This involves determining responsible parliamentary actors, ranging from finance committees, gender-focused committees/bodies, collaborations with governmental and/or non-governmental actors (such as women's organizations), or independent think tanks (OSCE/ODIHR 2017). Core to any approach is access to supporting resources, such as training, statistics and topic-specific gender research.

Gender budgeting functions exist in various parliaments, as Box 5.3 illustrates.



Box 5.3: Focus on... Gender-responsive budgeting

- **Malaysian House of Representatives:** In the early 2000s, Malaysia and UNDP initiated gender-responsive budgeting with several ministries. In 2020, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, legislators and CSOs revitalized efforts on gender-responsive budgeting. The Gender Budget Group was formed, a coalition of 20 CSOs and 18 academics to monitor the national budget, advocate for gender-responsive allocations and provide capacity-building programmes for ministries, CSOs and academics. Recently, the Gender Budget Group also provided capacity building for MPs to localize gender-responsive budgeting in their constituencies and scrutinize the budget through a gender lens. Several MPs have raised gender-responsive budgeting in the House of Representatives. (Source: INTER PARES n.d.)
- **Georgian Parliament:** The Parliamentary Budget Office of Georgia has continued its work on gender budgeting since its 2017 pilot project. The Parliamentary Budget Office uses gender impact assessments and publishes reports on the gender impacts of the state budget. In March 2023, the Parliamentary Budget Office organized a four-day training session on gender-responsive budgeting, with the support of the European Union. The participants came from a range of state bodies, such as the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council, the government administration, the Public Defender's Office, state agencies and gender focal points—all directly engaged in policymaking and decision-making processes. The training focused on presenting international practices, the importance of gender equality in budgetary processes and tax policy, and ideas on how to make the budgetary process in Georgia more gender-sensitive. (Source: Expert survey with Elisabeth Klatzer; see for details <https://pbo.parliament.ge/media/k2/attachments/gender_budget_gender_efficiency_index.pdf> and <<https://pbo.parliament.ge/newsearchen/item/Training%20on%20Gender%20Responsive%20Budgeting%20for%20representatives%20of%20State%20Agencies%20was%20held%20with%20an%20engagement%20of%20the%20Budget%20Office.html>>, accessed 18 July 2023)
- **Pakistan National Assembly:** After the Covid-19 pandemic, the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) in Pakistan restarted promoting gender budgeting in parliamentary processes. In November 2022, the WPC organized a two-day workshop for its members and other interested parliamentarians, which focused on critically evaluating gender aspects in grants allocated to specific sectors (e.g. development, health, education) and the role of parliamentarians and legislators within these processes. The WPC continued with another one-day workshop in January 2023, where it developed recommendations on how to improve the gender sensitivity of the federal budgetary process in Pakistan. The workshop resulted in the 'Strategy Paper on Gender Responsive Budgeting in Pakistan', which was presented with the Speaker of the National Assembly Raja Pervez Ashraf attending. The paper put forward key strategies and methodologies for gender budgeting in Pakistan and proposed ways to lessen the existing gender disparities via policy interventions and sufficient budgetary allocations to women. Following up on the strategy paper, the WPC held another consultation session on a gender-responsive budget process in April 2023. (Source: Expert survey with Elisabeth Klatzer; see for details <<https://wpc.org.pk/2022/11/10/workshop-on-gender-budgeting-for-wpc-members/> and <https://wpc.org.pk/2023/01/26/launch-of-strategy-paper-on-gender-responsive-budgeting/>>, accessed 18 July 2023)

5.5. TOOLS FOR GENDER-SENSITIVE LAW-MAKING AND OVERSIGHT

Parliaments use different approaches to examine the gender impact of laws, policies and budgets. They vary in their formality and scope, allowing parliaments to test out the best tool for their context.

Gender impact assessments

Gender impact assessments are a tool to understand the current gender situation in a specific area, and to predict the impact of a proposed policy or law. Gender impact assessments gather gender-related evidence from different sources, and explore whether a proposed law, policy, programme or budget allocation will likely increase, maintain or decrease gender inequalities.

While some governments produce gender impact assessments alongside legislative, policy and budget proposals, parliaments have a distinct role in scrutinizing the evidence and conclusions of these assessments, or producing them if the government does not (Johnson 2022b). As noted by the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (2021), and shown by the Italian example above, parliaments are increasingly taking the lead for carrying out gender impact assessments, even when they are not legally obliged to do so.

In terms of mandating such assessments, Belgium's 2007 Gender Mainstreaming Act requires a 'gender test' to be applied to each new policy or law. The parliament is also granted powers to scrutinize ministerial performance with reference to annual governmental indicators (OECD 2023). The Latvian Parliament conducts impact assessments of legislative proposals, and its Gender Equality Committee is mandated to examine draft legislation on gender equality matters (OECD 2023).

However, the use of the information in gender impact assessments is varied. For example, research in Austria found that, while MPs are aware of the gender information in impact assessments, its use in parliamentary debates is unsystematic and other dimensions, such as financial implications, are more dominant when considering impact. It attributed this partly to a perceived insufficient quality of the gender impact assessments (UNDP Pacific 2017).

Toolkits and checklists

These resources are usually a series of simple steps or questions to help parliamentary actors detect potential gender issues in a systematic way. They are an option for parliaments where conducting a full gender impact assessment is beyond their capacity or resources.

They prompt MPs and staff to consider: Who is likely to be affected by the proposed policy/law? Will women and men be affected in different ways? How was gender considered during the design of the policy/law? These resources may also provide sources of gender-disaggregated information on the legal and policy framework in a specific country (UNDP Pacific 2017). They usually provide ideas for how MPs can highlight and address the issues raised too, alongside case studies (Johnson 2022a).

Such resources are also flexible and customizable. For example, following workshops on gender-sensitive scrutiny and working with local gender non-governmental organizations, INTER PARES's international guide to gender-sensitive scrutiny was adapted and published as co-produced, country-specific guides (e.g. for Malaysia, INTER PARES 2021).

Infographic 7. A five-step model for conducting gender-sensitive scrutiny



Templates

Templates can help parliaments to examine laws and policies in a consistent and systematic way, including through gender impact assessments. Guided by the Italian Parliament's approach to legislative gender impact assessment, the Chilean Law Evaluation Department and the Malaysian House of Representatives were both supported by INTER PARES to produce a tailored impact assessment template, along with a worked example. Critical civil society actors in Malaysia then tested the template to assess an agricultural regulation bill and inform MPs of the gender impact, which otherwise would not have been known.

Data and analysis

A lack of gender-disaggregated data is a huge barrier to gender-sensitive law-making and oversight. MPs and committees are well placed to advocate for improvements to data collection—for example, among national statistical bodies. International sources of data, such as the World Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), UN and others, can also help to fill data gaps at a national and international level.

Information about gender inequalities produced by non-political sources can persuade even the most sceptical MPs that gender inequalities exist. In-house research services are therefore critical actors in gender-sensitive law-making and oversight, because they are trusted and impartial. This analysis helps to remove political interests from debate about how best to address gender inequalities.

Disregarding gender aspects in seemingly neutral policy fields like transport, energy or climate change is common and widespread. A systematic approach to gender-sensitive law-making and oversight can help overcome this by making sure that all laws, policies and budgets are scrutinized from a gender perspective, regardless of whether they are seen as a 'gender issue' or not (Johnson 2022a).

5.6. CONCLUSION

Infographic 8. Lessons for parliaments on embedding gender in oversight and law-making



Gender-sensitive law-making and oversight are essential pillars in gender-sensitive parliaments. The integration of gender equality principles into various stages of legislative processes not only aligns with democratic ideals but also enhances democratic outcomes, representation and legitimacy. These practices elevate the quality of laws and legislation, fostering their effective implementation and evaluation.

The examples and experiences described in this chapter highlight some lessons for parliaments wishing to embed gender into their oversight and law-making activities:

- **Rules and tools do not change practices and cultures alone.** Gender-sensitive initiatives taken by parliaments may be formal or informal. While formal rules have clear advantages (through their explicitness and clearer mechanisms for enforcement), both formal rules and informal practices can lead to significant results. Informal processes and activities are sometimes more flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances than formal rules can be. As a result, not every effective informal rule needs to be formalized—finding a common ground to get started is more important.
- **Consistency is key.** As shown by the Fijian example, initial periods of activity can fizzle out over time if critical actors (inside and outside parliament) are not present to keep the momentum going. Rules mandating that gender is integrated into parliamentary work can appear arbitrary and confusing without context or convincing arguments explaining why it leads to more effective, representative decision making. Consistent awareness-raising by parliamentary institutions (for example, regular statistical briefings, training or events) and civil society can help maintain enthusiasm for having gender on the political agenda.
- **Every topic should be considered a ‘gender issue’.** As evidenced by the examples above, everything from aquaculture (UNDP Pacific 2017) to taxation (Johnson 2022a) will affect people of different genders in different ways. A systematic approach to assessing gender impact, alongside access to high-quality data and analysis, can help parliaments to surface gender inequalities that may previously not have been visible or understood.
- **Every parliament must find their own way of embedding gender into law-making and oversight—one size doesn’t fit all.** Many factors affect the effectiveness of gender-sensitive scrutiny: the interest of MPs, the existing rules and procedures, the resources available, the interest of parliamentary leaders, the presence of specialized bodies (Chapter 4), the policy priorities of the government, the power of critical actors, the strength of civil society, the numerical representation of women, the culture—and many others. Some parliaments have the resources and capacity to create entire research units or complex processes to assess the gender impact of policies, laws and budgets. Others will only realistically be able to ask questions of the government. There are many different options available to parliaments, and even small actions can lead to results.

- **Access to trusted gender data and analysis is critical.** Without access to data, it is nearly impossible to predict or assess the gender impact of a law, policy or budget. But data and evidence take different forms: from statistical data to the testimonies of people with lived experience, and from comprehensive legal analysis to the views of CSOs. In-house parliamentary research services are important, as in the Italian example above, but where these do not exist this information can be obtained from international organizations, civil society, academics and many other sources. Parliament should aim to gather information from as many different sources as possible (see Chapter 6) to build a comprehensive picture of the issue under consideration and the possible gender impacts. Relying on a single source (commonly the government) is usually insufficient. MPs are also well placed to advocate for improvements to gender data collection.
- **Gender-sensitive changes often result from a few critical actors** (Childs and Krook 2009) **or equality champions** (Chaney 2006), including gender equality bodies, women’s caucuses, informal (cross-)party networks, individual or groups of MPs and parliamentary staff, as well as state institutions and civil society outside of parliaments. A combination of these factors is usually needed for change to happen.

By challenging systematic gender biases, addressing blind spots, and dismantling discriminatory structures, gender-sensitive law-making and oversight not only reshape traditional gender norms within parliaments, but also serve as catalysts for broader societal change. While gender-sensitive change is gradual, incremental adjustments to rules and procedures can yield substantial, long-term impact.

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CHAPTER 6

GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS AND (CIVIL) SOCIETY

Women's movements, activists and organizations are powerful drivers of gender equality. They have pushed for the implementation of international agreements, such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action or the 2000 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Historically, mobilization around women's rights has encompassed a wide range of issues, including women's suffrage, violence against women, gender stereotypes, and reproductive and bodily rights. It has also extended to topics like the gendered segregation of the labour market, gender dynamics in armed conflicts and peace processes, the gendered impact of climate change, and advocacy for women's rights during periods of democratic backsliding and anti-gender backlash.

Intersectional and women of colour's activism has advanced a more inclusive approach to social justice, by fostering a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between gender, "race", ethnicity, class, bodily abilities and other identities in the pursuit of equality (D'Agostino and Brown 2023; Emejulu and Bassel 2021).

Studies on gender-sensitive parliaments emphasize the value of institutionalizing relationships between parliaments and women's organizations (IPU and UNDP 2022; OSCE/ODIHR 2021), not least in times of crisis like a pandemic (Childs and Palmieri 2020). When parliaments actively consult and engage with women's organizations and broader society, they are better able to identify and address key issues around gender equality, even if women are still underrepresented in parliament. Developing mechanisms to hold elected representatives accountable to women's interests and making them responsive to women's diverse needs are also core aspects of gender-sensitive parliaments.

This chapter reviews how parliaments engage and cooperate with women's movements, civil society organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders in their functioning, and how this can support gender equality in politics and society. It also explores the inclusion of a gender dimension in parliaments' outreach activities to individual citizens and society in general. Both aspects—engaging citizens individually and across society more widely—have been identified as important work in making parliaments more gender-sensitive (OSCE/ODIHR 2021), and this chapter explores the forms and potential effects of such engagement strategies. The first part offers a broad, general discussion of parliaments' public engagement initiatives. The second part focuses on how parliaments can actively encourage consultation and participation among citizens and CSOs. The third part concentrates on parliaments' education, information and communication initiatives aimed at the general public.

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6.1. PARLIAMENTS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public engagement is an important activity for modern-day parliaments. By engaging with citizens and CSOs, parliaments act as a mediating link between society and governance (Leston-Bandeira 2022).

Parliaments have introduced—particularly in recent years—a wide range of public engagement initiatives, defined by the *Global Parliamentary Report 2022*, on public engagement, as ‘ways in which the community is involved in an activity, process or decision including through information, education, communication, consultation and participation’ (IPU and UNDP 2022: 6).

Efforts to map public engagement initiatives have started only recently. The *Global Parliamentary Report 2022*, offers one of the first systematic and comprehensive overviews of public engagement activities developed by parliaments. The report distinguishes between various types of activities used by parliaments worldwide to connect with citizens:

- **Consultation and participation activities:** These enable citizens and CSOs to actively engage with political decision making. Some parliaments offer the right to petition. Other initiatives support the engagement of citizens and CSOs through new forms of participation and deliberation, including online forums and portals for legislation, e-democracy platforms or citizens’ assemblies.
- **Education activities:** These are intended to educate citizens on the workings of parliament, for instance through parliamentary visits, or raise awareness on important societal issues through workshops and lectures. To familiarize young people with formal politics, parliaments organize youth or children’s parliaments or shadowing programmes, or develop resources and tools for teachers.
- **Information and communication activities:** These provide information on the functioning of parliament and its procedures, and disseminate parliament’s work and outputs to the public. This can be done through a variety of means, including parliamentary websites and social media platforms, livestreaming, and TV and radio broadcasting.

While many of these initiatives may not primarily focus on gender issues, they should be considered from a gender perspective. The *Global Parliamentary Report 2022*, calls for a ‘gender-sensitive engagement’, and states that it should ‘strategically target women and ... ensure that women’s views are meaningfully included in parliamentary processes’.

Responding to the need for gender-sensitive engagement, several of the INTER PARES survey questions asked parliaments whether they regularly consult with CSOs and whether they had organized engagement activities aimed specifically at promoting women's and gender issues through participation, education, information and communication.

6.2. CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION

Consultation and participation initiatives allow citizens and CSOs to actively engage in parliamentary decision making. Parliaments can consult with CSOs and women's movements in the legislative process. In addition, parliaments sometimes engage citizens or other stakeholders on a more individual basis.

Consultation and participation of CSOs and women's movements

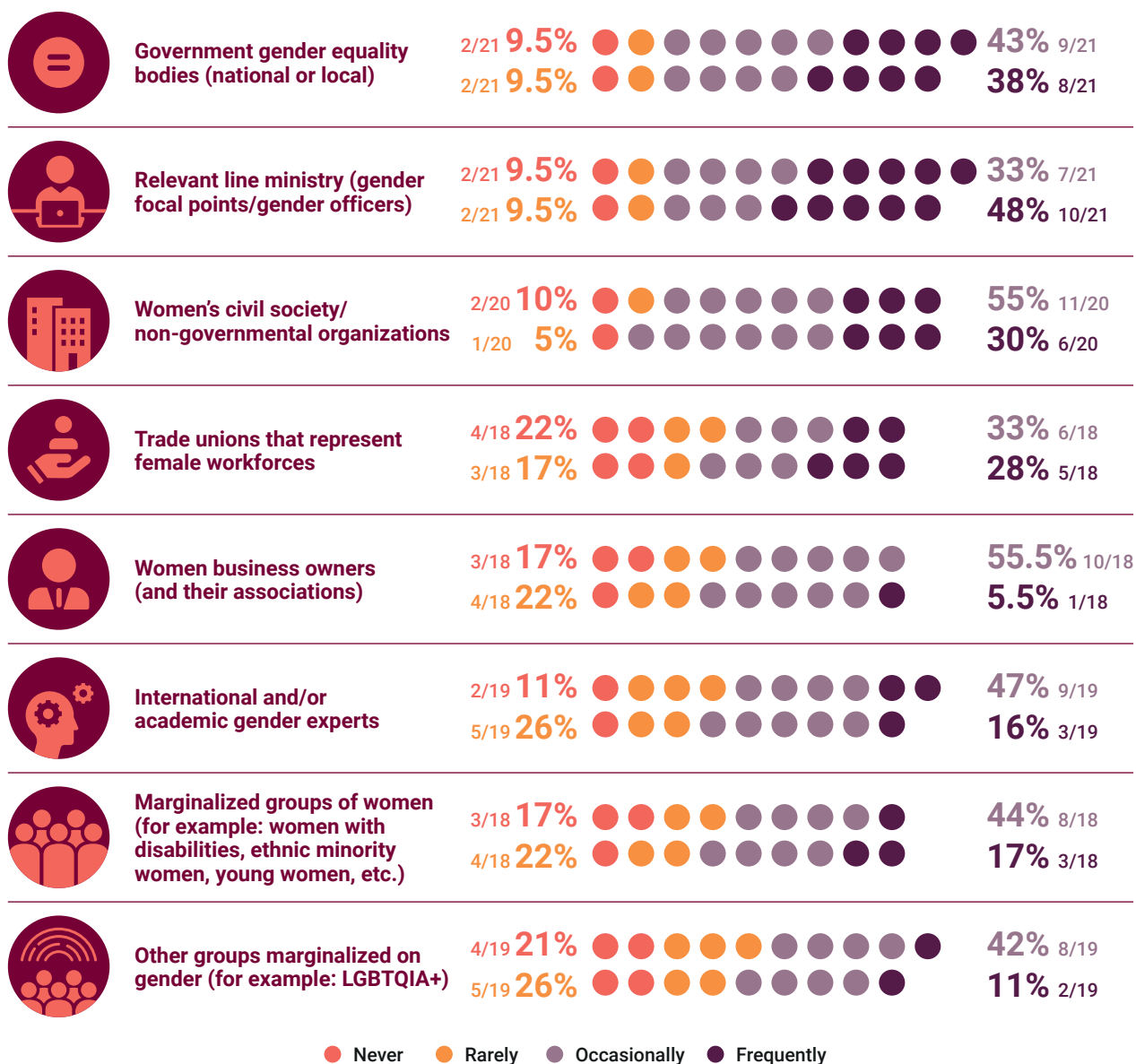
Parliaments are logical targets for mobilization around women's rights and gender equality, and they should respond to this through formal and informal processes.

Formally, CSOs can be invited to committee hearings—for instance, by gender-focused parliamentary bodies (see Chapter 4), or can be consulted in legislative processes (see Chapter 5) or participate through other forms of public engagement (see below in this chapter). Informally, CSOs often have dialogue with core parliamentary actors, such as women's caucuses, parties or individual Members of Parliament (MPs).

The INTER PARES survey asked how often the views of different individuals and groups were consulted in the legislative processes. As well as governmental actors (e.g. gender equality bodies, relevant line ministries), the survey asked about consulting with women's civil society and other stakeholders, as well as specifically about marginalized groups of women and other marginalized groups. The results are summarized in Figure 6.1.

Unsurprisingly, governmental bodies were consulted most frequently, with only two parliaments each stating that they never or rarely consulted them. A total of 17 parliaments (85 per cent) reported that they occasionally or frequently consulted with women's civil society or non-governmental organizations. Apart from trade unions, which five parliaments consulted frequently, most parliaments did not frequently contact any other actors, although (almost) half reported occasional consultation of other actors including women business owners, academic experts, and marginalized groups of women. Consulting international and academic gender experts is meaningful, as it can support parliamentary processes and initiatives regarding gender mainstreaming and gender equality policies, including gender quotas (Childs and Dahlerup 2018).

Figure 6.1. Parliaments' consultation with individuals and groups in the legislative process



While women's voices are often underrepresented in parliamentary processes, this is especially true for women from marginalized groups. The potential of diverse women's organizations to influence political outcomes hinges on the resources at their disposal for engaging with MPs. Unfortunately, these resources tend to favour women who are already relatively privileged, leaving the most marginalized women with limited representation in political and parliamentary discussions (English 2022; Rolandsen Agustín, Meier and Ahrens 2024). Furthermore, CSOs and women's movements encounter challenges when trying to put the concept of intersectionality into practice in an effective way (Evans and Lépinard 2019).

Consulting with women's organizations through hearings and other formal procedures helps elected representatives consider the views and experiences of those who are most affected by laws, policies and public spending (see Box 6.1). Being able to switch between formal and informal consultation may also help secure the participation of equality CSOs in an increasingly difficult context.

In the European Parliament, for instance, all political groups (equivalent to party groups in national parliaments) are formally allowed to invite witnesses to hearings. In light of the growing number of anti-gender Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) in the European Parliament, the other political groups increased their informal consultation with equality CSOs, while reducing the number of formal hearings with them to avoid anti-gender witnesses in committee hearings (Ahrens and Woodward 2021).



Box 6.1: Focus on... Involvement of women's organizations and civil society

- **Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago:** Women-centred CSOs, non-governmental organizations and gender equality activists and experts are invited to public hearings of Joint Select Committees on inquiries related to gender equality issues. (Source: INTER PARES survey)
- **Maldives People's Majlis:** Women's groups and other CSOs were consulted during the drafting of the Amendment Bill to the Sexual Offences Act (29 November 2021), which re-defines rape, sexual injury and sexual assault, including criminalizing marital rape. (Source: INTER PARES survey)

Research suggests that women's movements can have an impact on parliaments, but the mechanisms through which this occurs are complex. Wang (2013) found that relationships with civil society and the aid community were key for the development of effective pro-women policies, alongside increased women's representation in the Ugandan Parliament and the women's caucus. Moreover, a study comparing Uganda and Uruguay showed that cross-party networking and collaboration between legislators and the women's movement improves if it is facilitated by a cross-party women's caucus (Johnson and Josefsson 2016). Likewise, participatory engagement with local women's groups in Kenya and Namibia helped MPs identify key issues and service gaps in women's health, which then informed their policy advocacy and budget oversight (Caffrey et al. 2009). Similarly, the European Parliament's collaboration and networking with CSOs has been a fundamental tool to improve supranational policies and politics on gender and sexuality rights (Ahrens, Meier and Rolandsen Agustín 2023).

CSOs often mobilize around specific issues, targeting different stakeholders beyond the parliament. Yet building alliances to hold parliament accountable on gender equality and support women MPs benefits both women parliamentarians

and women's CSOs (see Story of Change from Malaysia below). CSOs can thus directly contribute to gender-sensitive parliaments through flexible support (providing legislative expertise, training on policymaking, awareness-raising and monitoring) tailored to the national context.



Story of Change: Strengthening each other—women parliamentarians and women's CSOs in Malaysia

Women's rights groups in Malaysia have long been a strong force in the promotion and advocacy of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The women's CSOs have also been a nurturing ground for several women MPs, including the first woman minister in Malaysia.

Recognizing the important role of legislators in their law-making and oversight mandate, women's groups—including two major coalitions—have long engaged parliamentarians in law and policy reform. In recent years these coalitions have joined forces to amplify their efforts, enhance their work, and broaden their outreach in advocacy efforts with MPs. This led to the formation of a joint Parliament Engagement Working Group that coordinated civil society's submission of parliamentary questions on gender issues. By posing written questions through the MPs, the Parliamentary Engagement Group has effectively managed to obtain updated data and insights into pertinent issues. This joint collaborative effort between women's groups allowed for a more systematic engagement and monitoring of parliamentarians in raising gender-related issues; and gauging support for legislation in Parliament and government. The joint coalition, which has since evolved, has successfully advocated for the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act through targeted parliamentary questions and briefings with Parliament Select Committees, while widening the pool of legislator advocates for gender equality. This proactive engagement not only nurtures a network of supportive MPs but also fosters strong relationships with policymakers, some of whom have ascended to ministerial positions.

A CSO within the group, ENGENDER Consultancy, also undertakes legislative reform advocacy. Notably, the organization monitors parliamentary discourse to identify questions raised and ministry responses, including data, which provide valuable insights on the status of gender equality to inform and guide civil society's advocacy work. ENGENDER also conducts capacity-building sessions on gender oversight and scrutiny for MPs and Parliament Select Committees. As the Co-Founder and Co-Lead of the Gender Budget Group, Malaysia, ENGENDER also conducts gender scrutiny budget briefings for parliamentarians. It supports legislators in putting a gender lens in their constituency work through its programme, Localising Gender Responsive Budgeting in Parliamentary Constituencies, which sees legislators conducting gender analysis and adopting gender mainstreaming in their areas. ENGENDER is also the founding member and Resource Person (Gender) of the All Party Parliamentary Group—SDGs, Malaysia, which conducts localization of SDGs in parliamentary constituencies.

This wide array of activities contributes to enhancing the gender sensitivity of the Parliament of Malaysia and advancing gender equality within the country. The alliance formed by different women's rights groups in Malaysia has bolstered activists' effectiveness, and in turn, is helping women in Malaysia in their efforts to advance gender equality. Civil society's capacity continues to strengthen to advocate for gender-responsive legislation and policies within the Parliament and the government, shape public discourse on gender, and monitor parliamentary proceedings. These developments underscore the pivotal role of a strong, dedicated and united civil society in helping parliaments develop gender sensitivity through strategic collective efforts.

Omna Sreeni-Ong, ENGENDER Consultancy
www.engenderconsultancy.org

Consultation and participation of citizens and other stakeholders

Parliaments not only consult with organized interests; they also sometimes engage citizens and other stakeholders on a more individual basis. The INTER PARES survey asked parliaments about their initiatives that targeted women as individuals (see Figure 6.2).

Half of the participating parliaments report having committee meetings, hearings and round tables for which they invite women citizens. Committee hearings, during which MPs hear from experts and witnesses, are among the most established forms of consultation organized by parliaments (IPU and UNDP 2022).

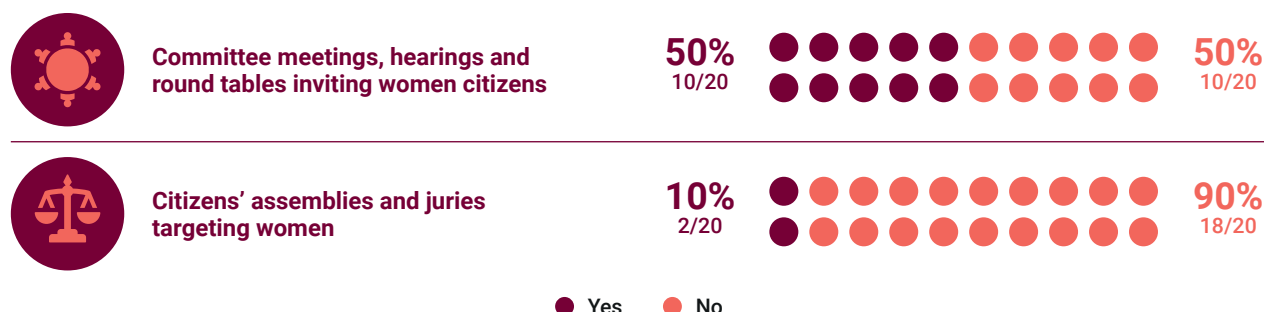
Women's voices are often underrepresented in committee meetings and hearings (Geddes 2020; Smith 2022). Data from the Welsh Parliament (Senedd Cymru) show the gendered participation of women in committee work: while 74 per cent of evidence to the Health and Social Care Committee was from women, this compares to only 27 per cent of evidence to the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee (Johnson, Thomas and Wilkes 2023).

Similarly, in the United Kingdom House of Commons women comprised around 40 per cent of all witnesses during the 2021–2022 parliamentary session, although variations were noted among different committees (see Johnson 2023). Committees focusing on finance, home affairs, and international development exhibited a higher representation of women, whereas committees dedicated to defence and privileges had a comparatively lower representation of women.

Reasons for women's low participation vary. A recent UK study, in which academics were surveyed regarding their interest in contributing as experts to parliamentary committees, revealed gender-based differences in the factors hindering and motivating their participation in committee activities. A higher proportion of women than men described encountering notable obstacles to their involvement from resource constraints, such as time limitations or a lack of familiarity with committee procedures. Additionally, they emphasized that access to training programmes and the option to participate remotely would enhance their willingness to engage in the process (UPEN 2021).

Whereas committee meetings and hearings usually take place in the parliamentary building, some parliaments have also used field hearings which move committees 'into the field' and closer to local communities (IPU and UNDP 2022: 28). Although the parliaments in the INTER PARES survey did not report on such activities being organized to engage women specifically, they are good practices to enable consultation with those individuals and groups for whom parliament is a distant place. On a symbolic level, such initiatives bring parliament to the citizens and may lower the threshold for participation for groups who are more difficult to reach.

Figure 6.2. Parliaments' consultation and participation initiatives targeted at women



Participatory initiatives have mostly developed outside of formal politics. Even today, many parliaments offer limited participation opportunities to individual citizens, as documented by the *Global Parliamentary Report*, on public engagement (IPU and UNDP 2022; Leston-Bandeira and Siefken 2023). Yet some parliaments are exceptions to the rule. Among the parliaments that participated in the survey, two parliaments—the Irish Parliament and the German Federal Parliament—have established citizens' assemblies and juries targeting women. Box 6.2 sheds light on the Irish example, where there is a long tradition of organizing citizens' assemblies on gender-related issues.

The Irish examples are based on strong links between parliament, government and the citizens' assemblies, helping to ensure a commitment from all stakeholders involved (Suiter et al. 2021). Each citizens' assembly was established on the basis of a parliamentary resolution. The reports produced by the assemblies are referred to a relevant parliamentary committee, which brings its conclusions to the parliament for debate. The resolutions also include a commitment for the government to respond to each recommendation in the Houses of Oireachtas (Suiter et al. 2021).

Constitutional amendments based on the recommendations of citizens' assemblies are drafted by the government, voted by the parliament, and put to a national referendum. In the case of constitutional amendments proposed by the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, the proposed amendments were defeated by a wide margin in the national referendum held on 8 March 2024. While detailed analysis of the results has yet to be carried out, many commentators noted that citizens found the wording and implications unclear, with some arguing that the Citizens' Assembly's recommendations had been 'watered down' to the point of meaninglessness (Webber 2024). The Irish citizens' assemblies have undoubtedly enabled potentially divisive issues, such as divorce, abortion and same-sex marriage, to be addressed constructively and much more effectively than had the parliament itself handled the issue. However, the defeat of the 2024 proposals on definition of the family and care responsibilities underlines the need for both very clear wording of amendment proposals and a more direct relationship between the citizens' assembly recommendations and the government's legislative proposals.



Box 6.2: Focus on... Citizens' assemblies in Ireland

- The Convention on the Constitution (2013–2014):** In July 2012, Ireland's parliament, the Houses of the Oireachtas, approved the establishment of a Convention on the Constitution by resolution. The Convention consisted of 100 members, including 66 randomly selected citizens, 33 parliamentarians and an independent chair. The participants discussed eight specific topics, including reducing the voting age and presidential term, the role of women and women in politics, same-sex marriage, electoral reform, blasphemy, voting rights for non-resident citizens, reforms of the House of Representatives, and economic, social and cultural rights. The Convention produced nine reports with 38 recommendations, to which the government responded in the House. The government accepted six recommendations for constitutional change, including the recommendation on marriage equality, which was submitted to a referendum. The proposal, which asked voters whether the Constitution should be amended so that 'marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex' passed by a majority of 62 per cent and was added to the Constitution of Ireland (article 41.4; Ireland 2020). The Convention also made an effort to ensure that the deliberative process was inclusive by monitoring the gender balance among participants in the round tables. Despite efforts to recruit an equal number of men and women as Convention members, somewhat more men than women participated in the deliberations. The gender gap was larger among politicians than citizens (Suiter, Farrell and Harris 2016). (Source: Citizens' Assembly n.d.)
- The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality (2020–2021):** In July 2019, the Houses of Oireachtas approved a resolution to establish a Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality to 'consider gender equality and make recommendations to the Oireachtas to advance gender equality' (Citizens' Assembly 2021: 6). The Citizens' Assembly consisted of 100 people, including 99 randomly selected citizens representative of Irish society, and a Chairperson. The deliberations were scheduled to take place in person, but due to restrictions following the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the assembly meetings took place online. The Citizens' Assembly formulated 45 recommendations related to a variety of issues, including: the Constitution; care; social protection; leadership in politics, public life and the workplace; norms, stereotypes and education; pay and workplace conditions; domestic, sexual and gender-based violence; and gender equality principle in law and policy. (Source: Citizens' Assembly 2021)

With very few formal parliamentary participatory initiatives, many topics must be addressed outside of formal politics. Unquestionably, women's groups and other CSOs are core actors in this regard (see above). Yet MPs can also use the parliamentary space to give gender equality issues enhanced attention through informal channels. This particularly applies to topics where it is rare for CSOs or other traditional stakeholders to participate through formal channels. Such informal but direct exchange with those affected but without an organized voice in politics can help in putting new topics on the agenda, as two German MPs testify in their description of one of their own events (see the Story of Change from Germany below).



Story of Change: Engaging with citizens on women's health issues in the German Bundestag

The German Bundestag, like other legislative bodies, commonly uses parliamentary hearings and a broad range of events to engage with experts, citizens and activists. This is a valuable avenue to put new topics and initiatives on the political agenda in a more accessible way through engagement with civil society and organizations working on often marginalized issues.

Certain women's health concerns such as menopause are still topics which rarely receive the attention they deserve. In Germany, a country of 83.5 million, an estimated 9 million women between the ages of 45 and 55 are affected to varying degrees by (pre/post-) menopause. Despite this, menopause is a topic seldom discussed publicly, largely due to feelings of shame surrounding bodily changes and ageing. This is further fuelled by a general lack of knowledge on a subject that has long been considered a niche issue affecting only a small number of women. Yet, the hormonal changes during menopause may cause severe health problems like increased risk of cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, diabetes and dementia. Menopause can also impact women's incomes and retirement savings as well as the economy as a whole seeing that many women reduce their working hours in this stage of life. Even though menopause affects women regardless of class or geographic location, its negative impacts are exacerbated by poverty due to additional medical costs and the possible lack of accessible adequate medical care in rural areas.

Inspired by interactions with citizens and activists, we, Dorothee Bär and Julia Klöckner, two members of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union parliamentary group, decided to organize an event in the German Bundestag to highlight the medical, personal, economic and societal challenges caused by menopause. We invited gynaecologists specializing in menopause, as well as two women authors who had published bestsellers on the topic in addition to professional menopause societies, several activists and community groups. The event was also open to interested citizens, who had been invited through an extensive social media campaign. Originally expecting 20 participants, we were pleased to welcome about 150 participants to a discussion on menopause's multitude of impacts. The event included an informative presentation by experts on the scope of menopause as a public health issue while also giving participants the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

This event had both direct and indirect effects on the public debate surrounding menopause in Germany. Several participants informed us afterwards that hosting the event within a building of the Bundestag complex was of great importance to them as a symbol of political interest. Additionally, the voices of those affected were emphasized at the event over those of typical stakeholders like the German Medical Association. Consequently, participants felt validated now that their long-standing concerns had finally taken centre-stage in national German politics.

The large number of participants was also beneficial for generating networking opportunities among attendees, leading to an ongoing discourse between members of civil society and political actors. Moreover, the meeting raised awareness and attention among fellow MPs across genders and party lines, and underlined that menopause is a challenge impacting the whole of society not only women. The chosen location for the event within the Bundestag complex also secured significant media attention for the event, especially on social media, and was widely regarded as a crucial marker of political significance by participants and observers alike.

Besides these direct outcomes, the event sparked a concerted joint effort across various parliamentary committees—the Committee on Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, the Committee on Health, and the Committee on Economic Affairs and Energy. The resulting final joint declaration could in the long term result in changes to medical fees and university curricula as well as to the establishment of funding opportunities for research on menopause. Such steps would help to abolish the taboo surrounding menopause and consequently improve women's medical care. Furthermore, in the face of growing labour shortages, it may also help to raise awareness of the changes to working conditions necessary to keep women in the workforce despite their menopause-related medical complaints.

There were several critical aspects that helped to effectively put menopause as a complex topic on the political and parliamentary agenda: (1) menopause is a topic of broad societal relevance that nevertheless lacked attention due to existing taboos; (2) medical and scientific experts in the field were willing to participate and share their detailed insights; (3) we as organizers had the political standing to garner interest in our event and secure the participation of key players; (4) we were able to win male allies to support the endeavour and show that this is not 'just' a women's issue; and (5) the location of the event within the Bundestag underlined the significance of the event and the importance of menopause as a topic, thus securing media attention.

Menopause and its impact on women's health generate challenges around the world. Parliaments or—as this Story of Change illustrates—individual MPs who want to engage with the topic should just get started, regardless of whether their party is currently in power or whether their colleagues recognize the importance of the issue. They should not be shy about using the tools at their disposal, such as locations of significant symbolism. Engaging with a broad range of voices—medical experts, activists, directly affected persons, interested citizens—will help to put the issue on the political agenda and, ultimately, disrupt societal taboos for the benefit of gender equality.

Dorothee Bär and Julia Klöckner, Members of the German Bundestag, Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union Parliamentary Group

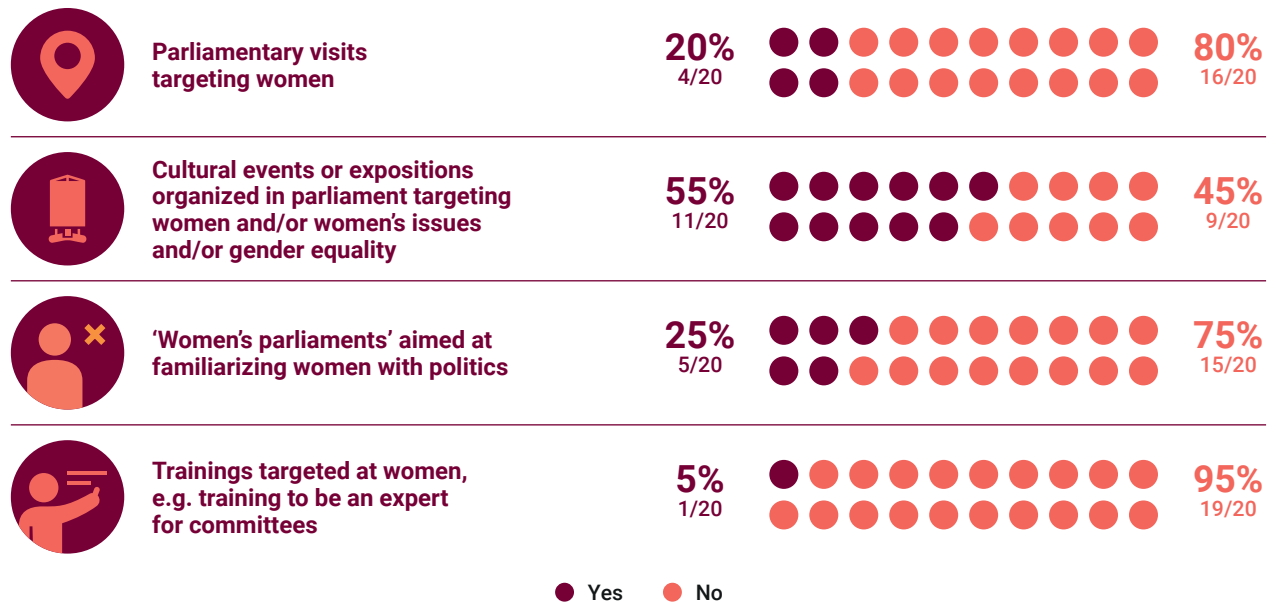
6.3. EDUCATION, INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Education

Initiatives with an educational focus are commonly reported by parliaments in the INTER PARES survey (see Figure 6.3). Most parliaments offer a range of tours, which allow visitors to see the inside of parliamentary buildings, visit plenary and committee rooms, and find out about the parliament's work. Four parliaments (20 per cent) report organizing such visits specifically for women visitors. Customizing tours for different audiences can be a way to enhance visitors' experiences and connect with their specific life situations. In some cases, tours are organized in collaboration with women's caucuses or joined by women MPs.

Cultural initiatives are well developed by parliaments. Eleven parliaments (55 per cent) report organizing cultural events and expositions targeting women, women's issues and/or gender equality. Such events can focus on the workings of parliament itself (e.g. on women's historical roles in parliament) or on issues of broader societal concern (e.g. exhibitions on the history of women's suffrage, events on gender-based violence or displays of the work of women artists; see Chapter 7).

Figure 6.3. Parliaments' education initiatives targeted at women



Another strategy used by parliaments to engage women is to organize 'women's parliaments' aimed at familiarizing women with politics. Five parliaments in the survey (25 per cent) report having established such a women's parliament. Similar to youth parliaments (which are more common), women's parliaments can help narrow the gap between women and formal politics. First, they offer direct access to parliamentary buildings and 'open up' the parliamentary arena. Second, some women's parliaments provide opportunities for women (either as individuals or collectively) to express their views, articulate their interests and give policy input. Third, women's parliaments may support women by offering opportunities for networking, mentoring and skills development.

To illustrate this further, Box 6.3 offers some specific examples of women's parliaments organized in various countries. While their formats and ambitions may vary, they all emphasize the importance of creating accessible and safe spaces for participants to advance gender equality. The example of South Africa shows that initiatives to improve gender equality need not target women only. Through the organization of a 'men's parliament', men were invited to join the conversation as critical actors and allies in the process towards gender equality.



Box 6.3: Focus on... Women's parliaments and men's parliaments

- Parliament of the Republic of South Africa:** The South African Parliament regularly holds women's and men's parliaments. Central themes revolve around the fight against gender-based violence and femicide. The 2020 National Women's Parliament was a one-day hybrid event, with a theme focused on 'Generation Equality: Advancing our collective efforts to end gender-based violence and femicide' (South African Parliament n.d.). In November 2020, the South African Parliament hosted a two-day National Men's Parliament in the National Assembly Chamber and on virtual platforms, in partnership with the South African National Aids Council and the Department of Social Development. The goal was to bring men and boys together to 'engage them to become agents of change and integral partners in the prevention and response in tackling the spread of HIV, gender-based violence and femicide, and other social ills' (South African Parliament 2020). The 2022 National Men's Parliament was organized by the South African Parliament's upper house, the National Council of Provinces. The central theme was 'Takuwani Riime! Institutionalizing a Responsive Men's Movement' and focused on measures that men can take to tackle gender-based violence and femicide, and to support men's mental health in relation to the practice of circumcision (South African Parliament 2022).
- The Parliament of Montenegro:** A Women's Parliament is organized once a year on 8 March, International Women's Day, by the Gender Equality Committee of the parliament. Participants include representatives of women's groups of political parties and civil society actors. Participants have the opportunity to raise questions to members of the government. The overall purpose is to improve women's human rights in Montenegro. (Source: Parliament of Montenegro n.d.)
- Parliament of Catalonia:** The Parliament of Catalonia organized a Women's Parliament in May to July 2019. Women MPs and women activists convened to discuss a feminist policy agenda. The Women's Parliament sought: '(1) to strengthen the Parliament's commitment to women's empowerment, (2) to heighten the linkage between women MPs and women's associations, and (3) to facilitate the participation of women's organizations in the agenda-setting process (Parlament de Catalunya 2019)' (Verge 2022b: 105). According to Tania Verge (2022b), the Women's Parliament offered a way for the Catalan Parliament to show their commitment to gender equality. The Women's Parliament symbolically challenged 'the parliament's skewed composition, their masculinized inner workings, and their gendered outcomes' (Verge 2022b: 121).
- Northern Ireland Assembly:** A Women's Parliament was organized in the Northern Ireland Assembly by the Speaker of the Assembly on 4 March 2022. The goal of the Women's Parliament was to address the economic and social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on women. Topics discussed included healthcare, employment, caring responsibilities, childcare, poverty, and violence against women and girls. (Source: Northern Ireland Assembly n.d.)

Drawing parallels with the discussion in Chapter 7 concerning women's rooms, establishing women's parliaments should not lead to the creation of segregated spaces for women and men in parliaments. Women's parliaments frequently lack substantive legislative or oversight capacities, thus they cannot replace women's presence in committees and plenary sessions. When women's parliaments function solely as symbolic gestures, without being matched with genuine efforts to include women and address their concerns in the legislative process, they risk diminishing the legitimacy of the initiative.

Training and mentoring schemes

Organizing training sessions can provide another way for parliaments to involve women in the workings of parliament, although the survey results indicate that they are rarely organized by the participating parliaments. Training for women can target different groups of women and serve various purposes. Some may focus on offering training and guidance to women acting as experts or witnesses for parliamentary committees—for instance, by counselling first-time participants (Bochel and Berthier 2018; Johnson 2023). Others may focus on strengthening the capacities of women aspiring to a career in politics by addressing topics such as digital and other types of campaigning, public speaking, fundraising, networking and media training.

Although training activities are sometimes taken up by political parties, parliaments can also play a role by organizing cross-party or non-partisan activities fostering formal and informal exchanges of knowledge and peer-learning among women from different parties, as well as non-affiliated women.

Training and mentoring activities can also be designed to educate and inspire new generations of young women. The Scottish Parliament, in collaboration with the Young Women's Movement, allowed young women to run their own committee inquiry in 2018 and 2019 with the goal of increasing their political participation (Scottish Parliament and Young Women's Movement n.d.). Another noticeable example exists in Cyprus, where the Speaker of the House of Representatives introduced a shadowing programme that gave adolescent girls the opportunity to follow and closely observe the work of women MPs and the President of the House (see the Story of Change from Cyprus below).



Story of Change: The shadowing programme for female students in Cyprus

In 2022, the Cyprus House of Representatives introduced a new shadowing programme at the initiative of the Speaker of the House, Annita Demetriou. Twelve students, all girls aged 17 or 18, had the opportunity to shadow the President of the Parliament and other women MPs that participated in the programme. The students were able to follow their work, by attending their meetings, and other daily tasks and responsibilities of parliamentarians. The students were also given a tour of the Parliament, attended a plenary session and learned how a bill passes through the legislative process. The programme was repeated in 2023, with more students from across the whole country. This time, the students were able to exchange with the President and the MPs on women in leadership and the activities of women MPs within the Parliament. The programme also included a training on women's empowerment conducted by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, where both students and parliamentary staff participated.

The shadowing programme strengthens the outreach activities and citizen engagement of the Parliament of Cyprus. The students were welcomed by the President of the House of Representatives, discussing with them the importance of women's participation in politics. Politics in Cyprus is still male-dominated with the first woman MP elected to parliament in 1981 and the numbers remaining at a low level since. Teaching young students, particularly girls, about how the parliament works and its history, and showcasing the presence of women within the institution, is crucial to make the Parliament more equal and gender-sensitive.

The programme had a positive impact on the participating girls, since the training and the exchanges took place in a safe space, allowing them to share their thoughts and experiences on gender issues with the President of the House and other participants. It teaches students how the Parliament works and serves to showcase the work and presence of women MPs. Experiencing the parliamentary work in such a targeted way creates confidence in young women that any woman can become an MP or engage with the Parliament in future. The Parliament plans to progressively extend its commitment to become more gender-sensitive by integrating gender issues into its trainings. Starting in 2023, everyone doing an internship in the Parliament will attend a gender equality seminar. Overall, the programme is seen as an important tool for the Parliament in its civic education efforts and to advance gender equality.

Sophie Tsouris, Hara Parla and Maria Sotiriou Georgiou, House of Representatives, Republic of Cyprus

The example from Cyprus shows how one engagement initiative may have multiple effects. Not only did the shadowing programme foster young women's understanding of politics, it offered them 'on-the-job training' and educated them in the workings of parliament. Crucial to the success of the programme was the strong involvement of the President of the House, MPs—and women MPs specifically—and CSOs, which contributed to the creation of a safe space and encouraged young women to express their ideas.

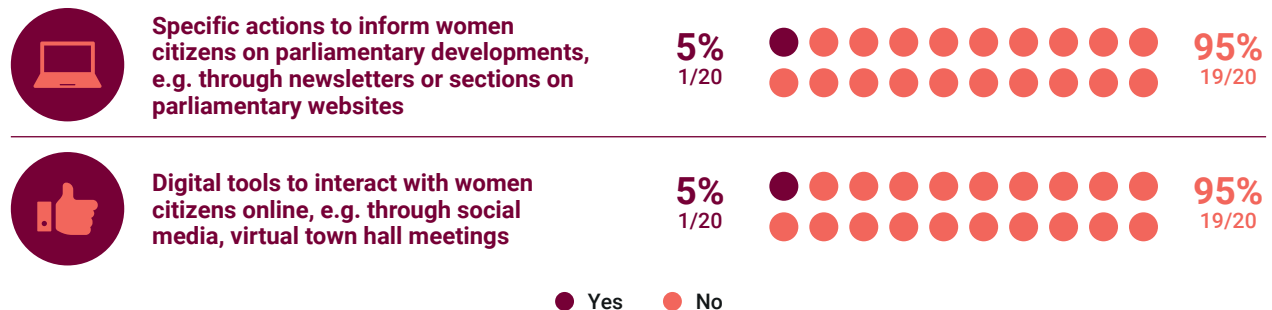
In the development of the shadowing programme, the decision was made to showcase the work of women MPs. This is vital in making women's political roles and contributions more visible. Studies of political science textbooks have pointed to the scarcity of women's voices in educational material, and the lack of examples that show women as political actors (Atchison 2021). Such misrepresentations not only reproduce gender stereotypes about women's roles in the political sphere, they also negatively affect how young people—and young women in particular—engage with the material and see themselves as (future) political actors.

Information and communication

Few parliaments in the survey have developed initiatives that would allow them to target women through their information and communication channels (see Figure 6.4). Most parliaments do not take action to inform women specifically on parliamentary developments through newsletters or the parliamentary websites, nor do they offer digital tools to interact with women citizens online.

While gender-specific targeting of public communication may be difficult to achieve (e.g. due to time and resource constraints), other initiatives remain relevant and worthwhile. Previous studies have repeatedly emphasized the importance of examining the gender sensitivity of language policies in parliament's official (written, oral and audio-visual) communication (EIGE 2018; Verge 2022a).

Figure 6.4. Parliaments' information and communication initiatives



Other initiatives focus on highlighting gender issues in parliaments' official communications, or systematically disseminating parliaments' achievements related to gender equality (Verge 2022a). Doing so not only brings gender equality concerns to the attention of the public but also signals parliaments' commitment to the issue (Verge 2022a).

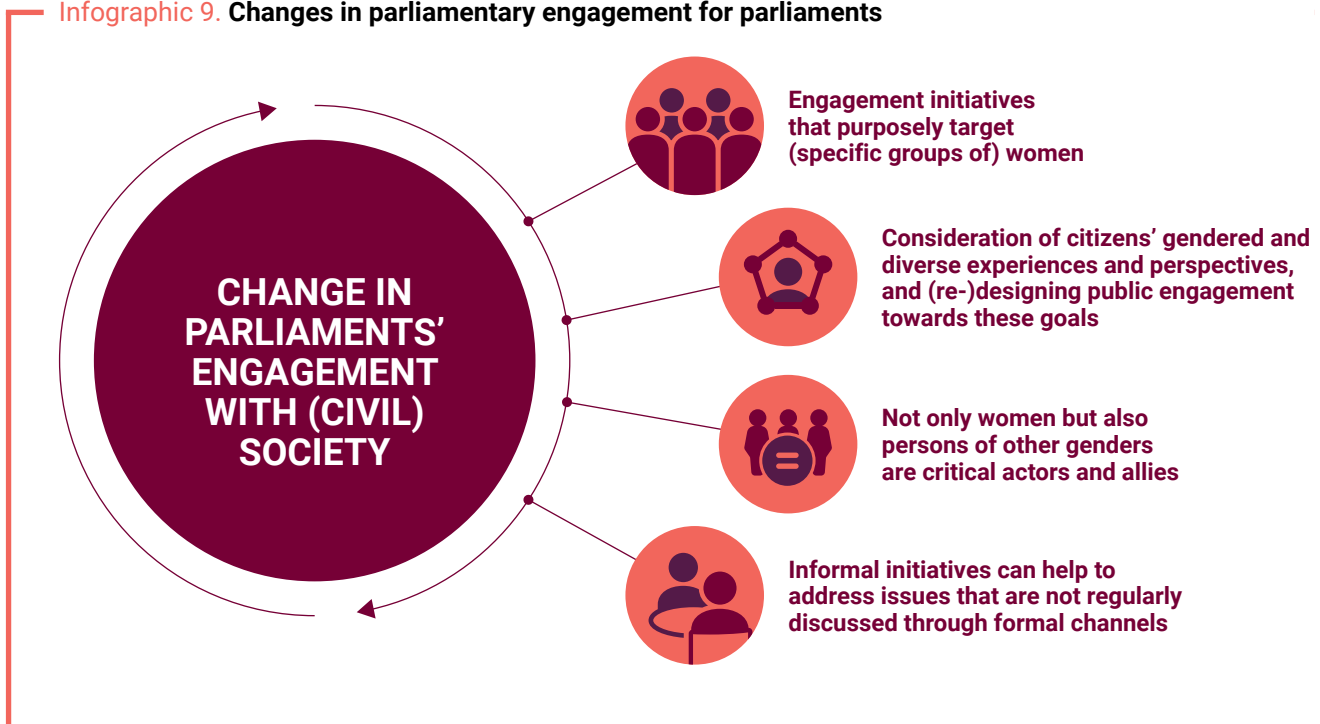
The Scottish Parliament, for instance, produced a video emphasizing the diversity of politicians and explaining practices and procedures, with the aim of incentivizing people from a variety of backgrounds to consider becoming a parliamentary candidate in the future (Scottish Parliament 2023). The recent gender-sensitive audit recommended that this video should be updated and extended in consultation with CSOs to reach underrepresented groups (Scottish Parliament 2023).

6.4. CONCLUSION

Public engagement initiatives, when developed properly and implemented successfully, can have a real impact on the lives of participants, on policies and political outcomes, and on the functioning of democracy.

Consultation with citizens, experts and CSOs can enhance parliaments' capacity to recognize and address key gender equality concerns, and develop mechanisms to hold MPs accountable and make them responsive to women's diverse needs. Activities focusing on information and education support a more informed citizenry in relation to gender issues. Feeling listened to, and being able to speak up, may also boost participants' attachment to parliament and foster a closer connection with the democratic system (Leston-Bandeira 2013). On a more general level, opening up parliamentary buildings, proceedings and outputs to CSOs and the general public supports the democratic principles of accessibility, transparency and accountability (Leston-Bandeira 2013).

Infographic 9. Changes in parliamentary engagement for parliaments



Still, gender-sensitive engagement initiatives targeting women's interests and gender issues are not yet widespread. This may be the result of the fact that parliaments 'are still trying to figure out how to incorporate public engagement practices with the traditional representative democracy' (Leston-Bandeira 2022: 11), as well as how to engage more diverse publics. More initiatives may develop in the future, while the subnational level might be useful for inspiration and could function as blueprint for the national level.

Several challenges and opportunities for **change in parliaments' engagement with (civil) society** can be distinguished:

- Gender-sensitive engagement encourages groups that have traditionally experienced underrepresentation in parliamentary politics. It is not surprising that parliaments have developed **engagement initiatives that purposely target (specific groups of) women**. For instance, initiatives focusing on young women, like the examples in Cyprus and Scotland (see section 6.3), offer opportunities for leadership development among groups less likely to be involved through other channels. Women-targeted initiatives, like women's parliaments (see section 6.2), may also create an environment where women feel secure, encouraged and empowered to express their views.
- However, gender-sensitive engagement does not mean gender-segregated engagement. Rather, it is about the consideration of citizens' gendered and diverse experiences and perspectives, and (re)designing public engagement towards these goals. One important action which parliaments can undertake is monitoring who engages and who does not (see sections 6.2 and 6.3; or Johnson 2023 on the Welsh Parliament), and why. Reasons

for (dis)engagement may be linked to a lack of resources (time, knowledge about the parliamentary processes, financial means), as examples above have shown. They may also depend on the set-up of the initiatives and the context for participation. Studies of deliberative democracy, for instance, show that women who participate in deliberative events, especially those from marginalized groups, are more often silenced, interrupted or disrespected (Siu 2017). Inclusive rules and practices are therefore important, including inclusive rules for engagement and discussion (e.g. linked to speaking time and equality of participation, rules for respectful listening, etc.), inclusive information (e.g. attention paid to gender in information sheets, the inclusion of a diversity of experts and witnesses), or, if resources permit, wider organizational changes (e.g. training of supporting staff, the use of recruitment and selection methods that ensure representativeness) (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2023; Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2014; OSCE/ODIHR 2021).

- Gender-sensitive engagement **involves not only women but also persons of other genders as critical actors and allies** in the process towards gender equality. In the example of the South African Parliament, men's parliaments were organized to discuss measures that men can take in tackling gender-based inequalities. The Citizens' Assemblies in Ireland brought together randomly selected citizens to discuss gender-related topics.
- While formal initiatives are important, they are sometimes not available. In those cases, **informal initiatives can help to address issues that are not regularly discussed through formal channels** or do not feature prominently on the political agenda. Women's groups and other CSOs, as well as individual MPs, women's caucuses and other stakeholders, can each play a role in this. Such initiatives also increase the visibility of gender equality issues.

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CHAPTER 7
**GENDER-SENSITIVE
PARLIAMENTARY
INFRASTRUCTURE AND
THE ORGANIZATION OF
PARLIAMENTARY WORK**

Women (and non-binary and gender-diverse people) are relatively recent arrivals into parliaments in significant numbers. This means that parliamentary buildings, services, facilities, procedures and rules have been designed without consideration for their diverse needs and experiences.

In gender-sensitive parliaments, the parliamentary infrastructure and organization of work reflect the needs and experiences of all genders, and supports their presence in parliament. This is important for many reasons: it ensures that the parliament is a place that is welcoming and inclusive for people of all genders, as elected representatives and staff (see Chapter 2); it requires reliable commitment (see Chapter 3); supports gender-sensitive law-making and oversight (see Chapter 5); and makes parliaments more accessible for citizens and civil society actors (see Chapter 6).

Gender-sensitive parliamentary infrastructures and the organization of parliamentary work thus hold significant implications for political equality, women's empowerment and democratic legitimacy. They shape the experiences and opportunities of all genders in political institutions, and potentially influence the political ambitions of (young) people (see Chapter 6). They also challenge persistent masculine cultures and the informal rules for 'acceptable' behaviour, language or dress codes, which often particularly negatively affect young women parliamentarians (Palmieri 2011).

This chapter reports the INTER PARES survey results, summarizes the core aspects of gender-sensitive parliamentary infrastructure and organization of work, and provides inspiring Stories of Change and additional examples from surveys.

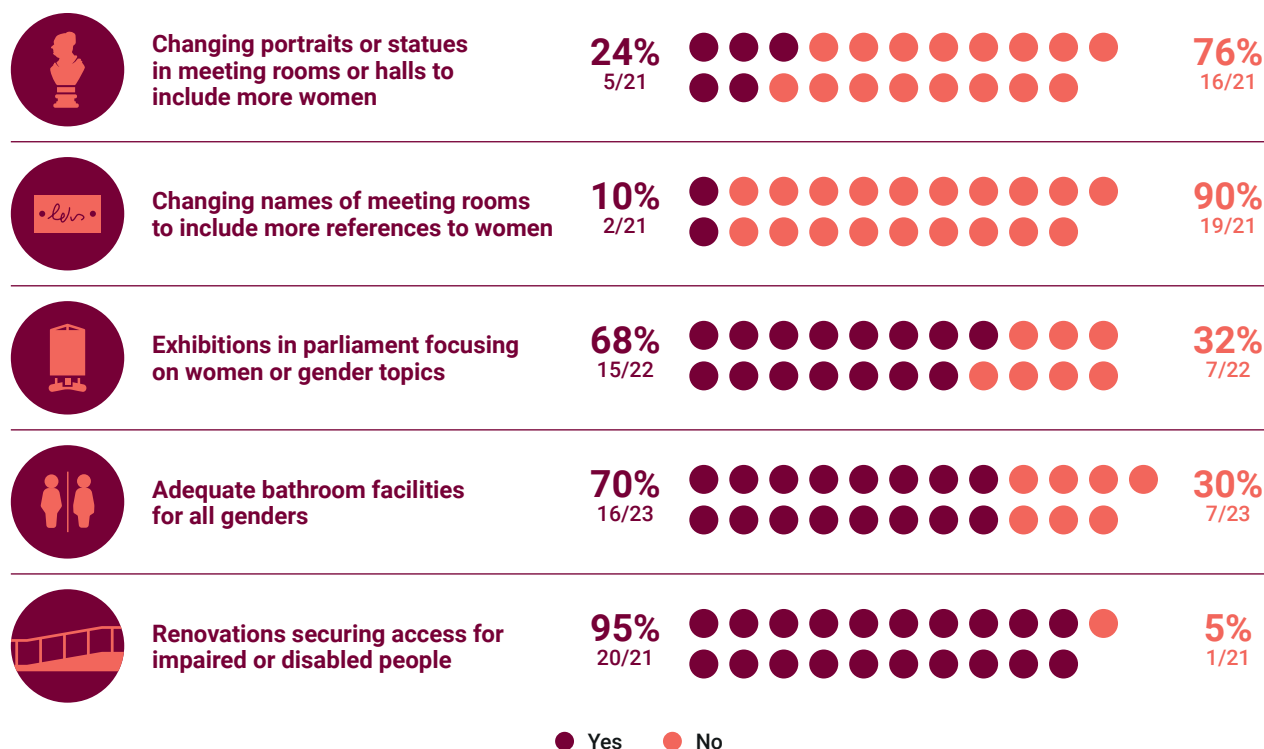
Gender-sensitive parliamentary infrastructures and the organization of parliamentary work thus hold significant implications for political equality, women's empowerment and democratic legitimacy.

7.1. GENDER-SENSITIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Parliamentary infrastructure can be transformed so that buildings, facilities and services accommodate the needs of all genders. This can include changes to parliaments' physical spaces, like renovations to improve accessibility, the provision of facilities that support Members of Parliament (MPs) and staff with caring responsibilities, and changes to visual elements and outreach activities, such as public events or exhibitions. While measures like these may seem superficial, it is critically important that everyone working in parliaments—or considering whether to do so—has access to the basic facilities they need, and sees themselves represented in the symbolic aspects of the parliament.

The INTER PARES survey asked whether parliaments had made any changes to their infrastructures to be more inclusive to the needs of different social groups. The survey items focused on changes in bathroom facilities, art displayed, room names and exhibition content, as well as renovations to improve accessibility for impaired or disabled people. The results are summarized in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1. Changes to parliamentary infrastructure



Several parliaments indicated that they have made changes to their infrastructure. The most common was renovations of parliamentary buildings to ensure access for impaired or disabled people, with 95 per cent of parliaments reporting such actions. The majority of parliaments have ensured that adequate bathroom facilities exist for all genders. The results for changing art-related elements and room naming are slightly more mixed. While exhibitions in parliament that focus on women or gender topics are quite widespread, with almost 70 per cent of parliaments reporting them, changing the traditional display of portraits or statues and the naming of rooms has occurred less often.

Parliamentary buildings and physical spaces

The physical construction of parliaments reflects the views from the time when they were built, and therefore also for whom they were built and for what style of democratic exchange (Mulder n.d.).

Political style is often characterized as either a 'debating' style parliament (like the United Kingdom House of Commons) or a 'working' parliament (such as the European Parliament). In the former, the plenary chamber is the focal point with confrontation between government and opposition; in the latter, exchange is more consensual and debates are mainly carried out in committees (Miller 2023). The physical space often corresponds with political style and different atmospheres, depending on whether seating space tends to be overcrowded as, for instance, in the UK House of Commons or offers

comfortable seating and space as in the Dutch Chamber of Representatives (Mulder n.d.). Each physical setting and style of decision making involves gendered effects (Miller 2023).

Many parliamentary buildings were built before women gained suffrage in the respective country and well before they reached a 'critical mass'. This means that parliamentary buildings often implicitly (sometimes explicitly) reflect men's needs and their overrepresentation in parliamentary spaces, be it as MPs or employees. Additionally, parliamentary buildings are not always easily accessible for people with disabilities using a wheelchair or parents with prams or buggies.

Changing such infrastructure may not be easy. Most parliaments are located in historic buildings, which may mean large infrastructural changes require extensive planning and renovation. Such improvements also need to be accessible for disabled and impaired persons, and for those accompanied by children. Likewise, other social-physical spaces, such as saunas, locker and sports rooms, or prayer rooms (while respecting religious diversity), should ensure equality in space, as they often disregarded women's interests and those of other marginalized groups, including those related to race and ethnicity, religion and belief or gender identities. Parliaments that prioritize and value gender sensitivity, and make it a crucial requirement in the challenging context of infrastructural change, demonstrate their understanding of gendered and intersectional inequalities and how to redress them.

The Good Parliament report, produced by Sarah Childs, contains recommendations such as making social spaces more welcoming (including less formal dining areas) and providing sufficient bathroom capacity (Childs 2016). It also suggests that it is essential to secure proper seating for every MP—not least to help prevent sexual harassment, by minimizing tight seating or MPs standing up in crowds together.

Meanwhile, seemingly small steps—for instance, (re)naming rooms or creating space for breastfeeding—are less costly and less lengthy adjustments. Yet they are important symbolic gestures and can make physical parliamentary infrastructures more welcoming.

Bathroom facilities

Access to sufficient bathroom facilities is one of the most basic aspects of gender-sensitive infrastructure, but also still notoriously under-addressed. To even out bathroom waiting times, women require about two or three times the provision of men, because of biological functions (e.g. menstruation, pregnancy) or because they are still primary caregivers and enter bathrooms with children (Lowe 2019; Verge 2022a). Yet most parliaments provide, at best, an equal number of toilets for women and men. Some exceptions include the Swedish Parliament with gender-neutral bathrooms only, the Danish Parliament with almost entirely gender-neutral toilets, or the Australian or Finnish Parliaments that made toilets for disabled people gender-inclusive (Childs 2017: 8–9).

Dividing bathrooms into women's and men's spaces may complicate accessibility for various groups, including parents accompanied by children, disabled relatives of the opposite sex, and transgender, non-binary and intersex people. Disabled bathrooms are often declared unisex or gender-neutral (Childs 2017), yet this does not address the needs of non-disabled persons. Likewise, facilities can reproduce gender stereotypes by only offering diaper/nappy-changing spaces in women's bathrooms, rather than allowing them to be accessible to parents of all genders.

Specific women's rooms in parliaments

Some parliaments have opted for women's rooms, which are specific spaces that either highlight women's importance in politics through art or information, or office or meeting spaces reserved for women.

The New Zealand Parliament was a forerunner by introducing the Women's Suffrage Room in 1996. The room originally displayed portraits of women MPs (dating back to 1933) and artworks commemorating women suffragists. More recently, the room was redecorated with portraits of the three women Prime Ministers (so far), and the first Māori woman MP (Verge 2022a). The redecoration not only emphasized women's leadership but also acknowledged the importance of diversity and inclusion.

Sweden followed a similar route in 2012 by redecorating a parliamentary space and calling it Kvinnorummet (Women's Room); it exhibits pictures of the first women in leadership positions, such as the first woman MP, minister, party leader and speaker (Freidenvall and Erikson 2020). In addition, the room includes a mirror with the caption 'This could be you', aiming to encourage young visitors—and young women in particular—to engage with politics. The Italian Chamber of Deputies redecorated a room in 2016, naming it the Sala delle Donne (Women's Hall), to make the contributions of women politicians visible and to encourage women visitors to consider a political career (see Box 7.1).



Box 7.1: Focus on... Specific women's rooms in parliaments

- **Italian Chamber of Deputies:** The Women's Hall (Sala delle Donne) in the Italian Chamber of Deputies was inaugurated in 2016 to celebrate the first women who entered the political institutions of the Italian Republic. The hall displays the portraits of: the 21 women deputies elected to the Constituent Assembly; the first women mayors elected in 1946; the first woman minister, Tina Anselmi; the first woman President of the Chamber, Nilde Iotti; and the first woman to be elected President of a regional government, Anna Nenna D'Antonio. Mirrors were hung on the walls of the Hall, to remind women visiting that they themselves could hold one of those offices. (Sources: INTER PARES survey; Italian Chamber of Deputies n.d.)

Such rooms increase women's visibility and emphasize their contributions in parliament, which can help to tackle stereotypes of women not belonging in politics and may eventually change public opinion and attitudes towards women MPs (see Chapter 6).

Some parliaments offer protected spaces for women MPs, which can increase women's sense of ownership of the institution (Verge 2022a). For instance, in 1926 the new parliamentary building of the Finnish Parliament included three women's lounges offering women MPs the opportunity to network, to collaborate cross-party, or simply to use the rooms for work as alternative to other MP offices. Finland was the first country to adopt universal suffrage in 1906, and with 19 women MPs elected (out of 200) the construction of a new parliamentary building provided an opportunity to acknowledge their presence in parliament. Nowadays, the women's lounges are, in principle, open to everyone.

Alongside Finland, the UK is one of the few parliaments that has included such women's rooms after universal suffrage in 1918. One office was dedicated as the Lady Members' Room, which existed in parallel to men members' rooms (Childs 2017). Yet the UK example also shows how spatial separation can become a double-edged sword. The furniture in the Lady Members' Room's was poor, and, as more women entered parliament, it quickly became overcrowded, with women MPs sitting on the floor to do paperwork; the situation was so dire that the room was even nicknamed 'The Tomb'.⁶

The benefits of separate women's rooms (and men's rooms) were highlighted in *The Good Parliament* report (Childs 2016). However, providing specific women's rooms should never lead to creating permanently or regularly segregated spaces for women and men. Dedicated spaces should rather offer them a safe space in an institutional environment where they are often a minority. Generally, all parliamentary spaces should be equally accessible for and used by women and men. Offering specific women's rooms is thus a contextual decision and (dis)advantages need a nuanced discussion.

Specific women's rooms can be a good tool in national contexts where it is still necessary to normalize the idea of women in parliaments and to help women get accustomed to spaces where they have been excluded. In such contexts, specific women's rooms can help women feel more comfortable and offer the opportunity to support each other in capacity building. In a similar manner, it might be a good parliamentary measure to offer regular spaces for men to engage with gender issues, for example gender-based violence, care equality or promoting women's leadership.

Physical symbols of diversity and inclusion

The names of rooms serve an important symbolic function, as they put certain figures into the spotlight to bring awareness to their contributions. Ensuring diversity in the individuals whose names are used can challenge gender stereotypes and signal the contribution of all genders. Yet, as the survey showed

⁶ Other UK House of Commons' parliamentary spaces for public visitors also separated women, who were not allowed in public galleries, off into questionable settings: 'The Ventilator', a loft space above the chamber let women watch and listen to parliamentary debates 200 years ago; 'The Cage' continued the practice in the new building after the 1834 fire by including a Ladies' Gallery high up above the Speaker's Chair and closed off by brass grilles, deliberately placed there to stop MPs seeing the women (see UK Parliament n.d.).

(see Figure 7.1), renaming rooms is not a common practice.⁷ Although some parliaments have changed the names of meeting rooms to incorporate more references to women (e.g. Belgian Chamber of Representatives, Croatian Parliament), this practice was not widespread. In several parliaments, names were designated at times when women were still excluded or a minority in politics, and a strong sense of institutionalization makes these harder to change.

However, more recently constructed parliamentary buildings seldom provide parity in names either. For instance, the four main European Parliament buildings in Brussels, which were constructed from 1989 onwards, are all named after men.⁸ Only the main square in front of the main entrance is named after Simone Veil, the first woman President of the European Parliament. Similarly, four of the Strasbourg European Parliament buildings are named after men, and only the plenary building is named after a woman. Out of the several new parliamentary buildings of Germany in Berlin, all finished after 2000, only one out of the five with names carries a woman's name, Marie-Elisabeth Lüders.

Official flags are also an important symbol-maker of parliamentary buildings, and can be used to signal inclusion and diversity. For instance, the German Federal Parliament started to fly the Rainbow flag on the Reichstag building on selected dates in 2022 (Christopher Street Day Berlin; International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia) in solidarity with people discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (Deutscher Bundestag 2022). In 2022, the Rainbow flag was formally added to the Federal Parliament flag etiquette next to the Federal German and the European Union flag, which are permanently displayed.

Art and exhibitions in parliamentary buildings

The art exhibited in a parliament—whether paintings, sculptures, decorations or other forms of artistic expression—signifies who and whose contribution is considered important.

Parliamentary exhibitions can be made more gender-sensitive by:

- representing similar numbers of women and men artists, or providing exhibitions from only women artists to counter traditional imbalances in art;
- avoiding gender stereotyping, sexism and racism in art;
- covering gender issues as exhibition topics, including those that counter gender stereotypes; and
- having interactive exhibitions allowing for engagement with the broader public in its diversity.

7 Admittedly, not all parliaments necessarily use people's names to identify their rooms or buildings and instead use numbers or characters or other terms.

8 József Antall, Willy Brandt, Paul-Henri Spaak, Altiero Spinelli; plus the connecting bridges named after Konrad Adenauer.

Over time, some parliaments have addressed this—for example, the Swedish Parliament with its room for women artists only, the Scottish Parliament's collection of 100 porcelain sentences written by women around Scotland, and temporary exhibitions in the Catalan Parliament (Freidenvall and Erikson 2020; Verge, de la Fuente and Duran 2019; Verge 2022a).

The survey results (see Figure 7.1) show that some parliaments have made efforts to change portraits or statues in meeting rooms or halls to make women's political contributions more visible and celebrate their political achievements (e.g. Belgian Chamber of Representatives, German Federal Council, Irish House of Representatives, Italian Senate). However, such initiatives are not widespread and they have only been established in a small number of parliaments. This is sometimes because of strict policies regarding who receives a portrait or statue. Some parliaments reserve this honour for prominent members of parliamentary leadership (e.g. speakers or presidents of the parliament)—for example, the UK House of Commons operates a '10 year dead rule' (Childs 2016: 39). Given that women have historically been underrepresented in these functions (see Chapter 2), this may explain why portraits and statues are still mostly dedicated to men.

Exhibitions in parliaments focusing on women or gender topics are more common: 15 out of 22 parliaments in the survey (68 per cent) report having organized such initiatives—for instance, the Belgian Federal Parliament (see Box 7.2).



Box 7.2: Focus on... Exhibitions in parliaments on women or gender topics

- **Belgian Federal Parliament:** The Belgian Chamber of Representatives and Belgian Senate jointly organized a thematic guided tour entitled 'Women Artists in the Chamber and the Senate' in 2022. During this event, visitors were introduced to 14 women painters and sculptors during a guided tour of the Belgian Federal Parliament. The exposition and guided tour were part of the celebrations around '1921–2021: 100 years of women parliamentarians', which centred on paying tribute to Marie Janson, the first woman to take her place in the Belgian Senate in 1921. (Sources: INTER PARES survey; Belgian Chamber of Representatives n.d.; Belgian Senate n.d.)

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago considers art an important tool for connecting with citizens, and for promoting women artists and art on gender-related topics (see the Story of Change from Trinidad and Tobago below). This shows that art is visible and important not only for those working in parliament on a daily basis, but also for citizens to feel represented. It is important to pay attention to who is portrayed, as well as which artists and topics are presented.



Story of Change: The Rotunda Gallery in the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago—supporting women and raising awareness of gender equality

When the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago was being renovated between 2016 and 2020, it was decided to turn what was to be the central lobby into an art gallery. That gallery became the Rotunda Gallery and opened in January 2020. The gallery presents exhibitions based on various themes. It gives an opportunity to artists to exhibit their work in a prestigious environment and to expose their work to a wide array of people, as well as highlighting the work of women.

Since International Women's Day (IWD) 2020, the Rotunda Gallery has had exhibitions focusing on women every year, both on IWDs and during November. The gallery also supports the work of women artists, by giving them a platform and helping them move on to commercial galleries and further their careers. Although the exhibitions for IWD also accept men artists, mostly women artists have taken the opportunity to present their work in the gallery.

The central theme of the 2023 exhibition was 'Women in Science' since science and technologies are still fields heavily dominated by men. The exhibitions contain not only artwork, but also informational briefs and biographies for example. This helps to give the cultural context and to give visibility to artists, and in this case, often women artists. This is also important since a good proportion of the visitors are students. Outside of gender issues, the Parliament runs a wide array of themes. In 2022, the theme was '60 years of parliamentary stories' to celebrate the 60th year of independence. This encouraged artists to do research and create pieces based on this, thus teaching both artists and visitors about the history of the Parliament. The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago always marked IWD, therefore having an exhibition to mark the day was thus not difficult to implement. The fact that both the Speaker and Clerk of the house were women further facilitated the exhibitions because both supported it.

Since everybody can send artwork to be exhibited, artworks present in the gallery not only are creations of professional artists, but some are made by children, students, or anyone wanting to be creative. This allows the Parliament to be an outlet for creativity and gives everybody access to space within Parliament. Also, if an art piece was made by someone under 18, the age of the artist is put on the display tag, which can inspire other students and children to send in artworks. The gallery also often collaborates with organizations, such as UN Women, and with cultural groups in society. Since the population of Trinidad and Tobago is ethnically diverse, the Parliament collaborated, for instance, with the East Indian women's organization and the Syrian and Lebanese Women's Association.

The exhibitions also have a positive impact for the Parliament. Since people visiting the exhibition are also given a tour of the Parliament, this draws in people who would not usually go to the Parliament. For instance, the exhibitions draw in art students and children, which the Parliament hopes will also boost their engagement with politics.

Keiba Jacob, Stephen Boodhram, Chenelle Arianne Maharaj and Khadija Gonzales, Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago

The Story of Change from Trinidad and Tobago illustrates how a small change can unfold a broader effect for gender equality and democracy. Originally planned as a standard art exhibition, the new Rotunda Gallery has inspired interactions with citizens and with other organizations. By improving personal attachment to the parliament as a core democratic institution, it is likely that the exhibitions will improve the support for democracy and its institutions.

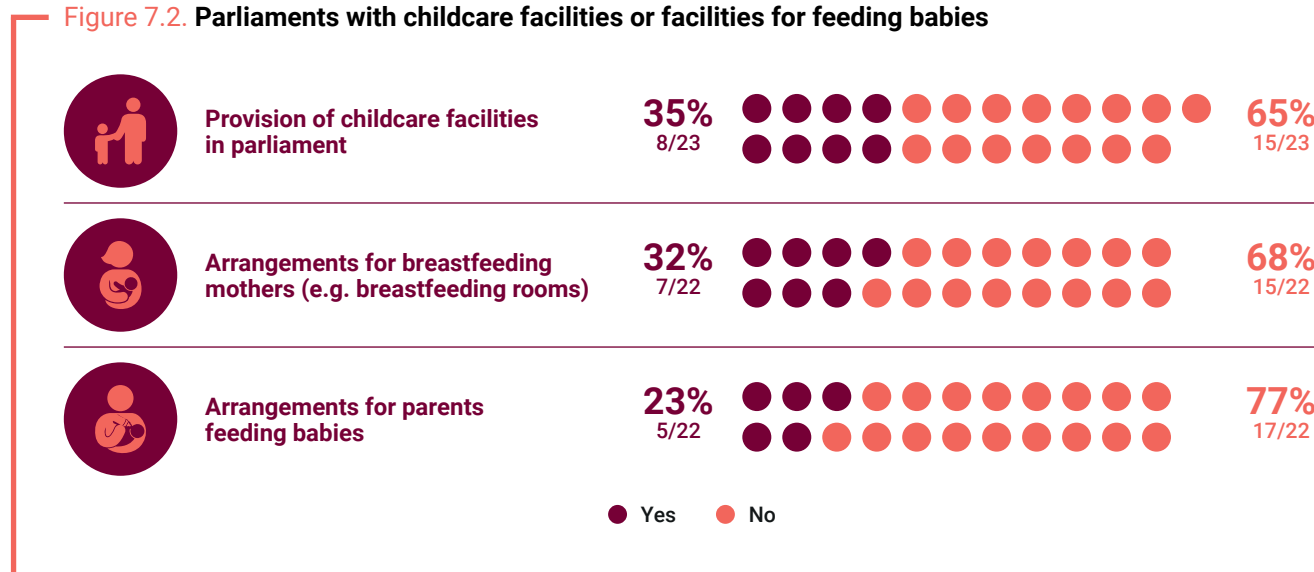
This holds particularly true for younger artists, who will remember their art being displayed in their parliament.

Facilities for childcare and feeding babies

Caring responsibilities remain a key barrier to women standing for office, given the often difficult work–life balance of MPs. Family-friendly facilities are an increasingly important concern (Lawless and Fox 2012). Becoming more family-friendly requires changing physical spaces (see below) but also family-friendly rules and policies (see section 7.2). It includes providing childcare facilities or services near or within parliament (for MPs, staff and visitors), or making arrangements for breastfeeding in parliament. Culturally, women are still often perceived as the primary caregivers and this can be addressed too—for instance, by securing easily accessible diaper/nappy-changing spaces for everyone (see Bathroom facilities above).

The survey asked parliaments specifically about these facilities. The results in Figure 7.2 show that the provision of childcare facilities in parliament or arrangements for breastfeeding mothers or parents feeding babies are still not widespread, despite their importance for MPs and staff. Only a small proportion of the parliaments that participated in the survey currently have such provisions in place.

Figure 7.2. Parliaments with childcare facilities or facilities for feeding babies



Other studies show that provisions vary considerably and depend on the national public childcare context, while many arrangements focus on MPs but not staff and most are aligned with sitting hours (Childs 2017; OSCE/ODIHR 2021). Countries like Denmark or Sweden rely primarily on their extensive public childcare systems and/or provide additional services upon request. Other countries focus on privately run services outside the parliamentary buildings. Less than half of the EU member state parliaments reported on-site childcare facilities in 2019 (EIGE 2019), and other measures like financial support were even less common in the wider Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) region (OSCE/ODIHR 2021; see also section 7.2: Gender sensitivity in the organization of parliamentary work, for discussion on parental leave).

Some of the surveyed parliaments and contacted experts provided additional information on family-friendly facilities through the open survey questions. The examples are shown in Box 7.3.



Box 7.3: Focus on... Arrangements for breastfeeding and feeding babies in parliament

- **Italian Parliament:** In 2021, the Italian Parliament created a new space dedicated to breastfeeding children. Initially an informal space, formal authorization was granted shortly afterwards, with a rule permanently protecting the new infrastructure. In 2022, the parliament adopted a new rule allowing women MPs to breastfeed their children in the Chamber of Deputies up to the age of one year. The Italian MP Gilda Sportiello was the first to breastfeed her son in a plenary session in the Italian Chamber of Deputies on 7 June 2023. (Sources: INTER PARES survey; Reuters 2023)
- **Australian House of Representatives:** In 2016, the Australian House of Representatives changed its rules allowing MPs to breastfeed in the house, following the Senate. Previously, children had been considered 'visitors' and so were only allowed into the public galleries and offices of the parliament, but not in sessions. Senator Larissa Waters was the first politician to breastfeed in the Australian Parliament in 2017. (Sources: BBC 2016, 2017)
- **National Assembly of Niger:** A nursing Member of Parliament may vote by proxy, and nursing MPs or staff are authorized to leave early. (Source: INTER PARES survey)
- **Netherlands House of Representatives:** Breastfeeding is allowed in the parliament. The parliamentary building has two lactation rooms. Currently, the parliamentary building is being renovated and a third lactation room will be installed. The speaker can impose longer breaks during long plenary debates to allow for breastfeeding/pumping. (Sources: Expert survey with Rozemarijn van Dijk; RTL 2017)

While creating spaces for breastfeeding and feeding babies is an important change to the infrastructure, the examples in Box 7.3 illustrate that changing both formal and informal rules are equally important. Making parliamentary infrastructure more gender-sensitive goes hand in hand with how parliamentary work is organized and regulated.

7.2. GENDER SENSITIVITY IN THE ORGANIZATION OF PARLIAMENTARY WORK

Parliaments, like other workplaces, are gendered organizations that must deal with the challenges of inequalities and discrimination. Efforts to create a more gender-sensitive parliament involve creating inclusive, supportive and safe working conditions that value diverse needs and experiences.

Previous research on the gender-sensitive organization of parliamentary work has highlighted a range of policies aimed at legitimizing informal practices and improving working conditions for MPs and staff. In general, these involve:

- tackling unequal power dynamics and the need for family-friendly working conditions, based on the concept of a family-friendly parliament (Smith 2022);
- combating (sexual) harassment related to the concept of a violence-free parliament (Verge 2022b); and
- remote parliaments, often discussed particularly in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic (Smith and Childs 2021; see also Chapter 8).

Family-friendly parliaments

A family-friendly parliament adopts policies, practices and measures to support parliamentarians and staff with their family and caregiving responsibilities (Palmieri 2011; OSCE/ODIHR 2021). Currently, no parliament is comprehensively responding to all these needs, even though the number and variety of measures has improved over time, as illustrated below.

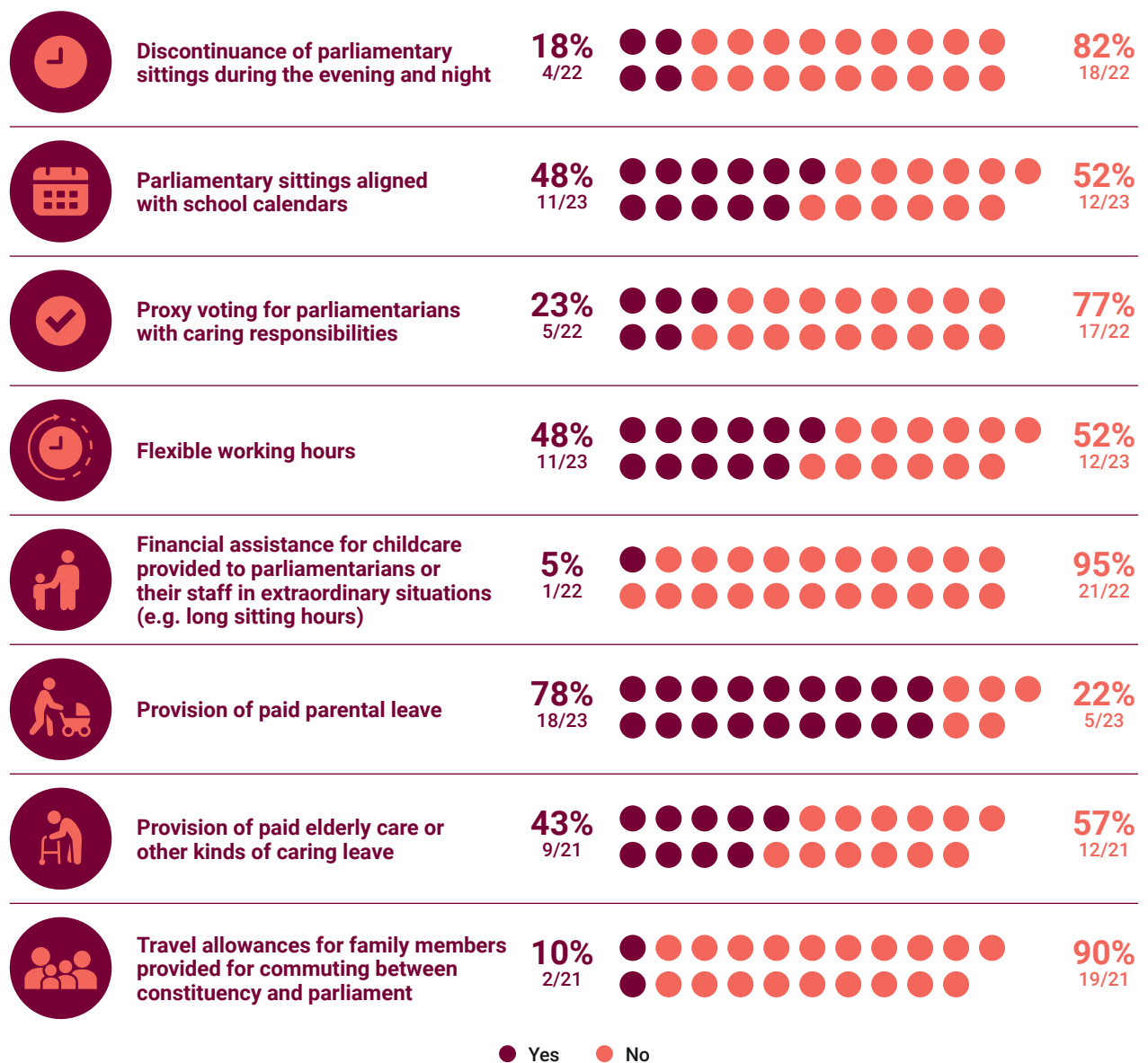
The concept recognizes that many people working in parliament have family obligations, such as caring for children, elderly parents or other dependents, and aims to create an environment that allows them to balance their duties with their family roles.

A family-friendly parliament acknowledges that the requirements of political office are often demanding and time-consuming, and this poses challenges for individuals with caregiving responsibilities (Palmieri 2011; Smith 2022). It aims to create an inclusive and supportive environment that recognizes the diverse needs and responsibilities of parliamentarians, regardless of gender. In sum, it means not compromising on democratic representation and services to citizens, but reimagining the setting. Solutions for MPs might differ, ranging from proxy voting to temporary replacement during maternity, parental or other leave, depending on context, but should always respect different life situations.

Making parliaments family-friendly is among the measures designed to make parliaments more gender-sensitive because in many cultures women continue to hold care responsibilities. In the long run, the ambition should be to ensure that MPs and parliamentary staff are acknowledged and accommodated as individuals who are engaged in many other social responsibilities beyond their work in parliament.

The survey asked for details about the family-friendly measures adopted by parliaments, such as discontinuing night sitting hours or aligning them with school calendars, proxy voting and flexible working hours, and financial support for care duties. The results are summarized in Figure 7.3.

Figure 7.3. Measures adopted to support the needs of MPs and staff with family and caring responsibilities



Most parliaments reported provisions for paid parental leave, indicating a possible improvement compared with previous studies (see OSCE/ODIHR 2021). Almost half of the parliaments surveyed have aligned parliamentary sittings with school calendars and adopted a system of more flexible working hours. The French Parliament was a frontrunner in aligning with school calendars, with changes adopted in 1995 (see Box 7.4). In the surveys, some parliaments provided examples of context-specific measures to improve sitting hours and adjust childcare facilities to them (see Box 7.4).



Box 7.4: Focus on ... Family-friendly parliaments

- French Parliament:** The constitutional reform of 4 August 1995 aligned parliamentary sessions with the school calendar. A session ‘begins on the first working day of October and ends on the last working day of June’. It lasts nine months, during which both the National Assembly and the Senate do not sit continuously but allow for periods of suspension of parliamentary work. As a rule, the parliament suspends its work at least three times: three weeks during the end-of-year holidays, one week in February and two weeks in April. These moments of suspension of parliamentary work allow elected MPs to be able to devote more time to family responsibilities. (Source: INTER PARES survey)
- The Irish House of Representatives:** The Speaker of the Irish House of Representatives, Séan Ó Feargháil, established a Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament in 2021 ‘to facilitate the Houses of the Oireachtas’ ongoing development as a family-friendly parliamentary community’ (cited in Cousins 2023: 120). The Forum made 51 recommendations, which focused on various dimensions of gender-sensitive infrastructures and organization, including improving sitting hours, working conditions, maternity/paternity/other leave, hybrid parliaments, childcare and harassment measures. Tackling the ‘late, long and unpredictable sitting hours’ was key, and led to several suggestions for short-term solutions, including the request to adhere to meeting timeslots, the gender-proofing of revisions of Standing Orders, adherence to the time of adjournment set out in the Standing Orders, alignment of sitting calendars with school holidays, and voting blocks to be moved within the weekly schedule and taken in the afternoon. (Sources: Cousins 2023; Houses of the Oireachtas 2021)
- Portuguese Assembly of the Republic:** While there is no financial assistance for out-of-hours childcare, the Portuguese Assembly offers childcare allowances for staff. The parliament’s crèche, which caters for children up to the age of three, has flexible hours, and aligns its opening hours with parliamentary work. (Source: INTER PARES survey)
- Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago:** The parliament offers daycare services during the July/August school vacation period for staff. It plans to further extend this to a full-time, on-site day and afterschool care facility at the Office of the Parliament. (Source: INTER PARES survey)

Other initiatives are far less common. Few parliaments in the surveys have discontinued parliamentary sittings during the evening/night, which is in line with earlier findings (see OSCE/ODIHR 2021). Also, few parliaments offer financial assistance for childcare in extraordinary situations or offer travel allowances for family members of MPs who need to commute between parliament and their local constituencies.

The Australian Parliament offers an inspiring example on gendered aspects of changing sitting hours. The Story of Change from Australia below illuminates how the usual sitting hours mirror a traditional understanding of gender roles, where men are not in charge of daily care responsibilities.



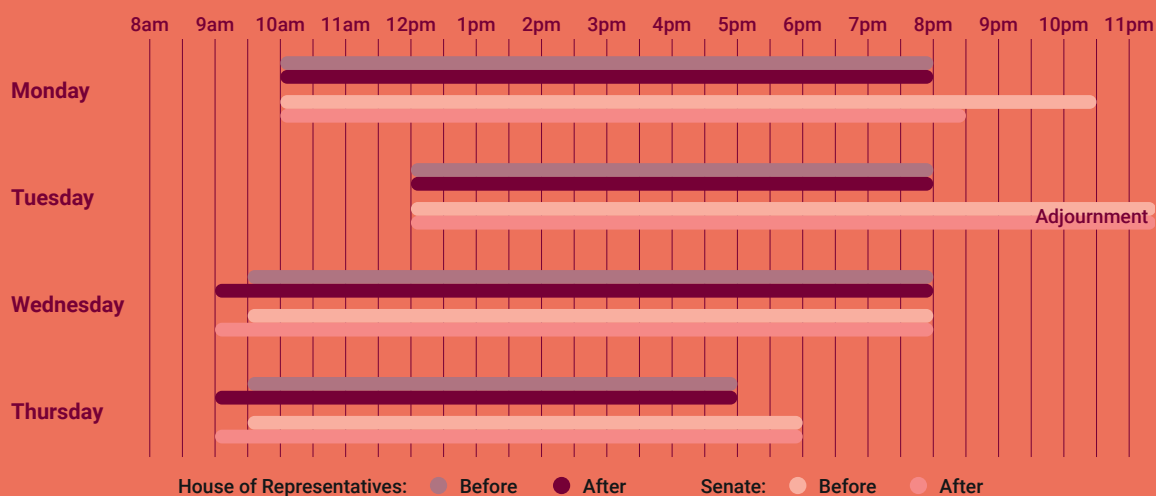
Story of Change: A 'family-friendly' sitting schedule in Australia

Historically, the Australian Parliament has been characterized by its long and irregular sitting hours. Parliamentarians have sat long into the night, debating, scrutinizing and passing legislation, and representing their constituents. In part, these long hours are a product of the geographical landscape: most of Australia's 227 representatives live a considerable distance from the capital, necessitating long commutes to parliament. Men politicians, leaving their wives and families at home, traditionally preferred to work long hours rather than travelling more frequently to Canberra. It has taken women gradually having an increased presence in parliament to question this practice.

In the Australian Parliament, a change of government often heralds changes in the rules of procedure. In 2022, after almost a decade in opposition, the Australian Labor Party won government, bringing with it a record high in the number of elected MPs: across both houses, women represent just under 45 per cent of all MPs; in the Senate, women represent over 56 per cent. In its first sittings, the new government introduced two specific changes to the parliamentary sitting schedule. First, the new sitting calendar 'avoided' parliamentary sessions during school holidays. Second, 'deferred divisions and quorums' were introduced; any votes called for between the hours of 6.30pm and 7.30pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays in either the House of Representatives or the Senate would be deferred until the first opportunity the next sitting day. In the Senate, deferred divisions now also operate from 4.30pm on Thursdays.

While newly elected Prime Minister Anthony Albanese publicly announced his intention to 'run a family-friendly parliament' (23 May 2022), and had 'consciously' taken school holidays into account in a previously held parliamentary role in the early 2010s, there was another significant catalyst for these changes. Following serious allegations of misconduct in Parliament House in 2021, the Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins was tasked with an independent investigation into bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces. Her 452-page report, entitled *Set the Standard*, was extremely well covered in mainstream political media and included 28 recommendations. Among these was a review of the sitting calendar and hours, which drew on international best practice outlined in reports by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Europe's Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) (Australian Human Rights Commission 2021).

Figure 7.4: Times of meetings during sitting weeks, before and after *Set the Standard* report in the Australian Parliament



In both chambers, the sitting hours are extended by half an hour on Wednesdays and Thursdays, commencing earlier in the morning than previously. In the Senate, however, the significant change is a reduction in time on Monday evenings, with an adjournment at 8.30pm rather than 10.30pm (see Figure 7.4). The decision to sit earlier in the day rather than late at night reflects an evidence base presented in the *Set the Standard* report that there is a link between alcohol consumption at night and sexual misconduct.

When he introduced these changes into the House of Representatives, the Leader of the House, Tony Burke, explicitly referred to Commissioner Jenkins' report:

- 'Every time we come together after an election, the incoming government reviews the standing orders. This time the context is different. This time, we have all had to deal with the issues that were raised in *Set the Standard ...*'
- 'The first is a recommendation about the sitting calendar, asking that school holidays be avoided at all times. With the different states, that's a complex thing to do, but we have done that with the sitting plan that was adopted yesterday.'
- 'The second issue is how we get through the business we need to get through without doing the absurdly late nights, including the really extreme late nights, that we have sometimes had. How do we sort that out? People, including the people we work with [such as parliamentary and political staff], not just each other [MPs], have had to be here in working conditions that are neither healthy nor safe.'
- '[The idea of deferred votes] has come principally from caucus members who've brought young families to parliament. Effectively, what they've had to do every afternoon until now is, when it's time for the child to get to bed, check with the whip as to whether or not they could get a pair on that particular day. I think we can be more decent than that, and the 6.30pm rule means that, obviously, if you're on duty for your party or you're intending to make a speech, you can't make that unless you're here. But, if people have reason to leave at 6.30pm, there will be no quorums and no divisions each day after that. And we will plan the program to be able to deal with that.'

It is hard to deny the impact of the *Set the Standard* report on gender-sensitive parliamentary reform in Australia. The report, based on submissions from over 1,700 individuals and organizations, presented Australian political leaders with a substantial 'case for change' and used that to propose a new ecosystem for a safer, more respectful workplace. It is not immaterial that the changes to sitting hours and schedules were largely motivated by arguments to improve the well-being and safety of all MPs. As is often the case in Australia (see Palmieri 2023), the changes—and their drivers—were not presented in gender-specific language. In part, this is due to a politically conservative culture that preferences egalitarianism over equity for 'special interest groups', such as women or gender diverse groups. Where reform, however, can be presented as having benefit for broader groups of people—in this example, parents—then there has been a greater chance of success.

These two changes were passed with little debate in the House of Representatives in July 2022 and the Senate in September 2022. It is still too early to note definitively the effect of these changes in terms of parliamentarians' ability to balance family responsibilities with parliamentary sitting hours. However, in 2023, a court case against a recently elected independent woman MP, Dr Monique Ryan, was lodged, putting a spotlight on the question of 'reasonable work hours'. Having refused to work more than 70 hours a week, Dr Ryan's former political staffer Sally Rugg is seeking compensation for subsequent 'adverse action'. In politics, there has been little consideration of what constitutes 'reasonable hours' for both MPs and political staff, although *Set the Standard* was critical in linking long hours to misconduct, not least because of the consumption of alcohol later at night.

The issue of sitting hours is certainly complex in geographically large states, but the case of Australia suggests that it has direct health and well-being impacts. Where the evidence gathered to support change is overwhelming, and the political discourse around that evidence has put some pressure on a new government, itself eager to differentiate itself from an old regime, there is potential for positive change.

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For full details, see: Palmieri, S., 'Can language rules improve everyday respect in the parliamentary chambers?', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, 38/1 (2023), pp. 7–16

The Australian example demonstrates that discontinuing sittings serves several interests, ranging from improving work–life balance (not only for caregivers) to protecting the health of MPs and staff, and preventing sexual harassment (see below). Ensuring that all MPs can participate in plenary voting without disadvantage is a core dimension of democratic decision making. Depriving MPs of this major duty by disregarding their personal situations challenges democratic core values of equality.

Violence-free parliaments

Violence against women and gender-based violence is a widespread and worldwide problem. Women politicians and political and parliamentary staff are regular targets (Krook 2020). In 2018, the IPU found that 85 per cent of women parliamentarians worldwide had experienced psychological violence, almost 25 per cent had been victims of sexual violence and 58 per cent had received online abuse (IPU 2018). The extent and nature of violence that women parliamentarians experience is shaped by intersectional characteristics too. An IPU study on African parliaments shows that disabled women, younger women (under 40 years), unmarried women and minority women are more often affected, as are women from the political opposition and gender equality advocates (IPU 2021). Women in European parliaments are slightly more often affected by psychological violence (particularly online attacks), while women in African parliaments suffer more from sexual violence (IPU 2021).

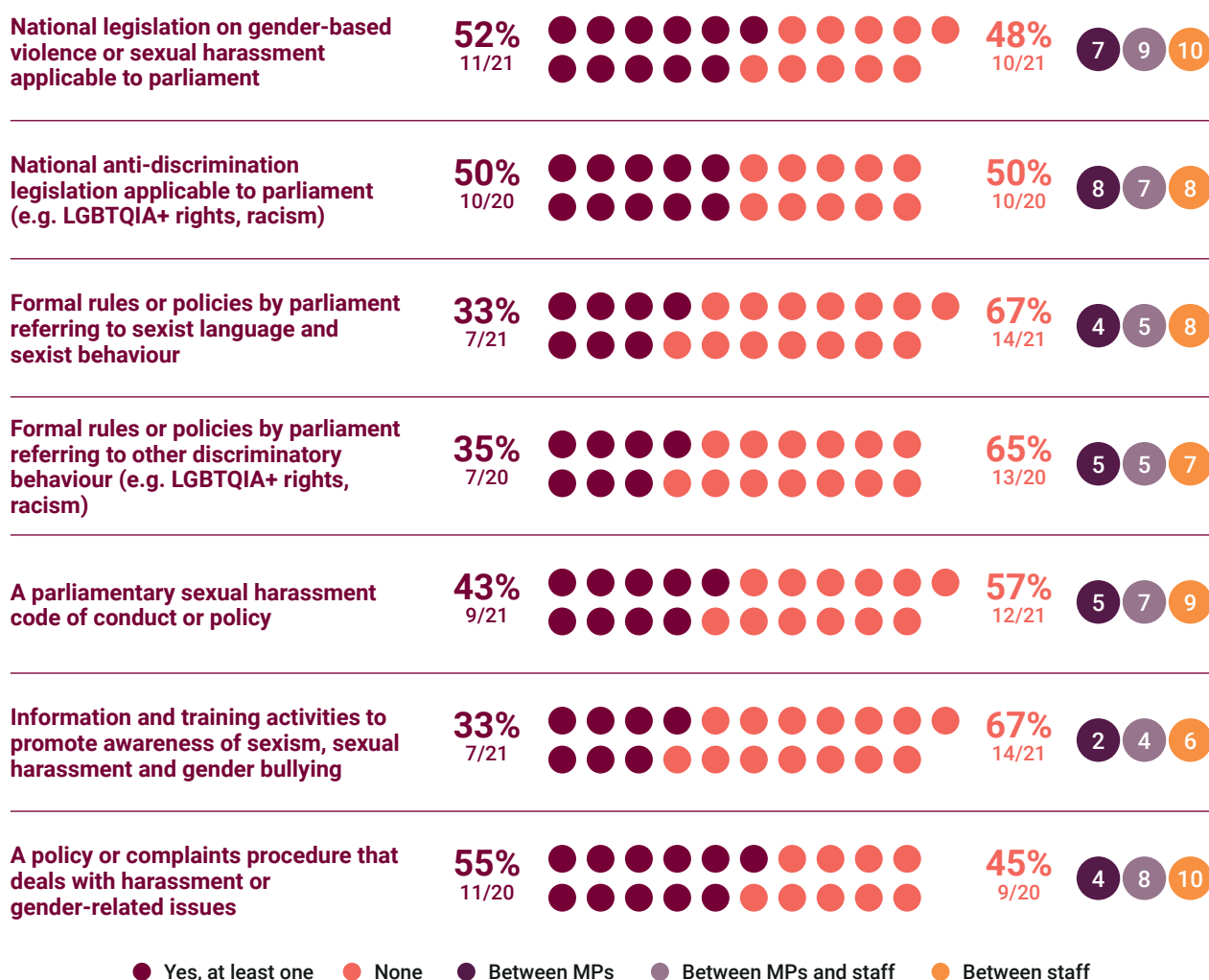
Parliaments have started to implement measures to become 'violence-free parliaments' (IPU 2018; OSCE/ODIHR 2021), and detailed guidelines were published by the IPU (2019). Some parliaments (e.g. Australia, New Zealand, UK) have started gathering data about bullying and harassment, and established codes of conduct, with Canada as one of the first examples for a Code of Conduct (OSCE/ODIHR 2021). The 2022 Kigali Declaration, 'Gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world', adopted by the 145th IPU Assembly puts ending gender-based discrimination and violence as core parliamentary actions needed to become more gender-sensitive (IPU 2022).

Violence-free parliaments emphasize the need to create a safe and respectful working environment on the parliamentary estate. This requires comprehensive policies and procedures to prevent and deal with incidents of harassment, abuse and discrimination. By promoting a culture of zero tolerance for all

forms of violence and misconduct, violence-free parliaments aim to provide a safe space for parliamentarians, particularly women, to effectively carry out their role and contribute to democratic processes without fear or intimidation (OSCE/ODIHR 2021).

The survey asked parliaments about their formal and informal measures to secure gender-sensitive relations in parliaments (between MPs, between MPs and staff, and between members of parliamentary staff). The results are presented in Figure 7.5.

Figure 7.5. Formal rules, policies or training activities adopted by parliaments to secure gender-sensitive relations



In approximately half of the parliaments surveyed, national legislation on gender-based violence or sexual harassment and/or national anti-discrimination legislation is applicable to parliament, as is the case in Bolivia since 2012 (see Box 7.5). Some parliaments also report having adopted formal rules or policies

to deal with sexist language and behaviour or other discriminatory behaviour (see Box 7.5 for Malaysia). Nine parliaments mention having adopted a parliamentary sexual harassment code of conduct or policy, and 11 parliaments report having a policy or complaints procedure that allows them to deal with harassment or gender-related issues (see Box 7.5 for France). Information and training activities to promote awareness regarding sexism, sexual harassment and gender bullying are organized in seven parliaments (see Box 7.5 for Cyprus, and Trinidad and Tobago). Another good example that promotes awareness on these issues is the public seminar organized by the Swedish Parliament in 2017. During this seminar, MPs and ministers read out anonymous statements from women politicians who had been victims of sexual harassment (Verge 2022b).

The survey results indicate a possible improvement in the situation over the last decade; in the 2011 IPU study only 20 per cent of the responding parliaments reported having a policy or complaints procedure (Palmieri 2011).



Box 7.5: Focus on... Eliminating violence, sexual harassment and sexism

- **Cyprus House of Representatives:** The House of Representatives appointed an equality officer in the parliament, as per national legislation provisions. The equality officer has initiated training sessions within the parliament, addressed at MPs, staff and parliamentary assistants, to promote awareness on sexism, sexual harassment and gender bullying, as well as to enable victims to recognize and effectively respond to acts of sexual harassment or gender-related issues. (Source: INTER PARES survey)
- **France National Assembly:** The Standing Orders of the National Assembly include stipulations on harassment. Article 6 stipulates: 'In the exercise of his mandate, each Member must comply with the principles set out in this code and promote them. Moral or sexual harassment constitutes a breach of the duty to set an example. Any breach of the code of ethics may be sanctioned under the conditions provided for in Article 80-4 of the Standing Orders.' (Sources: INTER PARES survey; Assemblée nationale 2024)
- **Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago:** The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago provided training in 2015 to parliamentary staff members in the form of a One-Day Sexual Harassment and Sextortion Workshop. This training contributed to increasing the level of gender sensitivity and awareness among parliamentary staff. (Source: INTER PARES survey)
- **Malaysian Parliament:** In 2012, the Malaysian Parliament made an amendment to its Standing Orders, which states: 'It shall be out of order for Members of the House to use offensive language or make a sexist remark' (Malaysia 2018).
- **Plurinational Legislative Assembly of Bolivia:** Bolivia was the first country in the world to legally recognize and criminalize 'political violence and harassment against women' in 2012 (Restrepo Sanín 2022: 1). The process of creating policy measures to eliminate violence against women in politics started in the 1990s. In the following decades, several bill proposals were drafted and debated in the Assembly but failed to be approved. As part of a broader process of constitutional change, as well as under the impulse of the large mobilization of feminist and Indigenous women's activists, a final bill proposal was presented to the Assembly in 2010 and approved as Law No. 243 in 2012 (Restrepo Sanín 2022). Women caucuses and women's networks, such as the Bolivian Association of Women Councillors and Mayors (ACOBOL), proved crucial in drafting and pushing through the law, after the murder of the councillor Juana Quispe (Castaño 2021). The law also served as a source of inspiration for similar measures in other countries, including Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico and Peru (Castaño 2021; Restrepo Sanín 2022).

Combating sexual harassment is core to securing equality for all, and initiatives to improve the situation can be triggered by various actors. The inspiring Story of Change from the European Parliament below illustrates that staff positioned lower in the hierarchy can also push successfully for change, in case parliamentary administrations are not aware of the scope of the problem.



Story of Change: Pushing against sexual harassment in the European Parliament

As in many other sectors, political institutions such as parliaments were put under the spotlight of #MeToo in 2017. The long working hours and late-night meetings, the imbalanced gendered norms and rigid hierarchical structure that still dictate parliamentary activities, and the precarious working contracts with which assistants are often hired, provide a fertile environment for the silent spread of sexual harassment.

In the European Parliament (EP), sexual harassment also became a major concern following #MeToo. The EP started in 2017 with the adoption of a non-binding resolution on combating sexual harassment and abuse in the EU (2017/2897) which laid out recommendations for preventing 'sexual harassment in parliaments, including the European Parliament'. Prior to its adoption, a group of MEPs sat in the plenary holding signs with the MeToo slogan—indicating that they had themselves experienced some forms of harassment during their careers. Although the resolution recommended that the EP needed to review its anti-harassment policies, no measures were taken back then.

Simultaneously, a group of staff had collected anonymous testimonies of sexual harassment and violence in the EP, incidents that often remained unpunished. For them, the lack of action was unacceptable, so they started an inhouse mobilization against harassment within the EP using the hashtag #MeTooEP. Via their actions, they pushed for a deep reform of the anti-harassment policies of the European Parliament, with demands in line with the recommendations adopted by the Parliament in the 2017/2897 resolution.

Changes in the functioning and practices of the EP involves a revision of its Rules of Procedures, as in most parliaments. Such revisions occur quite rarely and do not often relate to regulating MEPs' behaviours. MEPs are indeed protected by parliamentary immunity and very little can be imposed on them. Before #MeToo, the rules were amended in 2006 and 2007 to introduce new penalties for MEPs showing inappropriate behaviour such as defamatory, racist and xenophobic language or behaviour. However, sexism was not included. Finally, in 2014 the rules were amended to create an Advisory Committee dealing with harassment complaints between parliamentary assistants and MEPs. The Committee still exists today but was criticized by #MeTooEP and the media for being mostly composed of MEPs. Such an imbalanced composition, according to #MeTooEP, discourages the reporting of MEPs' harassment, and in fact, the Committee had not dealt with a single case of sexual harassment until 2019.

#MeTooEP had three clear demands, all of which built on the adopted 2017/2897 resolution. The inhouse mobilization called for: (i) changing the composition of the Anti-harassment Committee; (ii) mandating an external audit of independent experts to review the Anti-harassment Committee's work; and (iii) organizing a mandatory training for MEPs and political group leaders on sexual harassment.

The inhouse mobilization resulted in a series of changes in the immediate aftermath of #MeTooEP and consisted of creating a confidential reporting system; an awareness-raising campaign; the creation of a Code of Appropriate Behaviour; and a voluntary training on anti-harassment. These changes turned out, however, to be too weak and too symbolic. For instance, MEPs only needed to sign the Code of Appropriate Behaviour at the beginning of each term, and there exists no further monitoring. The voluntary training was attended by only a minority: 260 out of 705 MEPs participated in the current term (2019–2024). Other changes were left to the level of the political groups, leaving the fight against sexual harassment unharmonized and highly dependent on the self-regulation of political groups that hold very disparate positions on the issue.

Given the weaknesses, the EP recently initiated a second round of change which will likely be in place for the beginning of the new term in spring 2024. In January 2023, following the Qatar scandal that shed light on the corruption of some MEPs, their impunity and the lack of transparency of the political groups' activities, President Roberta Metsola decided to redress the reputation of the Parliament. While corruption is indeed a priority, the fight against sexual harassment in the EP is also seen crucial to match its reputation of a gender-equality champion.

Thus, with the continuous pressure of #MeTooEP, President Metsola requested from leading MEPs proposals for a revision and reinforcement of anti-harassment policies. As a result, the Bureau, the highest administrative body of the EP, adopted in July 2023 a decision that enhanced anti-harassment policies.

It created a new mediation service and a new mandatory training for MEPs on the topic of how to maintain a well-functioning team, including on anti-harassment. The new mediation service is announced to be established in view of resolving difficult relational situations between MEPs and staff and for maintaining a positive and collaborative working environment. The mediation service shall act independently, and in line with the principles of confidentiality, voluntariness, informality and self-determination. The mandatory training is set to be in place at the beginning of next term in spring 2024 and will consist of modules on the recruitment of assistants, team management, and conflict and harassment prevention. The Bureau's decision also includes a minor revision of the functioning of the Advisory Committee, such as the possibility to agree on a new restricted format of hearing in case of sensitive situations such as sexual harassment.

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For full details, see: Berthet, V., 'Mobilization against sexual harassment in the European Parliament: The MeTooEP campaign', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 29/2 (2021), pp. 331–46

7.3. CONCLUSION

In gender-sensitive parliaments, the infrastructure and the organization of work are designed to strengthen the symbolic representation of women's rights and gender equality. They support gender equality in parliament by challenging gender stereotypes and transforming power relations within the institution. They also encourage gender equality outside parliament by supporting the political recognition and sense of belonging of underrepresented groups.

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to making infrastructure and work more gender-sensitive. Rather, the survey results reveal that a variety of initiatives have been developed by parliaments, often depending on national contexts and cultural and historical trajectories.

Nevertheless, some core factors and actors that support change in parliamentary infrastructure and the organization of parliamentary work can be distinguished:

- Despite national differences, **cross-fertilization** occurs between parliaments. Good practices developed by one parliament are adopted by other parliaments and adjusted to the national context in the spirit of peer-to-peer learning. Women's rooms that showcase the contribution of women are just one example, with New Zealand setting the standard in

1996, Sweden following in 2012 and Italy in 2016, which then inspired Malaysian MPs during a visit to Italy organized by INTER PARES in 2022.

- Some rules and practices still mirror a traditional and narrow understanding of gender roles. Yet parliaments have also taken action to change this. Initiatives to improve **gender sensitivity not only benefit women but everyone** working in parliaments (see section 7.2). Violence-free parliaments create a safe and respectful working place for all and can prevent not only sexism and sexual harassment, but—if designed properly—also racism, homophobia and ableism. A ‘family-friendly’ sitting schedule may improve the work–life balance of MPs with or without primary care responsibilities. Highlighting the broader benefits of change for everyone, and strategically ‘marketing’ them, appears to be a valuable way to initiate changes and gather wide cross-party support.
- **Small changes** in infrastructure and organization of work can **generate broad impacts** for gender equality and democracy. Although large infrastructural changes (e.g. changes to parliamentary buildings) are sometimes necessary in the long term, smaller changes can be implemented in the short term with tangible effects. The Story of Change from Trinidad and Tobago provides an inspiring example of how art exhibitions in parliamentary buildings can function as a way of demonstrating that gender equality is a core democratic value (see section 7.1).
- **Leaders who champion gender sensitivity and gender equality** are often the game-changers in parliamentary change processes. Women who finally make it to core parliamentary leadership positions previously only occupied by men can and do use their new powers to change rules and routines. Likewise, male leaders who commit to gender equality are of critical importance for instigating gender-sensitive measures, as the Irish and Australian examples show (see section 7.2). Furthermore, it is worth noting that such leaders can also originate from the parliamentary administration, not only from the cohort of MPs, as demonstrated by Trinidad and Tobago (see section 7.1). Parliamentary officials should thus be recognized and targeted as key drivers of change when initiating gender-sensitive parliaments.
- **Incidents** that stir public attention can **provide a window of opportunity** to forge unity on previously contested measures. Sexual harassment scandals in broader society (#MeToo) featured prominently as the basis for the #MeTooEP mobilization in the European Parliament (see the Story of Change from the European Parliament in section 7.2). Severe threats to and attacks on women MPs, with the worst case in Bolivia involving murder (see Box 7.5), led to the most extensive legislation on political violence and harassment against women.

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CHAPTER 8

PARLIAMENTS' RESPONSES TO CRISES AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

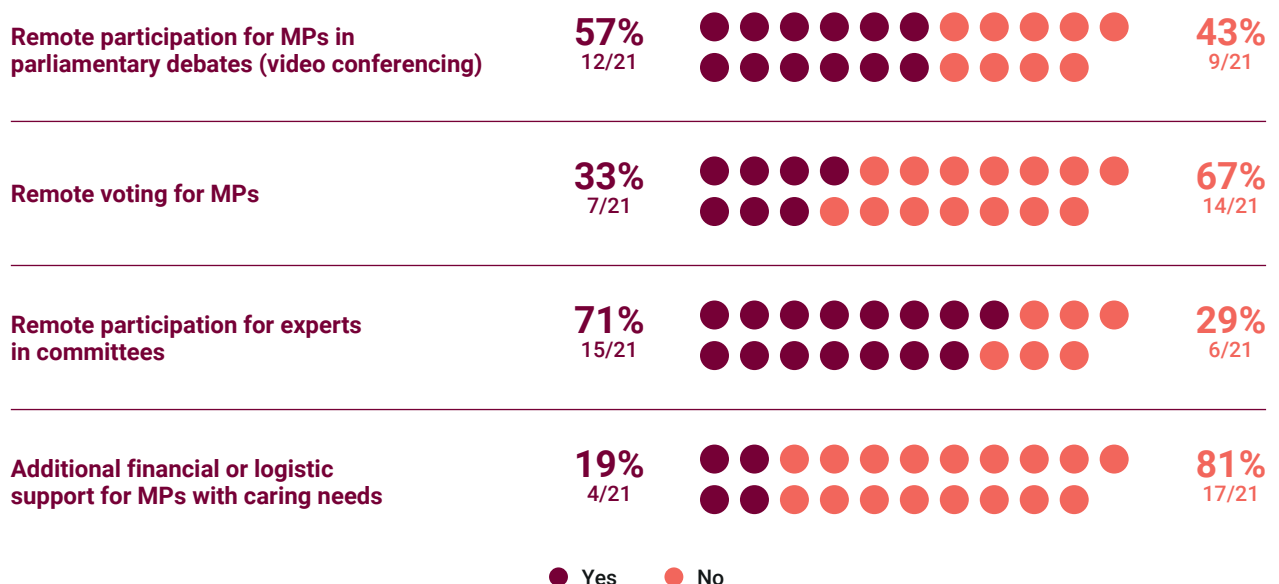
The strength and durability of democratic systems become contested during crises, such as pandemics, natural disasters, violent conflicts or democratic backsliding. Parliaments as core institutions of representative democracy provide a litmus test for the continuous functioning of democracy (Murphy 2020). Crises can affect the normal functioning of parliaments in multiple ways: such as emergency measures requiring quick decisions instead of in-depth deliberation, the delegating of more decision-making powers to government or the destruction or temporary inaccessibility of parliamentary buildings. Yet crises also offer opportunities to learn for the future (Murphy 2020).

8.1. THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS

The Covid-19 pandemic was a unique crisis, occurring simultaneously across the globe and requiring swift reactions from governments and parliaments. It brought with it gendered benefits and disadvantages across all dimensions of gender-sensitive parliaments. Supporting the former while eliminating the latter will be crucial to securing gender-sensitive parliamentary processes and improvements for the future. This chapter highlights examples of gender-sensitive parliaments addressing the aspects discussed in the preceding chapters.

The INTER PARES survey asked how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted parliaments' procedures and outputs. The survey items focused on remote participation (particularly remote voting and expert participation), support for Members of Parliament (MPs) with care duties and other changes. The results are summarized in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1. Gender-sensitive changes to parliaments' procedures or outputs during the Covid-19 pandemic



Some of the surveyed parliaments had made changes to their procedures or outputs during the Covid-19 pandemic, but in all the parliaments surveyed none had used any of the measures before the pandemic. Many parliaments relied on online or hybrid alternatives for day-to-day parliamentary activities, such as remote participation for MPs in parliamentary debates (57 per cent of parliaments) or remote participation for experts in committees (71 per cent of parliaments). A more limited number of parliaments also used remote voting for MPs (in total 33 per cent; either for all votes or for votes in committee sessions only), while offering additional financial or logistic support for MPs with caring needs was much more limited (19 per cent of parliaments).

The Covid-19 pandemic led several international organizations, among them the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women, to restate the case for gender-sensitive parliaments. Both organizations emphasized that failing to address the gendered dimensions of the pandemic and to consider different life situations in emergency response would exacerbate existing gender inequalities and probably reinforce old ones and create new ones (Childs and Palmieri 2020).

Early analysis highlighted that countries with high scores in gender equality indexes and state capacity frequently exhibited a more nuanced emergency response to gender issues, irrespective of the gender of their political leaders (Aldrich and Lotito 2020; Piscopo 2020). Yet, among the 110 examples provided by countries to the IPU up to October 2020, through either an online survey or in writing,⁹ only five countries (Colombia, Djibouti, Mexico, New Zealand, United Kingdom) and the European Parliament mentioned either gender issues or women's representation as relevant topics for parliament in their Covid-19 response (see Box 8.1). This limited number demonstrates the insufficient consideration given to the pandemic's gendered impacts on parliaments as workplaces.

Overall, women were underrepresented in emergency committees and groups, which also led to their absence in public—for instance, in interactions with the press (Smith 2020). Across the globe, pandemic emergency measures were decided mainly by male-dominated governments, expert groups and committees, exacerbating the exclusion of women as parliamentarians, ministers and experts (van Daalen et al. 2020). The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) found nevertheless that in European Union member states, women were, on average, well represented in parliamentary committees with responsibility for Covid-19/health: 44.7 per cent of leaders and 45.6 per cent of their combined members were women (EIGE 2022). Yet the situation differed a lot between countries: whereas women outnumbered men in Belgium (64.7 per cent), Finland (70.6 per cent) and Sweden (70.6 per cent), they held less than 25 per cent of committee

⁹ The IPU invited parliaments to share changes to parliaments during the pandemic through an online survey or via email. Gender was not an explicit topic and thus the parliaments who mentioned it decided that this was important for them in the context of the pandemic. For a full list of examples, see: IPU (2020).



Box 8.1: Focus on... Gender equality in the IPU compilation of parliamentary responses to the pandemic

- **Congress of the Republic of Colombia:** In Colombia, the Women's Equality Commission (members of the House of Representatives and the Senate) promoted a gender-sensitive approach to the Covid-19 response, focusing on 'highlighting and addressing the alarming levels of violence against women, especially intra-family violence, as well as the specific needs of rural women', as 'domestic abuse ... increased by 200 per cent' (Colombia, 8 June 2020, paras. 3–4 in: IPU 2020). The social media campaign #MujeresSinVirusdeViolencia launched by the Commission was aimed at sensitizing the population. Moreover, the Commission held hearings with relevant ministries and the Women's Equality Agency on how to mitigate the economic impact of the crisis on women in the short and medium term.
- **Chamber of Deputies Mexico:** Alongside other committees, the Chamber of Deputies in Mexico set up a working group headed by the Speaker of the Chamber with women deputies representing all parliamentary groups and presidents of committees, such as the Gender Equity and Justice committees. The working group held weekly meetings and ensured that measures taken by the government and the Congress during the pandemic were defined and implemented with a gender perspective. It also engaged with the specific problems women and girls were facing as a result of the health emergency. Other committees continued online, including the forum on femicides.
- **UK House of Commons:** Committee inquiries on Covid-19 and its gendered effects were issued in different committees. The Home Affairs Committee prominently highlighted the potential emergence of vulnerabilities for women and children in abusive situations due to social distancing and lockdown conditions, leading to the publication of a report. The Women and Equalities Committee initiated an inquiry into Covid-19 responses concerning people with protected characteristics and issued a call for evidence (UK Parliament n.d.).

(Source: IPU 2020)

seats in Cyprus, Greece, Hungary and Ireland; in Malta, there were no women altogether (EIGE 2022).

Concerning parliaments more specifically, the pandemic led to diverse developments, exemplified by the topics of remote parliaments and gender-sensitive law-making and oversight.

Remote participation in parliaments

The extraordinary context of the Covid-19 pandemic pushed parliaments across the globe to rapidly adapt to remote working (Childs and Palmieri 2020). It created a situation where, in many countries, MPs and staff were often unable to go to parliament in person. Such situations could also occur outside a pandemic, such as if there were urgent caring responsibilities, periods of illness, transport problems or other emergency circumstances.

Remote parliamentary participation can, in general, increase women's participation in parliament in several ways (Childs 2016; Smith 2022) and had significant effects on women during the pandemic (Childs and Palmieri 2020; Smith and Childs 2021). Allowing for remote participation in parliaments can open up further opportunities for becoming more gender- and diversity-sensitive (Smith and Childs 2021). Virtual committee meetings and hearings, for instance,

can allow for the inclusion of a broader diversity of (expert/witness) voices and not only those in close geographic proximity or with sufficient resources (e.g. time for travelling) (Smith 2022; Smith and Childs 2021).

On the other hand, remote parliaments may also lead to disadvantages for those who are participating remotely. Lockdowns, school and childcare closures, and restrictions on care services often placed the burden squarely on women's shoulders, resulting in a pandemic-induced retrogression in gender relations. This also applied to women parliamentarians who more often participated remotely. Hannah Johnson and Sonia Palmieri (iKNOW Politics 2022: 9–10) point out that the widespread hybrid arrangements could lead to a 'two-tiered system', where some MPs are able to participate 'as usual', while those participating online face additional technological limitations. During the pandemic, some plenary and committee sittings saw a division between men predominantly in the room and women mostly online (Uberoi 2020; iKNOW Politics 2022). Such a gender imbalance may result in new disadvantages because, even if excellent information and communication technology is available, it cannot compensate for the in-person interactions.

Proxy voting

Democracies rely on parliaments and MPs' voting to approve legislation, budgets and other issues. In the post-pandemic landscape, it remains important to scrutinize remote parliamentary practices and their impact on government accountability. Some countries already had proxy voting—where MPs delegate voting rights to another MP—before the pandemic or formalized the process during this period. The Welsh Parliament was one of the first parliaments to pilot and retain proxy voting as a gender-sensitive measure (Welsh Parliament 2022).

The recent gender-sensitive audit conducted by the Scottish Parliament proposed a pilot proxy voting scheme to provide support for MPs facing illness, caregiving responsibilities or bereavement. Notably, the suggested scheme extended its broad applicability beyond parental needs (Scottish Parliament 2023). A significant 78 per cent of Scottish MPs support hybrid participation due to family circumstances (Scottish Parliament 2023). This shift in parliamentary procedures could potentially reshape the composition of legislative bodies in the long run, prompting parties to reconsider their 'supply pool' if participation is ensured even in difficult circumstances (Smith 2022).

Belgium allows for proxy voting during crises, while Spain permits remote voting in specific situations, such as pregnancy, maternity, paternity and exceptional serious circumstances, requiring approval from the Bureau for a limited duration. Andorra, Australia and Slovenia have adapted their rules to allow proxy voting or remote participation during the pandemic, illustrating the evolving nature of parliamentary procedures worldwide.

In Slovenia's National Assembly, teleworking was introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic and the Rules of Procedure were amended to allow remote

plenary sessions (Slovenia 2021). Deputies participating remotely in the session 'vote by means of a voting device; if there is no such device, they vote by declaring themselves "for", "against", or "abstained" by raising a green ("for") or red ("against") card, or in any other agreed manner that clearly shows the will of the deputy' (article 93a).

Violence and harassment

Next to facilitating virtual work, hybrid parliaments can also support a violence-free parliament by reducing the chances of gender-based heckling, intimidation, bullying, harassment and sexual assault (CPA 2022). Of course, avoiding such situations through hybrid arrangements can only be a short-term solution; the transformation to a violence-free parliament requires sustained and permanent actions and rules (Childs and Palmieri 2020; Krook 2020; see also Chapter 7). Moreover, the potential that hybrid working has for prevention only applies to the parliament as a workplace, since external threats and harassment to women and marginalized MPs may continue (see Chapter 7 for details).

Gendered decision making during the pandemic

Parliaments can steer gender-sensitive elements in decision making, particularly during pandemics. The Covid-19 pandemic put women-dominated employment sectors into the spotlight. Compared with other economic crises, the women-dominated health and care sector was considered to be 'crucial infrastructure'. This led to a new understanding of the term, which was previously informed by the need for industrial production and energy sectors, both dominated by men. Nonetheless, while women worldwide made up 70 per cent of health and social care workers, they only constituted an average of 25 per cent of national legislators. In turn, while men were represented in all the decision-making bodies in charge of responding to the pandemic, women were considerably underrepresented as decision makers. This situation may inadvertently perpetuate the misconception that men are inherently better crisis managers (Childs and Palmieri 2020).

The overrepresentation of men in decision making during the pandemic often translated into gender-blind policymaking. For instance, countries could struggle between improving their pandemic emergency response budgets and maintaining their funding to gender-sensitive development and humanitarian assistance, setting back progress on gender equality in the poorest and most conflict-afflicted countries (Childs and Palmieri 2020). UN Women recognized these risks early on and published the *'Primer for Parliamentary Action: Gender Sensitive Responses to Covid-19'*, which highlighted potential actions for MPs and parliaments and provided a checklist covering the different aspects of gender-sensitive parliaments in light of the pandemic (Childs and Palmieri 2020).

In a similar vein, the IPU provided a guidance note for parliaments in 2021 that recommended how parliaments can attend to gender issues in pandemics, while pointing out that the actions also apply to other health crises (IPU 2021). The guidance note was accompanied by three reports by the IPU together with UN Women addressing specific topics: women's economic empowerment (IPU

and UN Women 2021a), violence against women and girls (IPU and UN Women 2021b), and gender-sensitive parliaments and gender-responsive legal reforms (IPU and UN Women 2021c).

A study of parliamentary debates in the Southern African region (covering Botswana, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe) showed that a combination of a high proportion of women in parliament and a high degree of democracy enabled gender issues, particularly gender-based violence, to be put on the political agenda during the pandemic (Cederquist 2021).

The Greens/European Free Alliance political group in the European Parliament commissioned a Gender Impact Assessment of the European Commission Proposals for the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (#nextGenerationEU) (Klatzer and Rinaldi 2020). The study highlighted the gendered effects of the pandemic (e.g. the women-dominated health and care workforce, the unpaid care work taken over by women, the increase in gender-based violence and the higher poverty risk for women) and how investing in addressing these would generate significant employment stimulus effects and macroeconomic gains, while increased gender equality would make societies more resilient (Klatzer and Rinaldi 2020). Klatzer and Rinaldi (2020) criticized the EU's Recovery Plan as gender-blind, with the allocated funds failing to address the gendered challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. All analysed programmes were classified as jeopardizing gender equality, since the funding was directed to sectors with a high share of men in employment (digital, energy, agriculture, construction and transport industries), while many sectors profoundly affected by the Covid-19 crisis employ a high proportion of women (Klatzer and Rinaldi 2020). The study, however, was widely acknowledged in the European Parliament, and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), and its gender mainstreaming network, was ultimately successful in inserting a gender perspective into the Covid-19 response (Elomäki and Kantola 2023).

8.2. GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

As well as major crises—such as pandemics, natural disasters and conflicts—parliaments seeking to become more gender-sensitive may be challenged by other events, such as electoral wins by parties questioning or even opposing gender equality. In such a context, parliaments need to develop strategies to maintain processes and adopt standards to avoid backsliding on gender equality. According to the *Global State of Democracy 2023* report by International IDEA, democratic backsliding is not uncommon and '2022 was the sixth consecutive year in which more countries experienced net declines in democratic processes than net improvements' (International IDEA 2023: 8).

Democracy and gender equality are closely connected and mutually constitutive. While democratization alone does not guarantee gender equality, it contributes to it by providing for the recognition and protection of rights for gender and sexual minorities. It is therefore not surprising that threats against (liberal) democracy pose a direct threat to gender equality, and vice versa.

Gender forms an important part of the recent wave of de-democratization, which is characterized by a process of decline and backlash against democratic values and practices (Bogaards and Peto 2022; Lombardo, Kantola and Rubio Marin 2021). Parties and movements at the forefront of illiberal and anti-democratic sentiments embrace ideologies that perceive feminist, pro-choice and LGBTQIA+ movements and rights as threats to traditional values (Kantola and Lombardo 2021; Wodak 2015). De-democratization also intertwines with explicit opposition to gender equality and gender backlash, as seen in anti-gender movements. These movements oppose feminist and gender equality policies, influencing politics on issues like marriage equality, abortion, reproductive technologies, sex education, sexual liberalism, transgender rights, anti-discrimination policies, gender mainstreaming and even the notion of gender itself (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Verloo 2018). In such contexts, anti-gender backlash emerges as both a result of and an integral element of growing illiberalism and the erosion of democratic values (Kovats and Poim 2015), which allows the rollback of gender equality and anti-discrimination legislation and reduces the effective organization of women's movements and their influence on policymaking (Lombardo, Kantola and Rubio Marin 2021; Roggeband and Krizsan 2020).

De-democratization and opposition to gender equality also affect parliaments, making them a critical focus and challenge for future measures to advance gender sensitivity. Within parliaments, opposition to gender equality includes resistance against women MPs and opposition to gender equality policies and laws.

Opposition to women in parliaments as a form of backlash against women's growing political presence and power occurs through processes of stereotyping, silencing and othering, and—in severe cases—in expressions of violence, which all particularly affect women of colour (Collignon, Campbell and Rüdiger 2022; Hawkesworth 2003). Opposition is also expressed against gender quotas as structural means to overcome gender barriers in politics. Mona Lena Krook (2016) identifies a variety of opposition strategies, including legal appeals to overturn quotas, attempts to violate the spirit or letter of quota rules (e.g. by engineering women's electoral losses), and efforts to delegitimize women's capacities, qualifications and performance.

Opposition to gender equality policies also comes in various forms. According to Conny Roggeband and Andrea Krizsan (2020), some forms are 'merely' discursive in that claims are made to delegitimize, oppose or discredit existing policies, whereas other forms aim to influence policy more directly—for instance, by dismantling or altering existing gender equality policies and the implementation of these policies. Finally, opposition can also involve

the erosion of accountability mechanisms, such as by curtailing (formally, organizationally or financially) the functioning of women's organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs) and state feminism (Roggeband and Krizsan 2020).

Recent studies of the European Parliament show that parties opposing gender equality use both direct and indirect strategies. According to Johanna Kantola and Emanuela Lombardo (2021), some Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) directly opposed gender equality on issues like gender quotas and LGBTQIA+ rights. They also operated with the derogatory term of 'gender ideology' in discussions on gender and education. Indirect opposition, on the other hand, took the form of framing strategies in parliamentary debates. This involved using appeals to Euroscepticism and subsidiarity to push back against gender equality policies. Additionally, they diverted attention from gender equality by linking it to other issues, such as migration and Islamophobia. They also employed self-victimization tactics, like trying to 'shift the blame' in discussions on sexual harassment and gender violence. Another strategy was to depoliticize gender equality by framing a gender binary as an indisputable biological given and, for instance, debates on the rights of intersex people as a medical rather than a political issue (Kantola and Lombardo 2021).

Similar examples are observed at the national level. In Slovakia, illiberal anti-gender parliamentary discourses are present, yet vary across parties reflecting their ideological backgrounds (Zvada 2022). In Spain, the rise of an illiberal populist party led to the erosion of crucial equality policies (Alonso and Espinosa-Fajardo 2021).

While illiberal parties are most effective when in office, their impact is also felt outside government. Once elected to parliament, illiberal parties have parliamentary rights, which may differ across countries, but often entail the right to initiate, discuss, amend and vote on legislation, the right to participate in debates, the right to parliamentary offices and staff, and the right to financial resources (Heinze 2022). Through these activities and resources, they can influence the positions of other parties, potentially triggering 'spill-over effects on more mainstream parties and politics, which can roll back their commitments to gender equality and even democratic values' (Lombardo, Kantola and Rubio Marin 2021: 521).

8.3. CONCLUSION

Crises, such as pandemics, natural disasters, violent conflicts or democratic backsliding, can pose significant challenges to democracies and to the functioning of parliaments as key democratic institutions. Responses to crises require fast and substantial changes in parliaments' practices and procedures, which may have gendered effects on political participation and decision making.

In the context of the recent Covid-19 crisis, parliaments adopted several such changes, including remote participation of MPs and committee experts, as well as remote and proxy voting. While some of these changes proved compatible with the principles of gender-sensitive parliaments (e.g. remote participation allowing MPs and experts to be heard when, for various reasons, they cannot attend in person), there are also some risks involved. The possible creation of a two-tier system where those participating remotely are not able to participate fully, especially in the informal work of parliaments, may hinder gender-equal participation. Gender-sensitive parliaments are also important for decision making during and after crises. Given that people's experiences and the societal effects of crises are often gendered, gender-sensitive law-making, scrutiny and engagement are crucial elements in parliaments' responses to crises.

The current landscape of de-democratization around the world poses a significant challenge to gender equality in and outside parliaments. In this context, democratic parliamentary actors may face the challenge of responding to democratic threats and opposition to gender equality, while building resilient institutions, policies and practices. Democratic responses to gendered de-democratization may include a deeper institutionalization and further strengthening of the consultation and participation of diverse women's organizations and civil society actors in representative processes and policymaking (see also Celis and Childs 2020). Campaigns to counter disinformation and anti-democratic rhetoric may help to expose non/de-democratic discourses and actions hidden behind seemingly democratic language. Simultaneously, the development of pro-democratic counter-narratives is important.

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CHAPTER 9

OUTLOOK:

**THE FUTURE OF GENDER
EQUALITY WITHIN AND
THROUGH PARLIAMENTS**

This handbook has defined a gender-sensitive parliament as one that values and prioritizes gender equality as an important objective, by changing institutional rules, practices, cultures and outputs towards this goal (see Childs and Palmieri 2023). Gender-sensitive parliaments have become an emergent international norm, which democratic parliaments strive to achieve. To achieve these goals, gender-sensitive parliaments envision the following transformative changes:

1. ensuring the equal presence and power-sharing between women and men in the institution, alongside removing structural barriers that may hinder this;
2. embedding considerations for women's interests and gender equality concerns within the core activities of parliaments, namely law-making and oversight;
3. supporting a working environment within the parliament's internal organization that recognizes, accommodates and values the diverse needs of individuals of different genders; and
4. establishing an external outreach that involves connecting with diverse publics and civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly those from marginalized communities.

Gender-sensitive parliaments are committed to advancing gender equality both within their parliamentary structures and through them. This handbook has offered new perspectives on how gender equality develops in relation to parliaments' core functions (representation, law-making, oversight), their internal organization and infrastructures, and their engagement with the public in a variety of contexts. Illustrative examples have also shed light on the various ways in which gender-sensitive parliaments can contribute to broader political and societal changes, thereby expanding their influence on democratic representation, legitimacy and outcomes.

This final chapter provides an overview of the key findings from preceding chapters and offers insights into the pathways towards gender-sensitive change. It clarifies the diverse roles played by various agents of change and underscores the importance of initiating institutional change.

Gender-sensitive parliaments are committed to advancing gender equality both within their parliamentary structures and through them.

9.1. PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY *WITHIN* PARLIAMENTS

Gender-sensitive parliaments are dedicated to establishing gender equality within parliaments' own rules, processes, practices and outputs. The previous chapters have shown a variety of ways in which parliaments work towards this goal. Figure 9.1 offers a descriptive overview of existing initiatives in parliaments.¹⁰





While there is considerable variation, some initiatives are more common across parliaments than others. The use of effective gender quotas, for instance, has become a widespread tool to increase women's presence in parliaments. Yet initiatives aimed at improving women's presence in positions of parliamentary power are only present in a small number of parliaments. Initiatives aimed at addressing the underrepresentation of marginalized groups of women or other gender groups are mostly absent.

To support the representation and consideration of women's interests and gender equality in law-making and oversight, parliaments rely more commonly on consultations with relevant gender experts or women's organizations and on specialized bodies in parliament. Formal commitments (such as gender equality policies or gender action plans) are less common, as are other legislative initiatives, such as impact assessments, checklists, budgeting tools and monitoring the impact of laws on gender equality.

Parliaments describe having made changes to their internal organization and infrastructure—gender-sensitive renovations and exhibitions are frequently reported. Such initiatives support gender equality in parliament by challenging gender stereotypes and transforming gender hierarchies within the institution. In relation to gender-sensitive engagement, consultations with expert stakeholders and civil society are more widespread than initiatives fostering the participation of and communication with women citizens.

¹⁰ 'Descriptive' means that we describe which initiatives are there and how common they are, but we do not prescribe which initiatives should be there.

Figure 9.1. Dimensions, forms and prevalence of gender-sensitive initiatives

DIMENSION	INITIATIVES	PREVALENCE
 i. Equal presence and power-sharing between women and men	Increasing women's presence through effective gender quotas	**
	Initiatives to improve women's presence in positions of parliamentary power (e.g. secretary general, speaker, committee chair, party caucus leader, ...)	*
	Initiatives to improve the presence of marginalized groups of women or other gender groups	*
 ii. Women's interests and gender equality in representation, law-making and oversight	Formal commitments to gender equality/sensitivity (e.g. gender equality policy, gender action plan)	*
	Initiatives to improve gender-sensitive policymaking (e.g. sex-disaggregated data, checklists, budgeting tools, ...)	*
	Opportunities to consult with relevant gender experts or women's organizations	***
	Initiatives to improve gender-sensitive oversight through monitoring	**
	Specialized bodies focusing on women's concerns and gender equality	***
 iii. Gender-sensitive parliamentary organization and infrastructure	Changes to parliamentary infrastructure	*** (exhibitions, renovations, bathrooms) * (statues, names of meeting rooms)
	Facilities for childcare or child feeding	**
	Supporting MPs and staff with family and care responsibilities	*** (paid leave) ** (flexible working hours) * (meeting hours, proxy voting, financial assistance)
	Rules, policies or training on gender-based violence, discrimination, sexism	**
	Consultation with expert stakeholders (governmental actors, civil society, academics) in legislative process	***
 iv. Gender-sensitive engagement with diverse publics and civil society organizations	Consultation and participation initiatives aimed at women citizens	*** (consultation) * (participation)
	Education initiatives targeted at women citizens	*** (cultural) * (visit, training)
	Information and communication initiatives aimed at women citizens	*

Note: *=present in only a (very) small number of parliaments; **=present in some parliaments, but not the majority; ***=present in a majority of parliaments.

Looking beyond these general patterns, the results reveal a variety of initiatives developed by parliaments, often contingent upon the national context, cultural understandings and historical trajectories. An important conclusion is that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to making parliaments more gender-sensitive. Numerous pathways exist, shaped by committed core parliamentary actors, available resources and what stage a country is at in the process.

The diversity in the paths to gender equality is mirrored in the multiplicity of **actors** engaged in parliamentary change processes. Examples presented in different chapters demonstrate that gender-sensitive changes involve a wide range of actors and stakeholders, both internal and external to parliament. This includes Members of Parliament (MPs), staff of parliamentary administrations, parliamentary officials, parliamentary staff, gender experts in parliaments and parties, academics, societal actors and social movements, as well as individual citizens.

While various actors play a role, gender-sensitive changes are undeniably reliant on the presence and efforts of a select group of **critical actors** (Childs and Krook 2009) or equality champions (Chaney 2006). These individuals are strategically positioned and particularly motivated to drive change and go the extra mile. Parliamentary leaders, encompassing both MPs and parliamentary officials, wield significant influence in processes towards gender equality and sensitivity and their formalization and institutionalization, as illustrated in Chapter 3. These leaders, still predominantly women, have the capacity to alter formal rules and establish both formal and informal support across the institution to initiate change. However, men, as the dominant population in most parliaments, play a crucial role in instigating and supporting gender-sensitive measures.

Collaborative critical networks among actors within and outside of parliament are pivotal for fostering gender-sensitive change.

Collaborative **critical networks** among actors within and outside of parliament are pivotal for fostering gender-sensitive change. Examples highlight the importance of MPs or parliamentary officials working closely with societal actors, gender experts and academics (see also Palmieri and Ballington 2023), either through specialized bodies or outside of these structures. Likewise, actors from international organizations (e.g. Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)) were pivotal in constantly promoting the norm and supporting parliaments, thereby steadily anchoring gender-sensitive parliaments on the global agenda.

Parliamentary actions may also serve as inspiration for other parliaments. A noteworthy finding is that **cross-fertilization** of ideas occurs between parliaments despite national differences. Parliaments assiduously track what is happening in other parliaments and tend to follow good examples in institutional reform and strengthening. Good practices developed by one

parliament are adopted by other parliaments and adjusted to the national context in the spirit of peer-to-peer learning. Similarly, international bodies or actors may offer external support in the form of resources, expertise, benchmarking, assessment tools and good practices from other countries.

To support the adoption and implementation of gender-sensitive changes, it is evident that actors—particularly critical actors—require financial, human and logistic resources, along with access to gender expertise and information, including gender-disaggregated data. These **resources** are essential for realizing initial commitments, sustaining changes in the short and long term, and proactively identifying future opportunities for advancing gender equality. Yet, despite potential resource constraints, the previous chapters also offer examples of decisions and initiatives that require minimal resources, or that can be achieved at low cost.

Contextual factors also play a significant role. Examples underscore the importance of current events that have garnered political and public attention and have provided **windows of opportunity** for action on previously opposed measures. The #MeTooEP mobilization in the European Parliament following sexual harassment scandals in broader society (#MeToo) and the legislative response to attacks and threats against women MPs in Bolivia (see Chapter 7) are both illustrative of this.

While windows of opportunity create the momentum to start a process of change, sustainable change requires **institutional alteration**. The formalization and institutionalization of rules are important steps in making initiatives less dependent on political goodwill. Not every initiative necessitates a formal rule, though; informal processes and activities can, in certain instances, offer flexibility to pursue initiatives that might otherwise not receive adequate support.

Finally, gender-sensitive changes are not **isolated events but ongoing journeys**. The adoption, implementation and realization of actual change may take time and necessitate continuous efforts. The personal motivations and resources of critical actors must align with institutional changes to rules, processes, structures and culture. This journey unfolds in a context of uncertainty, where initial gains may slow down or reverse, supporting governments and parliamentary majorities may change, and driving actors may experience shifts in their positions. However, sustainable change is possible, as exemplified in the previous chapters, where unexpected or unintended events often provide opportunities for policy learning.





Gender-sensitive changes are not isolated events but ongoing journeys.

9.2. PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY *THROUGH* PARLIAMENTS

Making parliaments more gender-sensitive is not just an internal process—it has tangible effects on democracies and on citizens' everyday lives. Figure 9.2 provides a summary of the diverse effects resulting from various dimensions of gender-sensitive parliaments. In brief, gender-sensitive parliaments have the potential to:

- **Improve democratic representation:** They do this by supporting the descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation of women in politics. Gender-sensitive rules and practices may improve women's numerical presence in elected bodies, as well as the representation of their interests and concerns in political processes and outcomes. By making women in politics visible, they also support women's sense of belonging and affective attachments to parliament.
- **Support democratic outcomes:** They do this by producing, amending and improving gender-sensitive legislation. Gender-sensitive legislation resonates with the gendered experiences of citizens and the assessment of their gendered impacts.
- **Improve core parliamentary functions:** This includes introducing gender budgeting, gender-sensitive law-making and oversight to ensure that gender concerns are embedded in all decisions that affect people's lives.
- **Generate conditions for accountability:** This involves fostering dialogues, collaborations and consultations with CSOs and women's movements.
- **Generate conditions for responsiveness:** This involves empowering women and making their voices and concerns heard in various stages of the policymaking process.
- **Foster democratic engagement:** They do this by supporting women's involvement in and with politics, including their political interest, knowledge, efficacy, participation and leadership skills.
- **Foster democratic legitimacy:** They do this by informing, educating, consulting and involving citizens on gender equality issues.
- **Support opportunities for citizen participation and active citizenship.**
- **Support transformative changes and gender equal social change:** By challenging systemic biases, dismantling discriminatory structures and defying gender stereotypes, gender-sensitive parliaments open the way to transformative change and contribute to a society that respects and values the diversity of their members.

Figure 9.2. The impact of gender-sensitive parliaments

DIMENSION	IMPACT
 <p>i. Equal presence and power-sharing between women and men</p>	<p>Democratic representation, including descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation</p> <p>Women's political engagement, including political interest, political knowledge, political discussions</p>
 <p>ii. Women's interests and gender equality in representation, law-making and oversight, and the budget process</p>	<p>Democratic outcomes, including gender-sensitive legislation</p> <p>Generating conditions for accountability, including fostering dialogues and collaborations between civil society actors and MPs</p> <p>Generating responsiveness, by empowering women and amplifying the voices and concerns of marginalized groups in policymaking</p> <p>Supporting transformative change, by fostering social change and greater acceptance and respect for diverse gender identities</p>
 <p>iii. Gender-sensitive parliamentary organization and infrastructure</p>	<p>Democratic representation, including descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation</p> <p>Supporting transformative change, by fostering social change and greater acceptance and respect for diverse gender identities</p> <p>Supporting women's sense of belonging and affective attachments to parliament</p> <p>Dismantling discriminatory (infra)structures, and defying gender stereotypes</p>
 <p>iv. Gender-sensitive engagement with diverse publics and civil society organizations</p>	<p>Generating conditions for accountability, including fostering dialogues with and consultations of civil society actors and women's organizations</p> <p>Fostering democratic legitimacy, by informing, consulting and involving citizens</p> <p>Women's political engagement, including political interest, knowledge, skill development (especially among the young)</p> <p>Supporting opportunities for citizen participation and active citizenship</p>

The range of effects outlined in Figure 9.2 illustrates that gender-sensitive changes in parliaments not **only benefit women MPs but also extend to a broad spectrum of individuals and groups within and outside of parliaments.** For instance, establishing violence-free parliaments creates a space and respectful work environment for MPs, officials and staff, preventing not only sexism and sexual harassment but also—if designed properly—racism, homophobia and ableism. A ‘family-friendly’ sitting schedule can enhance the work–life balance of MPs, regardless of their caregiving responsibilities. Emphasizing these broader benefits and strategically ‘marketing’ them proves to be a valuable way to initiate change and gather wide cross-party support. Parliaments can thus function as ‘role models’ for other organizations beyond the immediate parliamentary context. Similarly, the impact of gender-sensitive parliaments may influence opportunities and conditions for civil society actors to shape policy, and for citizens to participate in decisions affecting their lives.

Sustained support from other political and societal actors, including governmental bodies, political parties, bureaucracies, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, civil society actors, experts and citizens, is essential.

While parliamentary initiatives may yield multiple impacts, it is crucial to recognize that changes are contingent on various other factors. Although parliaments may express their openness to making internal processes and structures more gender-sensitive, the broader impact on legislation, outcomes and legitimacy relies on changes in domestic politics (e.g. government policies, key political actors) and socio-economic factors (e.g. economic conditions, the strength of civil society, state of democracy, level of gender backlash and opposition). The effects of gender sensitivity are not solely within the control of parliaments. **Sustained support from other political and societal actors**, including governmental bodies, political parties, bureaucracies, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, civil society actors, experts and citizens, is essential.

Considering these factors, the examples in the previous chapters underscore that even **small changes** in parliaments’ gender sensitivity can have far-reaching effects on gender equality and democracy. While significant political, institutional and infrastructural changes may be necessary in the long term, smaller adjustments can yield tangible effects in the short term.

Incremental changes to rules and procedures may have substantial effects, perhaps not immediately, but over time. Additionally, discussions about potential changes may expose parliamentary actors who are not usually involved in gender equality processes to the subject. Although impact studies on gender-sensitive parliaments are still at an early stage, parliaments can monitor the gendered effects and outcomes of various initiatives. Short-term monitoring is important for assessing the immediate effects on participants and parliaments, while long-term monitoring accommodates policy lags and the time required for changing stereotypes and enacting cultural change.

Promoting gender equality *within* and *through* parliaments covers a broad range of aspects that can be achieved by implementing different measures. The preceding sections outlined what parliaments can do and it remains the decision of each parliament in its specific context to determine what is possible, even in light of broader crisis situations or backlash on democracy itself.

In summary, transforming parliaments into gender-sensitive institutions constitutes a challenging endeavour. Nevertheless, the future of democracy relies on resilient institutions; institutions that recognize that, without gender equality, a democracy has not realized its full potential. Gender-sensitive parliaments are key to promoting gender-equal institutions and policies, to maintaining already agreed standards, and to designing their own path to this essential international norm.

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ANNEX A

METHODOLOGY

This study gathered insights on European Union member states and INTER PARES partner parliaments' gender sensitivity. Data were collected on all chambers in 43 countries, comprising the 27 EU member states and 16 INTER PARES partners (Bhutan, Bolivia, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Libya, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Montenegro, Niger, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago).

While this is not a representative 'global' study, the inclusion of a selection of countries from diverse regions of the world does offer opportunities to explore variation and to see whether conclusions for EU member state parliaments also hold in other parliaments and regions in the world. The selection of parliaments offers a wide data set, which represents variation in socio-cultural, political and institutional factors, including the level of gender equality, the type of parliament, regime type, electoral/party system, use of gender quotas, and so on. This meant that differences in context and different starting points could also be taken into consideration when analysing the gender sensitivity of parliaments.

While it is only possible to draw direct conclusions for this set of parliaments and not generalize to a wider set of countries, this handbook does occasionally refer to and discuss cases outside the initial set, especially when good practices were found outside the selection. A variety of data sources has been consulted, as follows.

Survey with parliamentary administrations (see Annex B): In 2022, the INTER PARES survey (also referred to as 'the survey') was carried out to gather data on parliaments' gender sensitivity from parliamentary administrations. The survey was created with the approval of the advisory body. The survey questions were based on similar surveys created and tested by other parliamentary organizations, in particular the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), to foster comparability. The questionnaires were translated by INTER PARES and available in five languages: Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. The surveys were distributed through the Qualtrics software, with the option to fill out the questionnaire in the accompanied Word file. Most respondents completed the survey online; only four parliamentary chambers sent in a paper version.

The survey consisted of lead questions and optional follow-up questions to collect information on the formal and informal gender-sensitive rules and practices that are established by parliaments. It alternated between closed-ended (multiple-choice) questions and open questions, with the closed-ended questions focusing on the presence of actors, rules and practices, and the open questions seeking information on good practices, examples and Stories of Change. This questionnaire focused on gathering information on parliaments' overall gender sensitivity, gender mainstreaming and gender equality in representation and parliamentary organization. Information was also sought on parliaments' gender-sensitive legislation and gender-sensitive oversight, as well as their gender-sensitive infrastructure.

To ensure compliance with national and EU legislation regarding the protection of individuals and the processing of personal data, and on the free movement of such data, translated informed consent forms accompanied the surveys.

Organization and response rate: The survey was in the field between 7 December 2022 and 17 March 2023. On 7 December 2022, the first invitation email was sent. Four subsequent reminders were sent on 19 December, 12 January, 26 January and 7 March. In total, 24 out of 61 parliamentary chambers in 21 countries completed the survey. One hard refusal was received. Seven parliamentary chambers started the survey but did not answer more than 35 per cent of the questions, while 27 did not start the survey. Two upper chambers completed the survey together with their lower chambers. This brings the response rate to 39 per cent.

Below is the list of parliamentary chambers¹¹ which responded to the INTER PARES survey:

- Belgium, Chamber of Representatives
- Belgium, Senate
- Bhutan, National Assembly
- Côte d'Ivoire, Senate
- Croatia, Parliament
- Cyprus, House of Representatives
- Czechia, Senate
- France, National Assembly
- France, Senate
- The Gambia, National Assembly
- Germany, Bundestag
- Germany, Federal Council
- Ireland, House of Representatives
- Italy, Senate of the Republic
- Lithuania, Parliament
- Luxembourg, Chamber of Deputies
- Malawi, National Assembly
- Maldives, People's Majlis
- Malta, House of Representatives
- Montenegro, Parliament
- Niger, National Assembly
- Portugal, Assembly of the Republic
- Sweden, Parliament
- Trinidad and Tobago, Parliament of the Republic

Profile of respondents: Most respondents (17 out of 24) were members of the parliamentary administration and staff, but occasionally a Member of Parliament (MP) or member of the parliamentary leadership completed the survey.

11 The names of the parliamentary chambers correspond with those used by IPU Parline (2024).

Most of the respondents identified as women (N=14). Only four identified as men. Other respondents preferred not to say or did not answer this question.

Written input from gender equality bodies: To seek additional information on parliaments' rules and practices, and identify interesting Stories of Change, a second shorter written survey was conducted among parliamentary gender equality bodies and women's caucuses in parliaments where such bodies existed. The survey consisted of lead questions and optional follow-up questions to collect information on how improved parliamentary gender sensitivity is represented in parliamentary output such as legislation, and how it generates effects on gender equality in society. It mainly contained open-ended questions gathering information on good practices, examples and Stories of Change. The invitation email was sent on 31 January 2023. Three reminders were sent on 14 February, 28 February and 7 March. The survey closed on 17 March. Four equality bodies/women's caucuses finished this survey. Their answers offered examples and good practices and were included in the handbook as such, but they were not part of the quantitative analyses.

Written input from experts: To seek additional Stories of Change showcasing changes in the gender sensitivity of parliaments, written input through email correspondence was collected from experts in the field. This input consisted of short summaries written by the experts themselves, relevant documents or websites, and information on potential points of contact.

Advisory group: Throughout the project, three meetings took place with an advisory group consisting of academic gender experts. This group delivered an additional source of input and provided recommendations throughout the process.

Online data sources: To develop knowledge on the descriptive representation of women in parliament (Chapter 2), data were gathered from several online databases. Data were collected for legislatures in office on 1 January 1995, 1 January 2005, 1 January 2015 and 1 January 2022. In cases where data were unavailable on 1 January, the closest date when the targeted legislature was in office was chosen.

The following elements have been compiled using secondary online data sources.

Number of women in parliament: To offer an overview of the numerical representation of women in parliament and positions of parliamentary leadership, existing data from IPU Parline were gathered. Furthermore, the same data source was used to find information on young people's (under 30) parliamentary representation.

Electoral system: To explore variation in women's descriptive representation according to electoral systems, information was sought from the IPU Parline database.

Parliamentary power: Information on the strength of parliament was based on Fish and Kroenig's Parliamentary Powers Index (PPI), dating back to 2009. Following analyses of the PPI's distribution among the EU member state parliaments and INTER PARES partner parliaments, the PPI was grouped and recoded.¹²

Quotas: Data on the quota types were collected from the QAROT data set and the International IDEA Gender Quotas Database. For information ranging from 1995 to 2015, the QAROT data set was used, and more recent data were sought from International IDEA's Gender Quotas Database. The quota types discerned are 'effective legally binding quotas', 'non-effective legally binding quotas' and 'no legal quotas'. For 1995–2015, the QAROT data set contained the necessary information for the three quota types. However, to gather the relevant data for 2022, the effectiveness criteria from Hughes et al. (2019)¹³ have been applied to the information available in the International IDEA Gender Quotas Database.

Analysis of survey data: The closed-ended survey questions were analysed using IBM SPSS software. The analyses are univariate and report descriptive findings based on analyses of counts and frequency tables. Conducting more advanced statistical analyses was not feasible due to the limited number of cases. The answers to the open questions were further analysed in two strands. Examples that illustrated easily comparable and already more often tested gender-sensitive parliament approaches were composed as information boxes throughout the chapters. To verify the examples and be able to contextualize them correctly for each chapter, answers were cross-checked using the documents or links provided or by recontacting the respondent or checking the Internet for more information. Simultaneously, answers that seemed promising as innovative Stories of Change were used as starting points for collecting in-depth information from which to write longer 'Stories of Change' boxes, as illustrated in the next section.

12 PPI scores range from 0 to 1 (weak = 0–0.33, moderate = 0.34–0.67, strong = 0.68–1). See: Fish and Kroenig (2009).

13 Following Hughes et al. (2019), legally binding quotas are effective when they minimally achieve a 10 per cent de facto threshold, and when: (a) candidate quotas have placement rules meeting or exceeding the quota threshold and/or legal sanctions removing parties from elections when ignoring quota rules; or (b) reserved seats distribute the seats according to a legal mechanism.

STORIES OF CHANGE

Selection criteria and procedure

The information for the Stories of Change boxes was collected in successive steps. First, the survey responses were analysed with the following questions in mind:

- What kind of gender-sensitive parliament measure for internal implementation does the example describe? Criteria were based on previous literature from IPU, OSCE/ODIHR and other (academic) publications.
- Which legislation/measure was adopted/carried out and did it potentially benefit gender equality in society at large?
- Are there any extraordinary examples that do not fit the previous categories?

In addition to the surveys, examples were collected by the team by actively searching news websites and by INTER PARES through their parliamentary contacts and events organized on the topic, and through the expert survey.

In a second step, the potential stories were ranked, with the aim of covering as many chapter subsections as possible and presenting a broad diversity of country examples. Likewise, the novelty of the topic and the significance of the change in the context of the country were additional guiding criteria. Finally, the aim was to provide examples that could be transferred to a different country or context.

For each selected potential story, the contact person from the survey or gathered by the team or INTER PARES was re-contacted. They were sent a questionnaire with guiding questions (see below) and asked if they would like an interview covering these questions. Based on written answers and interview material, the Stories of Change were compiled in close collaboration with the respondents.¹⁴ The Stories of Change were embedded in the broader context of the different chapters in a vignette-style text box. Several Stories of Change are included in each chapter, illustrating variations in approaches across countries and regions.¹⁵

¹⁴ Some minor edits of the Stories of Change provided by respondents were made for clarity.

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the 'Stories of Change' methodology, see: Ahrens, Erzeel and Fieremans (2024).

Guiding questions

‘Stories of Change’: We are looking for ‘success stories’ which offer examples of how the parliament has taken important steps forward in reaching gender equality. We emphasize examples which parliaments like to share with other parliaments in the spirit of peer-to-peer learning and which they consider good practices or important achievements in their country.

Please briefly describe the adopted change.

Form of change and basic facts

- What exactly was adopted? (e.g. new law affecting society; new formal rule or procedure with effect within the parliament; new (informal) rule or routine with effect within the parliament)
- When was it adopted? If different please also add: when will come into force?

Process leading to change

- Who were the actors that proposed and negotiated the change?
- If different: who adopted the change?
- Who was in favour, who was against the change? In other words: what were obstacles or difficulties in the process? How was conflict solved and a compromise found?

Effect of change

- What are the core differences compared to the situation before?
- Who will be affected by the change?
- How does the change improve gender equality? If applicable: how does the change promote gender equality in society at large?

Recommendations for other parliaments

- What would you recommend to other parliaments seeking a similar change? What are core points to watch out for?
- What are next steps that you realized need to be addressed in the future?

REFERENCES ANNEX A

- Ahrens, P., Erzeel, S. and Fieremans, M. 'Methodological reflections on studying gender-sensitive parliaments cross-nationally: A "most significant change" approach', *Politics and Governance*, 12 (2024), pp. 1–18, <<https://www.cogitatiopress.com/politicsandgovernance/article/view/8117>>, accessed 5 August 2024
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ANNEX B
INTER PARES
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE



INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership SURVEY ON 'GENDER EQUALITY IN AND THROUGH PARLIAMENTS: STORIES OF CHANGE'

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to be surveyed for the purposes of the publication on behalf of INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership: 'Gender equality in and through parliaments: stories of change' (working title). This publication entitled 'Gender equality in and through parliaments: stories of change' (working title) aims to map initiatives to improve the **gender sensitivity of parliaments** and advance gender equality through parliamentary work. A gender-sensitive parliament identifies gender equality as an important objective and changes parliamentary processes, rules, practices and outputs towards this objective.

We are particularly interested in the many **formal and informal** gender-sensitive parliamentary rules and practices that are established by parliaments. Formal rules and procedures are codified in written form and operate with clear enforcement mechanisms. Informal rules and practices are customary routines, traditions, values, beliefs and norms of behaviour; they are usually not written down, but they are embedded in the everyday parliamentary practices.

The survey contains lead questions and follow-up questions. If you could provide us with short summaries of 'stories of change' in your parliament, or links to relevant parliamentary files or other forms of documentation, we would be very grateful. Each section of the survey offers open answer text boxes to provide such information. In case links to files are not available, documents can be sent directly via email.

When you fill in the survey online, your answers will be automatically saved. You can go back and forth to change answers or add additional information. You can also skip questions not relevant for your context.

Anonymity will be preserved, and your answers will be treated confidentially. Your name or any other identifying information will not appear in the publication without your explicit consent. More information on the purpose of the survey and the processing of data is included in the invitation email and in the informed consent form attached to the invitation email. We kindly ask you to carefully read and sign the informed consent form and return it to us.

For more information on the survey, please contact: Prof. Silvia Erzeel, Vrije Universiteit Brussels (silvia.erzeel@vub.be), Dr Petra Ahrens, Tampere University (petra.ahrens@tuni.fi) and assistant Merel Fieremans, Vrije Universiteit Brussels (merel.fieremans@vub.be).

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What is the official name of your parliament?

2. In which country is your parliament situated?

B. GENDER-SENSITIVE LEGISLATION

3. When considering proposed legislation, including the budget, does the parliament...? Please tick 'yes', 'no' or 'sometimes' for each item.

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Require committees to adopt a gender action plan or other tools to ensure gender mainstreaming and monitor gender-sensitive legislation?			
Monitor and enforce the implementation of legislation?			

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Have access to relevant sex-disaggregated data, for instance for reviewing the budget and drafting legislation?			
Use a checklist or other practical tools for gender-sensitive legislative scrutiny, or provide training on such?			
Require a gender impact statement or gender analysis of draft laws?			
Provide opportunities to consult with relevant gender experts, women's organizations, or organizations able to speak for potential beneficiaries of draft laws?			
Ensure gender-balanced representation of key groups at public hearings, or monitor the gender of people giving advice?			
Require that gender equality issues be reflected in the debate in the chamber on a regular basis?			
Monitor for compliance with international human rights and gender equality standards, including CEDAW and other UN treaties?			
Require that legislation be written in gender-sensitive language?			
Have gender budgeting tools to assess the impact of expenditures on women?			

3.1. Which, if any, of the previous measures was particularly successful in supporting gender-sensitive legislation or you consider to be a good practice? Please explain below:

3.2. Alternatively, are there any informal measures (e.g. by parties, women's caucuses, cross-party groups)? Please explain below and/or provide relevant links to documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

4. How often are the views of the following individuals and groups consulted in the legislative process by the parliament? Please tick whether they are consulted either 'never', 'rarely', 'occasionally' or 'frequently'.

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently
Government gender equality bodies (national or local)				
Relevant line ministry (gender focal points/gender officers)				
Women's civil society/non-governmental organizations				
Trade unions that represent female workforces				
Women business owners (and their associations)				
International and/or academic gender experts				
Marginalized groups of women (for example, women with disabilities, ethnic minority women, young women, etc.)				
Other groups marginalized on gender (for example, LGBTQIA+)				

4.1. Is there a recent example of a gender-sensitive law (reform) in which one or more of the actors mentioned above were successfully involved? Please explain below and/or provide relevant links to documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

5. What has been a recent example of a gender-sensitive law (reform) that was adopted by the parliament, and how did this law/reform come about? Please explain below, including the key steps and actors involved and/or provide the links to the respective documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

C. GENDER-SENSITIVE OVERSIGHT

6. Which, if any, of the following bodies does your parliament have? Please tick 'yes' or 'no' for each of the bodies in the list below.

	Yes	No
A formal women's caucus or network		
An informal women's caucus or network		
A women's or gender equality parliamentary committee		
A human rights parliamentary committee		
A social policy/employment committee		
A formal or informal group of male MPs advocating for gender equality		
Others, please specify:		

7. Which body is MOST responsible for gender-sensitive oversight by the parliament?

7.1. Is there a recent example in which this body successfully provided gender-sensitive oversight? Please explain below and/or provide relevant links to documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

8. What has been a recent example of a specific law, policy, or programme that has been successfully subjected to gender-sensitive oversight, and how did this come about? Please explain below, including the key steps and actors involved.

D. GENDER SENSITIVITY AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING

9. Does your parliament have...? Please tick 'yes' or 'no' for each item.

	Yes	No
A current gender equality policy/strategy		
A gender equality action plan, with concrete activities, timeframes and indicators that measure change		
Obligatory gender-mainstreaming training for all new staff and MPs		

9.1. If your parliament has any of the measures listed above, what is its most important outcome(s) or achievement(s) in improving the parliament's gender sensitivity, and why? Please explain below.

9.2. Alternatively, are there any informal measures (e.g. by parties, women's caucuses, cross-party groups)? Please explain below and/or provide relevant links to documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

10. Has your parliament instituted any formal rules, policies, or training activities to secure gender-sensitive relations between MPs, between MPs and parliamentary staff, and between staff? Please tick all that apply below.

	Between MPs	Between MPs and staff	Between staff	None
National legislation on gender-based violence or sexual harassment applicable to parliament				
National anti-discrimination legislation applicable to parliament (e.g. LGBTQIA+ rights, racism)				
Formal rules or policies by parliament referring to sexist language and sexist behaviour				

	Between MPs	Between MPs and staff	<u>Between staff</u>	None
Formal rules or policies by parliament referring to other discriminatory behaviour (e.g. LGBTQIA+ rights, racism)				
A parliamentary sexual harassment code of conduct or policy				
Information and training activities to promote awareness of sexism, sexual harassment and gender bullying				
A policy or complaints procedure that deals with harassment or gender-related issues				

10.1. Which, if any, of the previous measures was particularly successful in improving the parliament's gender sensitivity or you consider to be a good practice? Please explain below.

11. Have any of the following measures been adopted to support the needs of MPs and staff with families and caring responsibilities?

	Yes	No
Discontinuance of parliamentary sittings during the evening and night		
Parliamentary sittings aligned with school calendars		
Provision of childcare facilities in parliament		
Arrangements for breastfeeding mothers (e.g. breastfeeding rooms)		
Arrangements for parents feeding babies		
Proxy voting for parliamentarians with caring responsibilities		
Flexible working hours		
Financial assistance for childcare provided to parliamentarians or their staff in extraordinary situations (e.g. long sitting hours)		
Provision of paid parental leave		
Provision of paid elderly care or other kinds of caring leave		
Travel allowances for family members provided for commuting between constituency and parliament		
Others, please specify:		

11.1. Which, if any, of the previous measures was particularly successful in supporting the needs of parliamentarians with family or caring responsibilities or you consider to be a good practice? Please explain below.

11.2. Alternatively, are there any informal measures (e.g. by parties)? Please explain below and/or provide relevant links to documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

12. Has your parliament made any changes to its infrastructure to be more gender-sensitive? Please tick 'yes' or 'no' for each item below.

	Yes	No
Changing portraits or statues in meeting rooms or halls to include more women		
Changing names of meeting rooms to include more references to women		
Exhibitions in parliament focusing on women or gender topics		
Adequate bathroom facilities for all genders		
Renovations securing access for impaired or disabled people		
Other, please specify:		

12.1. If your parliament has any of the measures listed above, what is its most important outcome(s) or achievement(s) in improving the parliament's gender sensitivity? Please explain below and/or provide relevant links to documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

13. Have any of the previously adopted measures on gender sensitivity been reviewed and revised? These may concern, for instance, standing orders, codes of conduct, infrastructure facilities, sitting hours, pay and expenses, care-related provisions. Please add some examples and/or provide links to relevant documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

14. Has your parliament undertaken a formal process to become more gender-sensitive (for example, through a self-assessment or external audit)? If so, please provide examples and/or provide relevant links or documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

15. Which individuals or groups in your parliament, if any, are considered critical actors in the promotion of gender equality and gender sensitivity, and why? Please explain. (For example, specific cross-party groups, women or men leaders, parliamentary staff members, trade unions members, etc.)

16. In the past two years, did your parliament organize any activities or events that were aimed at promoting gender equality in society? These can include information campaigns on gender equality, awareness-raising, passing of gender equal legislation, etc. Please describe the most important activities below (maximum 3).

17. What, if any, gender-sensitive changes were made to the parliament's procedures or outputs during the Covid-19 pandemic? Please tick 'yes' or 'no' for each item, or whether it already existed before Covid-19.

	Yes	No	Already existed before Covid-19
Remote participation for MPs in parliamentary debates (video conferencing)			
Remote voting for MPs			
Remote participation for experts in committees			
Additional financial or logistic support for MPs with caring needs			
Other, please specify:			

17.1. Which, if any, of the previous changes was particularly successful in improving the parliament's gender sensitivity or you consider to be a good practice? Please explain below.

18. Which, if any, gender-sensitive changes were made to the parliament's procedures or outputs in light of other crisis situations (such as climate change, economic crises, war, etc.)? Please provide examples below.

E. GENDER-SENSITIVE REPRESENTATION

19. What is the current gender composition of leadership positions in your parliament?

	Number of men	Number of women	Total number
Speaker/President			
Deputy speaker/Deputy president			
Committee chairs			
Committee deputy chairs			
Leaders of party groups/caucuses			
Deputy leaders of party groups/caucuses			
Secretary general/Clerk			
Other leadership positions, please specify:			

21. Does your parliament have any formal rules to increase or guarantee the presence of women in parliamentary leadership positions. Please tick 'yes' or 'no' for each rule. If 'yes', please specify the rule and provide more information or a link to it.

	Yes	No	Please specify the formal rule and provide more information or a link to it
Formal rules regarding women's participation as committee chairs			
Formal rules regarding women's presence as (deputy) speaker or president			
Formal rules regarding women's participation as (deputy) leaders of party groups/caucuses			
Formal rules regarding women's presence as secretary general/clerk			

20.1. Which, if any, of the previous rules was particularly successful in improving women's presence or you consider to be a good practice? Please explain below.

20.2. Alternatively, are there any informal rules (e.g. by parties, women's caucuses, cross-party groups)? Please explain below and/or provide relevant links to documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

21. Does your parliament have any formal rules to increase or guarantee the presence of minority women, young women, or other groups in parliamentary leadership positions. Please tick 'yes' or 'no' for each rule. If 'yes', please specify the rule and provide more information or a link to it.

	Yes	No	Please specify the rule and provide more information or a link to it
Formal rules regarding the presence of <i>ethnic or religious minority women</i> in parliamentary leadership positions			
Formal rules regarding the presence of <i>young women</i> in parliamentary leadership positions			
Formal rules regarding the presence of <i>other (sub)groups of women</i> in parliamentary leadership positions			
Formal rules regarding the presence of transgender and/or non-binary persons			
Formal rules regarding women MPs' participation in parliamentary delegations			
Formal rules regarding women's presence in other leadership positions, please specify:			

21.1. Which, if any, of the previous rules was particularly successful in improving the presence of the above-mentioned groups or you consider to be a good practice? Please explain below.

21.2. Alternatively, are there any informal rules (e.g. by parties, women's caucuses, cross-party groups)? Please explain below and/or provide relevant links to documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

22. Does your parliament have any formal rules to encourage or guarantee committee membership of women and men in line with their overall share in parliament? Please explain below and/or provide relevant links to documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

23. Alternatively, are there any informal rules (e.g. by parties, cross-party groups) to encourage or guarantee committee membership of women and men in line with their overall share in parliament? Please explain below and/or provide relevant links to documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

24. Does your parliament target its engagement at women through any of the following measures? Please tick 'yes' or 'no' for each measure. If 'yes', please specify the measures taken.

	Yes	No	If yes, please specify the measure
Specific actions to inform women citizens on parliamentary developments, e.g. through newsletters or sections on parliamentary websites			
Digital tools to interact with women citizens online, e.g. through social media, virtual town hall meetings			
Parliamentary visits targeting women			
Trainings targeted at women, e.g. training to be an expert for committees, etc.			
Cultural events or expositions organized in parliament targeting women and/or women's issues and/or gender equality			
Committee meetings, hearings and round tables inviting women citizens			
Citizens' assemblies and juries targeting women			
'Women's parliaments' aimed at familiarizing women with politics			
Other, please specify (also specific measures targeting men to engage with women's issues and/or gender equality)			

24.1. Which, if any, of the previous measures was particularly successful in engaging women with parliament or you consider to be a good practice? Please explain below.

24.2. Alternatively, are there any informal measures (e.g. by parties, cross-party groups, civil society organizations)? Please explain below and/or provide relevant links to documents. In case online links are not available, feel free to send the files directly via email.

25. Is there anything you would like to add about your parliament's gender sensitivity, or suggest the names of other relevant contact persons?

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The final two questions are about your own background.

26. Which of the following describes your position in your parliament best?

	Please tick as many as apply
Member of Parliament (MP, elected representative)	
Parliamentary leadership	
Parliamentary administration and staff	
Other, please specify:	

27. How do you identify?

	Please tick only one
Female	
Male	
Non-binary	
Other	
Prefer not to say	

Anonymity

28. Please fill in your name and contact details if you agree to be contacted for further information. Your name will not be included in the publication without your explicit consent.

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Thank you very much for completing the survey, we greatly appreciate it.

About this handbook

Beyond Numbers: Stories of Gender Equality in and through Parliaments is the new handbook produced through the Women and Youth in Democracy (WYDE) initiative by the INTER PARES project, which is the European Union's Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments, which aims to contribute to making democracies stronger. Currently in its second phase, INTER PARES is the first global project funded by the EU and implemented by International IDEA, contributing towards strengthening the capacity of parliaments in partner countries, by enhancing their legislative, oversight, representative, budgetary and administrative functions. Through facilitating demand-driven peer-to-peer partnerships between partner parliaments and EU member state parliaments, the project aims to make parliaments more effective, transparent, accountable, representative and approachable.

Gender equality is a key area of focus for the INTER PARES programme and is mainstreamed across all its pillars. For the EU, the Gender Action Plan III is the blueprint for building a gender-equal world. A key pillar is making EU engagement on gender equality more effective as a cross-cutting priority of EU external action in its policy and programming work.

INTER PARES II is a key component of the European Commission's WYDE initiative, which recognizes the important role of women and youth as key agents for development and change, and wants to strengthen their rights, their empowerment and their participation in public and political affairs.

This handbook aims to provide a comprehensive framework for embedding gender sensitivity into the heart of parliamentary functions and processes, while highlighting practical stories of change to inspire and offer a fresh perspective on what enables change in parliaments across the world.

About the authors

Authors

Petra Ahrens is Academy of Finland Research Fellow at Tampere University, Finland, and is conducting her research project 'On the road to gender-sensitive parliaments? Gender equality and democratic practices in the Finnish, German and Polish Parliament compared' (2021–2026). Previously, she was Senior Researcher in the European Research Council-funded research project 'Gender, party politics and democracy in Europe: A study of European Parliament's party groups' at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Tampere University, Finland. Before that, she held positions as an assistant professor at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (2014–2016), as Marie-Curie-Sklodowska-Fellow and guest professor at the University of Antwerp, Belgium (2017–2019), and as Guest Professor for Gender and Diversity at the Free University Berlin (2021). Her research focuses on gender policies and politics in the European Union and its institutions, gender equality in Germany, gender-sensitive parliaments and transnational civil society. She has published in journals such as *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Parliamentary Affairs*, *Party Politics* and *West European Politics*. Her latest books include *European Parliament's Political Groups in Turbulent Times* (co-edited with Anna Elomäki and Johanna Kantola; Palgrave Macmillan 2022), *Gender Equality in Politics: Implementing Party Quotas in Germany and Austria* (co-authored with Katja Chmielewski, Sabine Lang and Birgit Sauer; Springer 2020), *Gendering the European Parliament: Structures, Policies and Practices* (co-edited with Lise Rolandsen Agustín; Rowman & Littlefield/ECPR Press 2019) and *Actors, Institutions, and the Making of EU Gender Equality Programs* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018).

Silvia Erzeel is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Belgium, and a member of the VUB Research Centre for Democratic Futures. Previously, she was a F.R.S.-FNRS postdoctoral researcher at the Université catholique de Louvain (2013–2016). She held international visiting positions at Brown University, USA (2013–2014) and the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands (2012). Her research interests focus on the causes and consequences of gender and social inequalities in representative democracy, and how representative democracy is innovated to reflect the views and needs of all. She studies these topics from a comparative perspective, using survey research and/or in-depth interviewing. Her PhD thesis (2012, VUB) dealt with the political representation of women in national and regional parliaments in Europe. She has also worked on the legitimacy and effects of gender quotas, and on intersectionality in political representation in Europe. Recently, she has developed a research agenda relating to the question of how representative actors and institutions (such as political parties and parliaments) navigate the so-called crisis of representative democracy, and how they respond to it by means of democratic reform and innovations. She is particularly interested in developments aimed at the inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups. Her recent publications appear in academic journals, such as *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, *Politics & Gender*, *Political*

Studies Review and *Parliamentary Affairs*. As well as publishing articles, she is the co-author of the introductory political science textbook *Politiek: Een inleiding in de politieke wetenschappen*, with Marc Hooghe, Eline Severs and Kris Deschouwer (Boom 2022).

Editor

Hannah Johnson is the Senior Gender Advisor, INTER PARES, and the Welsh Parliament/Senedd Cymru's knowledge exchange lead, and has 14 years of experience working in parliaments around the world. She has provided advice and technical support to parliaments in Bhutan, Chile, Egypt, Fiji, The Gambia, Laos, Malaysia and Ukraine, among others. Hannah specializes in gender-sensitive parliamentary reform, parliamentary research, committees, legislative scrutiny and oversight inquiries. She wrote an international handbook on gender-sensitive scrutiny for INTER PARES, which was published in 2022. She has a master of laws in human rights law, specializing in the human rights of women. Hannah has published academic articles on gender-sensitive legislative scrutiny in *The Theory and Practice of Legislation* journal, and diversity in evidence to parliamentary committees in the *European Journal of Politics and Gender*. Hannah is on the Scottish Parliament's Advisory Group on Gender-Sensitive Parliaments, and the advisory group of the International Community of Practice on Post-Legislative Scrutiny.

Contributor

Merel Fieremans is a PhD candidate in political science at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Belgium, and a member of the VUB Research Centre for Democratic Futures. She holds an MSc in European and International Governance (2022, VUB). Her research interests encompass political communication, gender and politics, and party politics. During her PhD project, she is studying the causes and consequences of (party) ambiguity within the Belgian political context.

Advisory group

The advisory group, made up of experts and partner organizations, has met several times over the development of the publication, provided valuable input and Stories of Change, and overseen the development of the publication. The advisory group is composed of the following experts:

Julie Ballington—Global Policy Advisor on Political Participation, UN Women

Saša Gavrić—Gender Officer, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

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About INTER PARES and WYDE

The WYDE | INTER PARES, funded by the European Union and implemented by International IDEA, is an innovative global project aiming to strengthen the capacity of parliaments by enhancing their legislative, oversight, representative, budgetary and administrative functions, through peer-to-peer exchanges between selected Parliaments from partner countries and Parliaments from European Union Member States, promotion of sustainable inter-parliamentary cooperation and production of comparative research and knowledge on parliamentary support approaches. It focuses both on elected Members of Parliament (MPs), particularly in their capacity as members of parliamentary committees and on the staff of parliaments' secretariats.

In 2024, the EU launched the three-year project The WYDE | Women's Leadership Initiative to promote the full and effective participation in decision-making of diverse women, especially those most often left behind, by leveraging collective action, partnerships, coordination, knowledge, and resources **globally**. The EU's continued support for INTER PARES now falls within this umbrella initiative. **WYDE** aims to strengthen the empowerment and participation of women and youth in public and political life, while promoting political pluralism and inclusion democratic processes.

As a multipartner initiative, **WYDE** includes five intertwined components: **WYDE | Inter Pares** for youth and women in parliaments; **WYDE | Civic Engagement** for youth participation in public affairs; **WYDE | Freedoms** for youth's defense of freedoms of association and assembly; **WYDE | Political Parties**; and **WYDE | Women's Leadership**. Each of these components aligns with the EU Gender Action Plan, the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, and the EU Youth Action Plan.

About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with 35 Member States founded in 1995, with a mandate to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

WHAT WE DO

We develop policy-friendly research related to elections, parliaments, constitutions, digitalization, climate change, inclusion and political representation, all under the umbrella of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We assess the performance of democracies around the world through our unique Global State of Democracy Indices and Democracy Tracker.

We provide capacity development and expert advice to democratic actors including governments, parliaments, election officials and civil society. We develop tools and publish databases, books and primers in several languages on topics ranging from voter turnout to gender quotas.

We bring states and non-state actors together for dialogues and lesson sharing. We stand up and speak out to promote and protect democracy worldwide.

WHERE WE WORK

Our headquarters is in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa and West Asia, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

OUR PUBLICATIONS AND DATABASES

We have a catalogue with more than 1,000 publications and over 25 databases on our website. Most of our publications can be downloaded free of charge.

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INTER PARES
Parliaments in Partnership
EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments



European Union

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Beyond Numbers: Stories of Gender Equality in and through Parliaments is the new handbook produced through the Women and Youth in Democracy (WYDE) initiative by the INTER PARES project, which is the European Union's Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments, which aims to contribute to making democracies stronger. Currently in its second phase, INTER PARES is the first global project funded by the EU and implemented by International IDEA, contributing towards strengthening the capacity of parliaments in partner countries, by enhancing their legislative, oversight, representative, budgetary and administrative functions. Through facilitating demand-driven peer-to-peer partnerships between partner parliaments and EU member state parliaments, the project aims to make parliaments more effective, transparent, accountable, representative and approachable.

Gender equality is a key area of focus for the INTER PARES programme and is mainstreamed across all its pillars. For the EU, the Gender Action Plan III is the blueprint for building a gender-equal world. A key pillar is making EU engagement on gender equality more effective as a cross-cutting priority of EU external action in its policy and programming work.

INTER PARES II is a key component of the European Commission's WYDE initiative, which recognizes the important role of women and youth as key agents for development and change, and wants to strengthen their rights, their empowerment and their participation in public and political affairs.

This handbook aims to provide a comprehensive framework for embedding gender sensitivity into the heart of parliamentary functions and processes, while highlighting practical stories of change to inspire and offer a fresh perspective on what enables change in parliaments across the world.

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the European Union, as part of the project WYDE | INTER PARES—'INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership—EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments, Phase II'. Its contents are the sole responsibility of International IDEA and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.