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GENDER-SENSITIVE PRACTICES IN PARLIAMENTS

Parliaments and legislative bodies are core actors in the realisation of the gender equality agenda in their capacity as law makers, oversight bodies, and employers. As representatives of the people, parliaments are expected to both reflect the wishes and needs of the women and men they represent, but also ensure that all policies, including legislation, promote their interests. Ensuring equal opportunities for women and men, girls and boys to fully realise their potential requires that parliaments and legislatures themselves shape and advance gender-sensitivity in all processes, practices and procedures. This section of the Toolkit aims to provide parliaments, legislatures and other deliberative bodies with a strategic framework and instruments to become gender-sensitive, help design, implement, monitor and evaluate public policies from a gender equality perspective, and enable women's access to top positions. It also aims to create and strengthen linkages between gender equality efforts within legislative bodies with the practices of other political and public institutions, such as electoral management bodies (EMB), national statistical offices and political parties.

4.1. MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN INTERNAL PARLIAMENTARY PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

Key Provision of the *OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life*

Strengthen accountability and oversight mechanisms for gender equality and mainstreaming initiatives across and within government bodies by encouraging a greater role of parliaments and parliamentary committees to support progress in gender equality, for example: by integrating gender perspectives in parliamentary practices, legislation and budgeting; by promoting legislative initiatives focusing on gender equality; and by providing oversight of the implementation of gender equality and mainstreaming strategies and initiatives.

4.1.1. Priority checklist for mainstreaming gender in internal parliamentary processes and practices

- A. A framework policy for gender mainstreaming has been established in the parliament
- B. Parliamentary gender mainstreaming mechanisms (e.g. committees, caucuses, research bodies, secretariats/ commissions) are created and empowered
- C. Processes and tools are in place to enable gender mainstreaming in parliamentary systems and practices
- D. Internal gender mainstreaming outputs and outcomes are monitored

4.1.2. Self-assessment tool

A. framework policy for gender mainstreaming has been established in the parliament

Self-assessment questions

- What policies inform the political institution's overall approach to gender mainstreaming and gender equality?

Why is it important?

Gender policies in parliaments should set out a strategic vision and plan to achieve specific objectives and can be used to hold any institution accountable for their actions – or inaction. Gender equality policies can cover gender mainstreaming, codes of conduct, equal access to resources or equal opportunities for advancement, anti-discrimination, and harassment, including provisions relating to grievance mechanisms or mechanisms for redress.

It is important to align goals and objectives with existing national gender equality policies. Self-assessments or gender audits can help identify existing efforts, opportunities for scale-up and persisting gaps and challenges, and serve as a baseline for measuring progress.

Consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, including governmental gender mechanisms (within ministries, statistics offices, electoral management bodies), parliamentary gender committees, caucuses, and secretariats, political parties, and civil society organisations – not only creates buy-in, but may also help identify resources and expertise to support policy implementation.

What are the key actions to consider?

- Securing endorsement and support of parliamentary leadership;
- Conducting gender audits or self-assessment of current policy gaps;
- Identifying and mandating relevant bodies;
- Determining clear, useful indicators and baselines to measure progress including through a needs assessment survey;
- Specifying reporting frameworks and relationships (when are gender equality reports made and to whom);
- Working towards cross-party consensus on gender equality initiatives;
- Ensuring the active participation of employees and key stakeholders in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of the gender equality plan.

What are the pitfalls to avoid?

- Creating a policy “in a vacuum” or without reference to broader gender policy initiatives and commitments;
- “Doing it alone”: underdeveloped consultation processes within parliament or externally;
- Establishing unrealistic objectives, or setting an institution up to fail;
- Failing to take into account broader organisational political dynamics;
- Making policy progress dependent on financial resources.
- Placing responsibility for gender mainstreaming solely in gender equality mechanisms.

Box 4.1. Good practice example(s): The Swedish Parliament’s Action Programme for Gender Equality

In the Swedish Parliament (Riksdag), an action programme for gender equality is adopted by the Riksdag Board for each electoral period. Within the framework of the action programme for gender equality in the Riksdag for the electoral period 2014–2018, a survey with in-depth interviews was performed among the members. The findings from these were reflected into the development of the action programme for the 2018–22 electoral period, which focused on workplace culture, such as how MPs treat, address and approach each other. A working group consisting of one representative from each party was responsible for implementing the programme, with the goal of creating a gender-aware parliament.

Source: The Swedish Parliament, (n.d.^[1]), *Gender equality Work in the Riksdag*, <https://www.riksdagen.se/en/how-the-riksdag-works/the-work-of-the-riksdag/gender-equality-work-in-the-riksdag/> (accessed in November 2022).

B. Parliamentary gender mainstreaming mechanisms (e.g. committees, caucuses, research bodies, secretariats/ commissions) are created and empowered

Self-assessment questions

- To what extent are existing gender mainstreaming mechanisms resourced to undertake their mandate?

Why is it important?

Many parliaments have established committees, sub-committees or multi-portfolio committees to address gender equality concerns, with mandates clearly spelled out in rules of procedures, statutes, or other procedural documents. Properly mandated committees are not only responsible for drafting or amending gender equality laws, but are also empowered to scrutinise all governmental policy and legislation from a gender perspective, to ensure that all laws abide by international gender equality commitments and are aligned with national policies. Importantly, this should include a mandate to review and amend budget bills.

There are a range of other gender equality mechanisms that parliaments can support financially and/or in-kind to promote gender mainstreaming and gender equality. These include: formal or informal cross-party women's caucuses, clubs or networks, gender divisions or departments within the parliamentary secretariat, and gender or women's research centres. While few informal or cross-party mechanisms enjoy the power to initiate legislation like their formal committee counterparts, they can be given powers to scrutinise legislation, particularly where formal gender committees do not exist.

What are the key actions to consider?

- Clearly specifying roles, responsibilities and powers of gender equality mechanisms in rules of procedure or statutes;
- Empowering gender bodies to scrutinise budget plans, laws and policies;
- Equipping parliamentary bodies with sufficient resources such as people, budgets, access to experts and expertise, and time to deliberate;
- Providing other types of support, such as staff, work rooms and access to communications resources;
- Recognising and supporting informal gender mechanisms such as caucuses.

What are the pitfalls to avoid?

- Positioning gender mainstreaming work as an "add-on" or voluntary activity;
- Unequal access to parliamentary resources;
- Limited oversight powers of gender bodies;
- Insufficient powers of parliamentary gender bodies to review and amend budget bills;
- Limited enforcement of the oversight powers of parliamentary gender bodies;
- Scheduling important votes or activities at the same time that gender bodies such as committees or caucuses are meeting.

Box 4.2. Good practice example(s): Parliamentary gender mainstreaming mechanisms

Many OECD member countries have established some form of gender equality committees. In Mexico, the Gender Equality Commission of the Chamber of Deputies was established to promote reform on highly gender-sensitive issues – such as violence, health, and political participation – and to encourage state and local governments to adopt public policies on gender equality and equal opportunity. It also lobbies for the approval of budgets that meet the specific needs of Mexican women. Since the Congress' Commission came into being, state-level congressional bodies have established similar commissions to promote gender equality at the sub-national level. The Gender Equality Commission of the Chamber of Deputies is also actively campaigning for the use of the budget gender, earmarked through the elaboration of Expenditure Annex for Equality between Women and Men in the Federal Expenditures Budget.

Few women's caucuses in the OECD region enjoy the power to initiate legislation however do exercise powers of scrutiny and input. The Network of Women Members of the Finnish Parliament, for example, enjoys the power to draft amendments (such as to the law on gender equality and law on provision of universal childcare); review legislation from a gender perspective; contribute to the development of legislation, as well as the provision of micro-loans to women entrepreneurs; and promote the use of gender budgeting. In Chile, women's caucuses and groups in the Senate has played a leading role in the adoption of a new legislation establishing the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality, providing six-month maternity leave and combatting violence against women.

Even where such mechanisms do not enjoy core parliamentary powers, parliaments can still provide support by ensuring equal access to resources. In Finland, the Network of Women Members of the Finnish Parliament is able to access the resources of the internal research service as well as of the International Unit; has been provided a room to meet and has been allocated funds by the Parliament to cover meetings and events. The Swedish Parliament provides the Speakers' Reference Group on gender with two parliamentary staff members as well as resources earmarked from the Parliament's general budget.

Leadership support and, where possible, direct participation in gender mechanisms can also demonstrate parliamentary support for gender equality. The Swedish Reference Group was purposefully established as a mechanism to be led by the Speaker, whether a man or a woman, to indicate the Parliament's commitment to gender equality and women's advancement.

Source: OECD (2018^[2]), *Toolkit on Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality*, OECD, Paris, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/toolkit-for-mainstreaming-and-implementing-gender-equality.pdf>.

C. Processes and tools are in place to enable gender mainstreaming in parliamentary systems and practices

Self-assessment questions

- What tools and processes (e.g. gender analysis, stakeholder consultation, access to gender-disaggregated data, gender impact assessments, gender budgeting) are legislatures empowered and supported to employ?
- How effective are the processes and tools available?

Why is it important?

A range of tools have been developed specifically for the use of parliamentary members and staff to guide gender mainstreaming efforts. Gender analysis allows a better understanding of the perspectives, interests and needs of women and men, girls and boys in order to make public policy more responsive and effective. It looks at relationships, access to opportunities, and access to and control over resources. It includes the preparation of research reports, the analysis of public policy and laws, and the scrutiny of government performance, in order to better understand the gender impact of policies, programmes, laws and initiatives.

Gender impact assessments also look at the impact of legislation and policy on women and men, girls and boys. *Ex ante* assessments use a systematic checklist to assess the potential impact of legislation. *Ex post* assessments analyse the actual impact of policy, legislation, programmes and projects to determine whether objectives were met, whether gender equality was achieved, and how gaps or discriminatory outcomes can be addressed through amendments.

Both tools work best when based on in-depth consultations with a range of stakeholders of both sexes and from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, ages and ethnicities. In addition, they require access to gender-disaggregated data, accessed either through the parliament's own research bodies or appropriate government bodies, such as national statistical bodies.

Gender budgeting tools have been developed to aid parliamentarians in analysing the budget from a gender perspective. These include gender policy appraisals (a type of gender analysis of the budget); gender-disaggregated beneficiary assessments (to collect the views and needs of women and men, girls and boys); gender-disaggregated public expenditure analysis; gender-disaggregated tax analysis (to determine the differential impact of tax systems on women and men); gender-disaggregated analysis of the impact of the budget on time-use; gender-aware medium-term economic policy framework; and gender-aware budget statements. The use of such tools can provide gender-disaggregated data to inform gender-sensitive and responsive policy making.

What are the key actions to consider?

- Properly resourcing secretariat or administrative gender bodies to support the use of gender mainstreaming tools;
- Building in-house gender research capacities, including in gender analysis and analysis of gender-disaggregated data;
- Mandating the use of gender mainstreaming tools in core parliamentary processes, such as gender analysis and/or gender impact assessments;
- Introducing and undertaking gender budgeting initiatives;
- Building the capacity of members of parliament (MPs) and staff to apply core gender mainstreaming tools;
- Developing channels to promote representative consultation of stakeholders and beneficiaries of proposed policies, programmes or laws;
- Creating a feedback loop between the consultation and the policy-making process.

What are the pitfalls to avoid?

- Insufficient investment in strengthening capacity of all MPs and staff, including leadership, on the use and application of core gender tools;
- Limiting consultation efforts to the “usual suspects” in policy review and development;

- Limited integration of gender-disaggregation in data collection processes;
- Insufficient allocation of resources to build capacity of bodies undertaking gender analysis and other gender mainstreaming tools;
- Setting expectations too high in terms of gender budgeting outcomes;
- Ignoring the findings of gender mainstreaming tools, including gender budget statements.

Box 4.3. Good practice example(s): Gender Mainstreaming in Parliamentary Processes

Sweden's Gender Mainstreaming in Parliamentary Legislative Processes

The Swedish Parliament (Riksdag) introduced gender mainstreaming in 1994. This means that a gender equality perspective should be taken into account by the Riksdag and its committees in all scrutiny of the executive. All new legislation should be accompanied by an analysis of the impact they will have on men and women. So when parliament committees are examining legislation, they are able to take into account its impact on men and women and use this information to make a more informed decision when they vote on whether or not the proposal should go ahead. Gender has also been mainstreamed into budget scrutiny, with the Committee for Finance examining the annual budget for gender equality aspects as a matter of course.

Denmark's Gender Mainstreaming Mechanisms in Parliament

The Danish Parliament integrates gender equality in its parliamentary practices. With regards to male engagement and support within the Parliament, Denmark reports that both men and women equally participate in and contribute to the work of the Gender Equality Committee. The committee is also planning to undertake an analysis of the Gender Mainstreaming Assessment as a means to make this tool more effective in assessing legislative proposals from a gender perspective. Moreover, all Member of Parliaments (MPs) have equal right to parental leave regardless of gender and the Parliament allows for substitution of MPs on parental leave.

Source: (OECD, 2018^[3]; OECD, 2019^[4]).

D. Internal gender mainstreaming outputs and outcomes are monitored

Self-assessment questions

- How does the parliament facilitate oversight of its internal gender mainstreaming agenda?

Why is it important?

It is crucial to carry out regular monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming and gender equality implementation to identify successes and achievements, pinpoint continuing gaps and challenges, and hold different actors accountable for specific gender mainstreaming actions. Gender equality mechanisms should also regularly engage in self-assessment (or commission external experts to conduct an evaluation) of how effective they are in promoting gender mainstreaming. Internal oversight provides an opportunity for the parliament to reflect on the gendered nature of the institution and identify innovative ways forward.

Internal monitoring and evaluation through regular gender audits or assessments can help assess institutional progress towards achieving a more gender-friendly working culture. Such audits should examine both the effectiveness of formal procedures in promoting gender equality as well as whether informal practices challenge or reinforce gender-based stereotypes.

Internal consultation is also critical; engaging with parliamentary representatives and staff can help publicise gender mainstreaming efforts, build buy-in and produce new ideas and perspectives.

Institutions and gender equality mechanisms should also celebrate and publicise their achievements, such as in annual reports, on the government or parliamentary website, via newsletters or promotional materials or through partnerships with the media or academia.

What are the key actions to consider?

- Performing internal gender audits to assess successes and challenges in implementing the gender mainstreaming policy;
- Securing the buy-in and, where possible, participation of leadership in assessment processes to serve as gender “champions”;
- Consulting a broad range of internal and external stakeholders to collect a diverse range of views and good practices;
- Ensuring that men occupying a range of positions are engaged in the process;
- Specifically identifying remaining gaps or unintended consequences of policy implementation;
- Widely disseminating audit findings;
- Creating channels for gender audit findings to feed into existing policies in order to further strengthen implementation and outcomes;
- Celebrating and promoting gender mainstreaming achievements as shared parliamentary accomplishments;
- Encouraging parliamentary leadership to assume ownership for gender audit results.

What are the pitfalls to avoid?

- Limited engagement of men or key external interlocutors, or dismissing their views;
- Insufficient support and buy-in of parliamentary leadership;
- Insufficient engagement of political party leaders in the assessment process;
- Inadequate use of gender audit findings to inform parliamentary gender and other policies.



Box 4.4. Good practice example(s): Towards United Kingdom's Gender-Sensitive Parliament

The Women and Equalities Committee of the House of Commons, United Kingdom has launched an inquiry to assess recent progress and make recommendations to create a more 'gender-sensitive' Parliament. This was done in light of a gender-sensitive audit of the UK Parliament carried out in 2018, which found barriers such as:

- The culture of Parliament as highlighted in recent reports of bullying and harassment, and sexual harassment;
- The challenges that working in Parliament poses for family life, including the unpredictability of business and potential long hours;
- The financial impact of standing for Parliament; and
- Online threats and threats to physical security, in particular gender-based intimidation, harassment and violence against female Parliamentarians and female candidates.

A series of actions includes a new Proxy Voting scheme for those on parental leave (and for COVID-related reasons) and an Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme containing a Behaviour Code for the whole Parliamentary Community.

Source: Information provided by the Government of United Kingdom as part of the OECD (2021), Survey on Gender Mainstreaming and Governance (unpublished).

4.2. INTEGRATING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN PARLIAMENTS' EXTERNAL OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY FUNCTIONS

Key provision of the *OECD recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life*

Strengthen accountability and oversight mechanisms for gender equality and mainstreaming initiatives across and within government bodies by encouraging a greater role of parliaments and parliamentary committees to support progress in gender equality, for example: by integrating gender perspectives in parliamentary practices, legislation and budgeting; by promoting legislative initiatives focusing on gender equality; and by providing oversight of the implementation of gender equality and mainstreaming strategies and initiatives.

4.2.1. Priority checklist for integrating a gender perspective in parliaments' external oversight and accountability functions

- A. Appropriate parliamentary bodies possess the mandate, capacity and resources to draft and review legislative initiatives from a gender perspective
- B. Parliamentary gender bodies can exercise oversight and accountability functions for the implementation of the government's gender equality agenda

4.2.2. Self-assessment tool

A. *Appropriate parliamentary bodies possess the mandate, capacity and resources to draft and review legislative initiatives from a gender perspective*

Self-assessment questions

- How does the institution ensure that all legislative outputs (laws, regulations, ordinances, and recommendations) do not discriminate against women or men, girls or boys?

Why it is important?

Parliaments and deliberative bodies have a key role to play in ensuring that legislation does not discriminate against men or women and that all laws ultimately promote gender equality. Empowering parliamentary bodies to exercise oversight of the implementation of legislation (including budgets) is also necessary to make gender equality a reality.

A checklist for reviewing legislation from a gender perspective, based on relevant national and international obligations, is a helpful starting point for identifying directly or indirectly discriminatory provisions and for incorporating provisions to achieve gender equality across all spheres. As noted, *ex ante* and *ex post* gender impact assessments can provide a formal means of assessing the impact of proposed or actual legislation on women and men, girls and boys (see Assessment of gender impacts of various public governance dimensions).

What are the key actions to consider?

- Mandating parliamentary body (committee or caucus) to be responsible for reviewing all draft legislation from a gender perspective before it is passed with the support of parliamentary library or research bodies;
- Ensuring that the parliamentary body considers both national and international gender obligations in the review of legislation;
- Formalising the mandate and duty to consult in the rules of procedure, or in legislation;
- Facilitating, via rules of procedures, equal access to parliamentary resources for gender bodies such as committees;
- Formalising the use of gender tools such as gender checklists or impact assessment in rules of procedure;
- Building capacity within all parliamentary bodies to better understand the potential and actual gender impacts of laws;
- Providing dedicated research and administrative support to parliamentary bodies mandated to address gender issues;
- Enabling informal groups such as women's caucuses to support or engage in the review of legislation from a gender perspective;
- Using gender-sensitive language in all written and oral communication.

What are the pitfalls to avoid?

- Only concentrating responsibility for parliamentary and legislative gender mainstreaming in gender committees or bodies;
- Insufficient mandates of relevant gender bodies;

- Lack of formalisation of consultation with mandated parliamentary bodies as part of the legislative process;
- Devaluing gender-mandated bodies, including symbolically, including through insufficient resource allocation;
- Ignoring the expertise that informal bodies such as women’s caucuses can provide, especially where formal dedicated gender bodies do not exist;
- Limited consideration by parliamentary leadership of the recommendations of gender-mandated bodies.

Box 4.5. Good practice example(s): Advancing gender-sensitive legislation through parliamentary bodies

Bodies supporting legislation with a gender perspective in OECD Parliaments

In Belgium, the Gender Mainstreaming Act of 2007 requires a “gender test” to be applied to each new policy or law. In addition, the federal government is required to define strategic gender equality objectives at the beginning of each legislative session, including indicators, and to submit annual reports of progress achieved in implementing the measures. The Parliament has been granted powers to scrutinise ministerial performance through reference to the indicators. Gender mechanisms in the Korean Parliament issue a newsletter on gender-sensitive legislation three times a year, which is disseminated across the parliament as well as to government gender bodies. Likewise, every four years a compendium of gender legislation is produced and distributed to new MPs, parliamentary staff and academics.

The Turkish Parliament has developed a gender checklist to guide the review of legislative drafts by parliamentarians and staff. The Gender Equality Committee in the Latvian Parliament has the right to be assigned as a responsible body for deliberating the draft laws related to gender equality. The Latvian Parliament conducts impact assessment of legislative proposals, the gender committee has the mandate to analyse legislative drafts on gender equality matters. Australia’s Joint Committee on Human Rights reviews legislation for compliance with seven international treaties to which it is a state party, including United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in accordance with the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act of 2011. The Committee reviews all bills introduced into the parliament during a set period of time. The Committee reviews the statement of compatibility that accompanies each piece of legislation and identifies which draft require further scrutiny from a human rights and gender perspective. The Committee then undertakes an examination of those bills requiring further scrutiny and issues a report with comments for the sponsoring committee’s attention.

Denmark’s Gender Equality Committee

In Denmark, the Gender Equality Committee (GEC) makes use of all the parliamentary tools (as other standing committees) in order to scrutiny and monitor the government. This could be through public and closed hearings, parliamentary questions, study trips and meetings with civil society, and in general civil society organisations have quite easy access to MP’s and committees. The Committee does not only address issues with a “gender equality tag” on it, but also issues which are gender neutral on the paper, but which has a greater impact on either women and men, and the Committee also works with the LGBT-agenda. The given scope of the Committees work is quite broad, so it is the members who set the agenda by initiating initiatives in the Committee. As examples on initiatives, the Committee has hosted public hearings on social control/ honour related violence or suppression, sexual harassment in

the workspace, digital sexual harassment (especially among young people on Instagram, Facebook etc.). An internal event regarding the general Gender Mainstreaming Assessments of legislative proposals (how can the Committee use these assessments in a more effective way in its work) is also in the pipeline. When arranging hearings (public or internal), stakeholders are generally both independent experts – researchers and field workers and government representatives, and often the responsible minister is also participating. These public hearings are livestreamed and can also be seen afterwards on the website.

Source: OECD (2018^[21]), *Toolkit on Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality*, OECD, Paris, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/toolkit-for-mainstreaming-and-implementing-gender-equality.pdf>.

B. Parliamentary gender bodies can exercise oversight and accountability functions for the implementation of the government's gender equality agenda

Self-assessment questions

- Are relevant parliamentary entities mandated, resourced and supported to scrutinise implementation of the government's gender equality agenda?

Why is it important?

Gender mainstreaming is essentially a form of parliamentary oversight. Without sufficient capacity and proper mandates for gender mainstreaming, however, the benefits of oversight (i.e. improved policies and processes) will not materialise. Integrating a gender perspective into existing oversight mechanisms improves the effectiveness of policy initiatives, can help pinpoint potential inequitable outcomes, and identify inclusive and innovative responses.

Importantly, oversight mandates can include powers for gender equality mechanisms to review and propose recommendations for amendments to budget bills:

- Evaluating government budget plans from a gender perspective (*ex ante* gender budgeting);
- Reviewing government/public expenditures from a gender perspective (*ex post* gender budgeting);
- Issuing a gender report or statement as part of the budget bill.

Core functions of gender committees also include monitoring the implementation of gender equality legislation and ensuring that laws do not directly or indirectly discriminate against women and girls, as well as monitoring adherence to international gender equality obligations, such as CEDAW and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

What are the key actions to consider?

- Integrating a gender perspective into existing oversight mechanisms, such as public hearings, scrutiny of government initiatives and questions to Ministers;
- Empowering gender mechanisms to scrutinise budget bills and implementation;
- Building the capacity of gender-mandated bodies, and parliament more broadly, to apply gender budgeting principles;
- Implementing gender analysis as part of the review of budget bills by parliament.

What are the pitfalls to avoid?

- Limited mandates of gender bodies to scrutinise government performance and policy implementation;
- Restricting mandates of gender bodies to only scrutinise gender-related policy;
- Ignoring gender as a criteria in assessing government performance or evaluation of policy implementation;
- Uneven capacity building of parliamentarians and staff to review budget bills from a gender perspective.

Box 4.6. Good practice example(s): Oversight for gender equality by parliamentary bodies

Ireland's Joint Committee on Gender Equality for Parliamentary Oversight

In December 2021, the Parliament of Ireland (Oireachtas) established a Joint Committee on Gender Equality consisting of members from both Houses of Parliament. The Joint Committee is tasked to consider the recommendations in the Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, and it is to report to the Parliament within nine months of its first public meeting. The key functions of the Committee are related to reviewing draft legislation, monitoring the work of government departments, and advising on policy issues related to Gender Equality. Among its powers is the power to invite submissions, hold hearings with the Minister for Justice, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science; Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth; and Minister of Health. It is also empowered to hold hearings with diverse stakeholders and publish reports.

Canada's Parliamentary Committees

In Canada, the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) has the broad authority to study work related to the status of women. Bills can be referred to the FEWO Committee, although there is no requirement for its involvement in studying bills on a systematic basis, especially those that are not explicitly seen as dealing with the women's issues. The Committee also has autonomy to conduct its own studies. Overall, the Committee is not bound by specific Orders of Reference that determine its work programme, however Committee members have taken a strategic approach in deciding what work to cover. When not dealing with legislation, the Committee has chosen to focus its study on three key areas; gender-based assessment, gender violence and women's economic security. Other parliamentary committees incorporate a gender element into their work programme. In 2022, the Senate of Canada, more specifically the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology convened a series of meetings inviting ministers, experts, representatives from various sectors to examine the role of Gender-based Analysis Plus, or GBA Plus, in the policy process.

Source: (OECD, 2018^[3]; Houses of the Oireachtas, 2022^[5]; Houses of the Oireachtas, 2022^[6]; Houses of the Oireachtas, 2022^[7]).

4.3. ACHIEVING BALANCED REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN PARLIAMENTS/LEGISLATURES AT ALL LEVELS

Key Provision of the *OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life*

Consider measures to achieve gender-balanced representation in decision-making positions in public life by encouraging greater participation of women in government at all levels, as well as in parliaments, judiciaries and other public institutions.

- Embed a political commitment at the highest level to promote gender equality in public life through developing a comprehensive framework to encourage balanced representation of women and men in public decision-making positions by:
 - considering comprehensive (transitional or correctional) regulatory or voluntary measures to promote gender diversity in parliamentary and executive bodies, including in parliamentary committees and leadership posts. For example, based on good practices and as appropriate, these measures can include disclosure requirements, quotas, voluntary targets, parity laws, alternating the sexes on the party list and linking gender rations in political parties to their access to public funding. Considering penalties for non-compliance can be important to ensure the effectiveness of such measures.
 - mainstreaming work-life balance and family-friendly work practices at the top level in public institutions and promoting gender-sensitive working conditions, for example by reviewing internal procedures of public institutions, reconsidering traditional working hours, developing schemes to support the reconciliation of family and professional obligations, providing incentives to men to take available care leave and flexible work entitlements.
 - facilitating capacity and leadership development opportunities, mentoring, networking and other training programmes in public institutions, promoting female role models in public life and encouraging active engagement of men in promoting gender equality.
- Systematically monitor gender balance in public institutions, including in leadership positions and different occupational groups, through regular data collection, such as the use of employee surveys, and reassess its alignment with overall gender equality objectives and priorities, taking into account the results of evaluations.

4.3.1. *Priority checklist for achieving balanced representation of women and men in parliaments/legislatures at all levels*

- A. Measures are in place to ensure gender balance in all parliamentary bodies and at all levels
- B. Gender-sensitive human resources policies promote and sustain gender balance in all parliamentary bodies and at all levels
- C. Parliaments promote women's professional development and advancement

4.3.2. Self-assessment tool

A. Measures are in place to ensure gender balance in all parliamentary bodies and at all levels

Self-assessment questions

- Has the parliament, including its political parties, introduced or adopted specific regulatory or voluntary mechanisms and/or initiatives to ensure gender balance in all parliamentary bodies and at all levels?

Why it is important?

It is critical that parliaments reflect the composition of the population itself. When public bodies lack balanced representation of men and women, critical views and perspectives are lost, diminishing the effectiveness of policies.

Gender-balanced representation is not only a matter of numbers, however. It is also about substantive representation: whether women are able to exercise actual influence in policy and law making and whether their views are valued as much as those of their male counterparts. Knowing where women are situated within the parliament – or within political parties, EMBs or other such bodies – and what roles they occupy can also shed light on the degree to which institutions reinforce existing gender-based stereotypes, and help identify effective measures to help women advance.

Achieving gender-balanced representation usually requires a mixture of legislative and policy initiatives to increase the pool of women willing to enter into political or public life, and facilitating their advancement once in office. As the “gatekeepers” of women’s political participation, political parties play a critical role in creating and selecting from the pool of potential women candidates for public office, and continue to influence women’s access to leadership once they are in parliament.

In politically sensitive environments, voluntary measures such as voluntary quotas or targets could help advance women’s candidacy and representation and demonstrate party commitment to equality and equal representation.

What are the key actions to consider?

- Identifying how many women are represented in political and parliamentary bodies and what positions they occupy;
- Considering development of a gender-disaggregated database and conducting qualitative research on women’s political participation;
- Considering special measures such as (legislated or voluntary) gender quotas to increase the number of women candidates;
- In case of use, strengthen quota efficacy by specifying minimum thresholds, rules for positioning and sanctions for non-compliance;
- Adopting internal measures to support gender-balanced representation of women in all decision-making bodies;
- Encouraging political parties to introduce internal measures to promote women’s advancement, candidacy and leadership;
- Tracking women’s advancement through use of gender-disaggregated data, particularly by EMBs and statistical offices.

What are the pitfalls to avoid?

- Limited understanding of the expertise of women members and what positions they hold within political parties;
- Adopting measures without a specified threshold, rank placements or enforcement mechanisms;
- Insufficient mechanisms for the collection of gender-disaggregated data, particularly by EMBs;
- Limited engagement of political parties in introducing gender-sensitive internal processes.

Box 4.7. Good practice example(s): Measures for gender balance in parliamentary bodies

The OECD countries have steadily made efforts to enhance gender equality in public leadership by introducing leadership targets, quotas, mentorship, networking, capacity-building programmes, and active recruitment of women in leadership positions. More specifically, to support women's access to politics, countries have introduced measures to address barriers in the pipeline to elected office.

For example, Portugal's Law 1/2019 of March 29 raised the minimum threshold for women and men in the electoral lists to national and European Parliament, elective bodies of municipalities, and members of the Parish Councils from 33% to 40%. Colombia's law of quotas establishes a minimum of 30% female participation in the top decision-making and other decision-making positions in the Colombian state; Germany and Austria have set a 50% quota.

In order to ensure gender-balanced decision making in Chile, the Law 21216 passed in 2020 to create the Convención Constitucional (the body tasked with drafting Chile's new constitution), mandated that its composition had to meet gender parity. As a result, half of the elected members of this important body are women.

In 2014, Mexico passed an amendment to Article 41 of its Constitution and a new electoral law, establishing a new gender-parity requirement in candidate lists. The new electoral law also requires parties to adopt a "zipper system" for seats allocated through proportional representation, meaning lists have to alternate between men and women candidates. For other seats elected by a plurality vote, the law empowers the National Electoral Institute (INE) to ensure that parties do not exclusively nominate women in districts where parties have typically received the lowest percentage of the vote. The legal framework also authorises the INE to sanction parties that do not comply with the parity requirement by denying registration of their candidate lists. National elections in 2015 and 2019 under the reformed quota system saw a notable increases in women's representation in both chambers of parliament, reaching near parity. As of 2023, Mexico is among the leading countries globally in terms of women's representation in parliament.

Source: (OECD, 2018^[2]; OECD, 2022^[8]).

B. Gender-sensitive human resources policies promote and sustain gender balance in all parliamentary bodies and at all levels

Self-assessment questions

- What measures are in place to create a gender-sensitive and family-friendly working culture in legislatures?

Why it is important?

Gender-sensitive parliaments respond to the needs and interests of both women and men in their structures, operations, methods and work, and remove barriers to women fulfilling their potential.

Human resource policies are a means of introducing gender-friendly parliamentary working procedures, such as provisions relating to sitting time, parental leave, proxy voting, and promoting work-life balance.

To support women and men caring for infants and small children, parliaments can earmark funds to ensure that proper facilities are in place to ensure both men and women can fully partake in all parliamentary proceedings. This may include the establishment of childcare or crèche facilities in the parliament, proper facilities to enable women to breastfeed, or family rooms.

Parliaments can also promote a gender-sensitive working culture through codes of conduct that promote gender-sensitive language and sanction gender-discriminatory behaviour and speech, being careful to respect freedoms of speech and expression. Gender equality mechanisms can review such codes as well as broader rules of procedure on a regular basis, to identify discriminatory provisions, such as gender-biased dress codes for men and women and use of gender-insensitive language. Finally, it is important that both grievance and disciplinary mechanisms are in place to enable discriminated parties to file complaints and to sanction offending members particularly in cases involving sexual harassment.

Gender mainstreaming and equality policies are also evolving to include progressive elements that reflect broader changes in society. It is important that parliaments and legislatures, as representatives of the population, reflect and channel positive societal developments.

What are the key actions to consider?

- Setting limits to voting times to promote work-life balance;
- Aligning parliamentary sittings and voting in plenary with school calendars and holidays;
- Introducing paid-parental leave provisions to allow both men and women to engage in childcare and rearing activities;
- Establishing childcare facilities;
- Providing breastfeeding facilities to enable new mothers to continue participating in parliamentary activities;
- Developing a code of conduct or ethics for MPs and staff that include provisions on gender-sensitive behaviour and language;
- Establishing and adequately resourcing grievance and disciplinary mechanisms;
- Reflecting progressive societal gender equality developments through policy provisions to secure LGBTIQ rights;
- Organising seminars and gender training sessions addressing both MPs and legislative employees on a regular basis about existing legal provisions, counselling facilities and initiatives taken by governmental, gender equality mechanisms and civil society organisations.

What are the pitfalls to avoid?

- Indirectly reinforcing gender roles and responsibilities (e.g. only providing maternity leave);
- Focus of work-life balance efforts on women only;
- Lack of consequences for gender-biased behaviour or sexual harassment;
- Lack or insufficient reporting channels for incidences of sexual harassment.

Box 4.8. Good practice example(s): Gender-sensitive human resources policies in parliaments

Iceland's Gender-Balanced Parliament, Committees and Councils

In May 2021 the Icelandic parliament, the Althingi, passed into law (42/2021) a bill requiring that the men to women ratio in the Presidium of the Althingi, in its standing committees, and in the other committees and councils appointed by the parliament shall reflect the results of the parliamentary elections in terms of gender balance. Furthermore, in committees with more than three delegates, the women to men ratio shall be as equal as possible and not fall below 40%. The bill aims at making it compulsory to consider gender when electing deputy speakers, distributing seats in committees and choosing or electing delegates in committees, councils and governing bodies in the country.

Sweden's Informal Conventions

In Sweden, there are informal conventions to ensure gender balance in that, for example, where a committee head is female, the deputy should be male (and vice-versa).

Australia's Parliamentary Resolution with Special Provisions for Nursing Women

In 2008, parliament passed a resolution to allow special provisions for women MPs who were nursing mothers. In particular, in cases where a woman is breastfeeding when a vote is called, she may ask her party whip to vote on her behalf, a practice called proxy voting. In October of that year, the first such proxy vote was recorded for an opposition member during consideration of a bill in the lower house of parliament. In addition to this arrangement, the parliament maintains a childcare centre within its building.

Canada's Family-Friendly House of Commons

On April 4, 2017, the House of Commons concurred with a report entitled Initiatives Toward a Family-Friendly House of Commons. The report helped inform various measures which have been introduced in recent years to make the Parliament of Canada more gender-sensitive and family-friendly, including:

- the availability of full-time and short-term childcare services for families;
- the adaptation of facilities to help parliamentarians with children, such as reserved parking spots and washrooms with changing tables;
- the adoption of the House of Commons Members' Sessional Allowance Regulations (maternity and parental arrangements); and
- the development or revision of sexual harassment policies by the Senate and the House of Commons.

Note: For more information on the Australian parliamentary resolution, see: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/procedure-committee/voting-by-proxy-in-the-house-of-commons/written/79407.pdf> (accessed February 2023)

Source: (OECD, 2022^[8]; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011^[9]; OECD, 2019^[41]); Information provided by Government of Canada as part of the OECD (2021), Survey on Gender Mainstreaming and Governance (unpublished).

C. Parliaments promote women's professional development and advancement

Self-assessment questions

- How effectively is women's professional development and advancement fostered within parliaments?

Why it is important?

Though women's representation in elected and public office is slowly increasing, the "glass ceiling" all too often prevents women's advancement, particularly to key decision-making positions. Supporting and facilitating women's advancement can help capture valuable voices, perspectives and expertise.

Human resource policies to support women's advancement include induction training, gender equality training, and ensuring that women are represented in all professional development initiatives, training and seminars; delegations and participation in conferences; and in informal parliamentary initiatives. It is important to encourage the parliamentary leadership to participate in gender equality training, so that they can be role models for other members and staff.

Mentoring or peer-to-peer knowledge and experience sharing, either by pairing experienced women parliamentarians with newcomers or by building partnerships between women and men in the parliament, can also support women's advancement.

Some parliaments are establishing cross-party bodies – gender or women's caucuses, clubs, networks, reference groups and friendship groups. Such entities also help highlight discriminatory behaviour and practices.

What are the key actions to consider?

- Institutionalising equal opportunities for professional development in human resource policies;
- Ensuring the gender-sensitivity of trainers and capacity development topics;
- Seeking the input of gender experts in the development of training programmes and curricula;
- Gender-sensitising induction trainings for new MPs on core parliamentary functions, procedures and "rules of the game";
- Including parliamentary staff in gender capacity development initiatives;
- Institutionalising parliamentary gender learning through mandatory gender mainstreaming capacity development;
- Requiring the participation of parliamentary leadership in general or specialised gender equality trainings.

What are the pitfalls to avoid?

- Insufficient requirements for gender training;
- Reserving responsibility for gender training only for gender equality mechanisms;
- Uneven mainstreaming of gender considerations in the organisation, monitoring and evaluation of all capacity development efforts;
- Insufficient consideration of possible gender roles and stereotypes in capacity development programmes (e.g. women as gender trainers; men as trainers in security and defence);
- Ignoring informal practices into account when transferring knowledge.

Box 4.9. Good practice example(s): Canada's roadmap for Improving Political Representation of Women

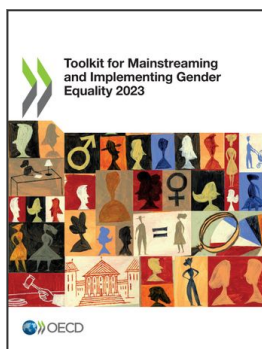
In April 2019, the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women tabled the report, *Elect Her: A Roadmap for Improving the Representation of Women in Canadian Politics*, which studied the barriers facing women in politics. The Committee's report provides possible solutions to the barriers women face when entering electoral politics. The 14 recommendations included in the report are intended to provide guidance to the Government of Canada on measures that could be implemented to help improve the representation of women at all levels of electoral politics. The Committee's recommendations are intended to: improve the collection of intersectional data on women's political participation; shift societal perceptions regarding women's political participation; support organisations and projects that promote the political participation of women from diverse backgrounds; encourage political parties to run more female candidates and address the gender-biased media treatment of female politicians.

Source: Information provided by Government of Canada as part of the OECD (2021), *Survey on Gender Mainstreaming and Governance* (unpublished).



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