

Strengthening women's political participation

Highlights of the impact
of women's parliamentary
networks in Eastern Europe
and Central Asia



Strengthening women's political participation

**Highlights of the impact
of women's parliamentary
networks in Eastern Europe
and Central Asia**

This paper summarizes the findings of a longer UNDP report, Strengthening Women's Political Participation: An analysis of the impact of women's parliamentary networks in Europe and Central Asia, available at:

<http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/library/gender-equality/strengthening-womens-political-participation.html>

©2016 United Nations Development Programme
UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub
All rights reserved.

Introduction

Gender equality is both a requirement for effective, responsive and accountable democratic societies, and a means of increasing the credibility and legitimacy of elected institutions. Yet, across the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region, women's participation in the lower houses of parliament remains at 21 percent, which is below the global average of 22.9 percent.¹ Women's representation in local elected offices also remains low, particularly in mayoral and leadership positions in local assemblies and councils; women represent just 15 percent of mayors or leaders of municipal councils, and 35 percent of local or municipal councillors.²

To address these challenges across the ECA region, women and men in parliaments and assemblies have established governance structures, networks, support mechanisms, and strategic plans to improve women's political participation and gender equality. UNDP has facilitated the creation of such structures in many countries, recognizing the important role they play in empowering women as parliamentary representatives, supporting the emergence of gender-sensitive parliaments, and adopting gender-sensitive policies and legislative frameworks. Such initiatives to advance both women's political participation and gender-sensitive legislative outcomes are key to achieving progress in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

-
1. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). *Women in National Parliaments*, data as of 1 August 2016. Available from: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.
 2. European Commission, DG Justice. "Women and men in decision making". Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/politics/municipal-councils/index_en.htm. The database calculates the number of women and men in the lowest levels of elected administrative office in EU-28 plus Iceland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia and Turkey. The term municipal councillor in this report refers to elected officials.

Parliamentary practices to advance women's political participation

Since the 1990s, the ECA region has made significant progress towards gender equality in political participation, in part due to the successes of gender equality committees in parliament, women's caucuses and cross-sector alliances and networks within political parties. Their work has contributed to gender-sensitive rules and procedures being implemented in parliaments, the design of gender-sensitive constitutions and electoral legislation and the empowerment of women elected to office.

Gender-sensitive rules and procedures in parliament



The Women's Caucus in Parliament in Kyrgyzstan working to finalize amendments to the law on domestic violence and the law on gender quotas at the local level. Photo Credit, UNDP Kyrgyzstan (2016)

The promotion of gender-sensitive rules and procedures in parliament is usually initiated by gender equality groups. These include:

Gender equality committees and informal groups, which have proven to be the most successful in the adoption of gender-sensitive and gender-friendly legislative frameworks. For example:

- The informal group of women MPs in Kyrgyzstan supported the adoption of sector-based

regulatory and legal acts that promote gender mainstreaming in government activities. The law of the Kyrgyz Republic on normative legal acts now makes it mandatory for all legislation to have a gender analysis. Furthermore, a group of women MPs built alliances with men deputies to garner support on specific issues, resulting in a bill on reproductive rights being adopted in 2015, following an extensive advocacy campaign.

Parliamentary women's caucuses and councils. Although many caucuses do not have the power to initiate or draft legislation, they can influence parliament by cooperating across party lines and collaborating with other gender advocates. For example:

- The Women's Caucus in the Kosovo³ Assembly, with support from different committee members, introduced four amendments to the Assembly's Draft Rules of Procedure:
 1. More gender-sensitive language shall be adopted in all Assembly documents;
 2. The President of the Assembly shall request the Women's Caucus to propose a candidate for the Deputy President of the Assembly;
 3. The Chair and Deputy Chair of each committee shall not be of the same gender;
 4. The composition of committees shall reflect the strength of political groups and gender equality.
- In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, women's civil society organizations in coordination with the Macedonian Women's Lobby advocated for legislated gender quotas, introduced in 2002. These have raised the

3. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

proportion of women in parliament from 6.7 percent to 32.5 percent.

- In Serbia, the Women's Parliamentary Network, which includes women MPs from all parliamentary parties, recently succeeded in persuading parliament to adopt a law on gender-responsive budgetary procedures and withdraw an unsatisfactory new law on equality between women and men.⁴

Internal party networks and mentoring initiatives, which develop the capacities of women parliamentarians to run for national or local elected office. For example:

- In Montenegro, only two out of 14 parliamentary political parties had women's groups before 2010. With advocacy efforts and training by UNDP for women in parliament, women's groups were set up in all parliamentary political parties and coalitions. Combined with the introduction of a quota of at least 30 percent for the less represented sex on party lists, these led to women's presence in local parliaments going up from eight to 26 percent.
- In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Women's Lobby helped to develop a strategy to strengthen cooperation between national and local committees. In 2013, the Assembly adopted this strategy, which included a mentorship component whereby women MPs became official educators and mentors for both men and women local councillors and mayors.
- The Central and Eastern Europe Network for Gender Issues, a regional network of

social democratic party women activists and progressive civil society organizations, supported by the Labour Party Westminster Foundation, initiated a pilot project in 2015 to mentor promising young women activists by those more experienced to trigger a process of "passing the torch" in nine Social Democrat parties in South Eastern Europe.⁵

Design of legal frameworks for promoting gender equality in society



Gender equality trainers in Montenegro receive certificates after UNDP training course. Photo credit, UNDP Montenegro (2014)

Parliamentary groups for gender equality usually initiate gender-responsive laws and policies and gender-sensitive development strategies. For example:

- The informal group of women MPs in Kyrgyzstan in collaboration with women's organizations lobbied for amendments to the Criminal Code and contributed to the adoption of the Family Code, the Code on Children and of policy frameworks for gender equality. They also helped to develop a long-term national gender equality strategy.

4. <https://zpmrbija.wordpress.com/>

5. A report on this project available in the CEE Network for Gender Issues Ljubljana Office.

- In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, in cooperation with the Women Parliamentarians' Club, drafted a law on equal opportunities (adopted in 2006 and revised in 2012). With advocacy and mobilization by the Macedonian Women's Lobby, they succeeded in having a law on preventing domestic violence passed in 2014. The committee also supported legislative reforms initiated by the Government to support women's entrepreneurship, rural women's economic empowerment, survivors of violence, as well as people with disabilities.

Equal participation and empowerment of women as elected officials



Women address their policy concerns with the Women's Caucus in the Parliament of Moldova. Photo Credit, UNDP Moldova (2016)

The gender equality groups in parliament also direct their efforts towards increasing the number of women in decision-making positions and developing their capacities as elected officials. For example:

- In Serbia, parliamentary elections held in May 2012 resulted in women constituting 33 percent of the incoming National Assembly, thanks to the application of a legislated gender quota with firm rules requiring every third candidate on each list to be from the less represented sex on candidate lists. The following year, the elected women MPs established the Women's Parliamentary Network, which helped parliament to adopt laws on violence against women, influenced the work on regional peace and reconciliation, and helped women to be part of national parliamentary policy-making.
- In Albania, sustained cooperation between the parliamentary Women's Caucus, gender advocates and women's organizations resulted in amendments to the Electoral Code in 2015 which require at least 50 percent representation of each sex on candidate lists for municipal elections.
- In Moldova, joint efforts by UNDP and UN Women in partnership with civil society organizations resulted in the adoption of legislation introducing a 40 percent women's representation quota in Government offices and on the electoral lists for local and parliamentary elections in April 2016.

Gender equality in parliaments

Parliaments that support the empowerment of women as parliamentary representatives, the adoption of specific gender equality frameworks and the improvement of gender mainstreaming approaches in policy-making are more likely to achieve sustainable results.

Gender-mainstreaming and gender-targeted approaches



Induction seminar for new women MPs, members of the Women's Parliamentary Network. Photo Credit, UNDP Serbia (2016)

To sustain progress towards gender equality in parliaments, UNDP pursues gender-mainstreaming and gender-targeted approaches:

The **gender-mainstreaming** approach refers to the integration of a gender dimension into broader parliamentary mechanisms. For example:

- In Moldova, parliament adopted Law No.25 in 2008, which established a Code of Conduct for Public Servants. Article 4.1 of the code requires public servants to behave in a non-discriminatory, impartial and fair manner, without prioritizing certain individuals or groups on the basis of sex, among other grounds.
- In Serbia, UNDP supported parliamentarians to enhance the oversight of practices in

parliament by bringing in gender-sensitive rules and procedures. This raised the number of women parliamentarians and legislative frameworks for gender equality.

The **gender-targeted** approach involves activities that target men or women – such as supporting parliamentarians and politicians to establish a faction or informal network on combating violence against women, helping women parliamentarians with public speaking, or ensuring that men contribute equally to the adoption and implementation of parliamentary policies and practices for gender equality. For example:

- In Kyrgyzstan, UNDP, working with the UN Gender Theme Group, provided women MPs with technical expertise in drafting gender-related legislation and advocating for implementation of international human rights obligations, such as CEDAW. In preparation for the 2015 parliamentary elections, UNDP developed a methodology for a gender rating in political parties as a way to promote gender mainstreaming in their activities and campaigns. The rating also serves as a gender-screening tool for MPs.
- In Georgia, UNDP supported local mechanisms to foster networking and develop the capacities of women councillors and politicians, including establishing a local forum.

Key challenges in promoting women's political participation and strengthening gender equality in parliament



Participants in the International Forum of Women Leaders. Photo Credit, UNDP Belarus (2016)

Low representation of women in parliament, for example:

- In Georgia, women represent 12 percent of members of parliament, which lacks a gender equality committee or sub-committee with the power to initiate legislation.

Caucuses or informal networks are often politically divided or disbanded, for example:

- The Women's Affairs Faction in Kazakhstan, established in 2012, had 33 deputies from both chambers of parliament, making it the largest parliamentary faction in Kazakhstan, but was disbanded in April 2016.
- In Moldova, the work of the cross-party Women's Caucus is often disrupted by political divides and differing party priorities which hamper joint efforts.
- In Ukraine, the Equal Opportunities Caucus had actively supported efforts to resolve the conflict in the country and recognized the

need to protect the rights of women and girls, but it disbanded in 2014.

Legislation or gender quotas do not always increase women's numbers in parliament, for example:

- In the 2014 general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were wide gaps between the number of women on electoral lists and the number of women elected. Women represent barely a fifth of all elected officials because voters can cast a preferential vote, and men incumbents are more visible and have much greater financial means and media coverage during campaigning than women candidates.
- In Ukraine, a draft law for quotas was never introduced in parliament. Although an amendment to the Law on Political Parties stipulates a 30 percent quota for women on party lists, it is silent on single-mandate seats and the order of candidates on party lists, leading to women being sidelined at election time.
- Even when there are sanctions and penalties for parties that do not comply with legal quota rules, many parties, especially the largest, would rather pay the fines than give women candidates legally binding opportunities to be elected, as in Albania.

Successful strategies of women's parliamentary networks



Women mayors and local leaders in Moldova at networking event. Photo Credit, UNDP Moldova (2015)

- Engaging as formal and informal groups of women MPs to promote gender equality initiatives;
- Introducing electoral laws that mandate efficient, rule-based quotas for increased representation of women and include additional measures to ensure compliance, such as effective sanctions (whereby a party is fined when candidate lists do not meet the requirements for the prescribed numbers and positions of women), as in the electoral laws in Montenegro and Croatia. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina also have strong sanctions (parties with lists that do not comply with legal quota rules have to amend them or be excluded from the electoral race);
- Using voting blocs in parliaments to bring attention to gender equality issues;
- Working with gender equality/equal opportunities committees to support the drafting of gender-sensitive laws;
- Engaging with men MPs, who are equally responsible for promoting gender equality in laws and upholding gender equality principles; several parliamentary committees on gender equality are mixed and some are headed by men (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina);
- Strengthening alliances with civil society and international organizations to promote gender equality in parliaments and decision-making. For example, broad coalitions of women striving for quota rules in South Eastern Europe since 1995 generated the political will for their enactment by using a "sandwich strategy" (consisting of top-down pressure from international actors to implement gender equality mandates and bottom-up pressure from nationwide coalitions of grassroots women), with simultaneous campaigns by women's coalitions listing their demands for equal political representation of women on electoral lists and in the distribution of executive positions after elections. Repeated campaigns, organized before elections, led to the enactment first of weak quota rules and then to their gradual improvement in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo* and Croatia (where the constitutional court annulled these efforts before the elections of 2014).

Entry points for programmatic support to advance gender equality in parliaments



Employee of the National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights in Turkmenistan. Photo Credit, UNDP Turkmenistan (2015)

- Facilitate the exchange of best practices on the work of women's networks and gender-sensitive policy-making, including the use of tools to design gender-sensitive legislation;
- Promote regional networking of women parliamentarians;
- Support statistical capacities to develop indicators to measure SDG targets on women's political empowerment;
- Empower and partner with civil society organizations, women's parliamentary networks and MPs to introduce legislated gender quotas and other measures aimed at equal political participation;
- Strengthen internal party democracy, with legally binding rules and sanctions, especially in the selection and nomination of women to elected party positions, on party electoral lists and in the distribution of executive and other posts of authority that depend on party decisions (leading positions in parliament, ministers and state secretaries, members of the executive and monitoring boards of public companies and institutions).
- Support mentoring by more experienced MPs and women in politics of less experienced colleagues to advance gender equality in parliamentary and other governance processes;
- Enact firm rules in political party laws to oblige them to finance the work of women's organizations within the parties;
- Support women's networks in parliament to collaborate with women in local governance;
- Facilitate leadership, media and public relations training to help women MPs to develop critical public speaking, debate and negotiation skills, and the ability to engage with the media to build public support for gender equality in politics and society;
- Sensitize and proactively engage with men MPs on their role and responsibility to promote gender equality in legislative outcomes, support women in party lists and elections, and fight discriminatory and exclusionary practices, sexism and misogyny;
- Work with the media to combat gender stereotypes and discriminatory portrayals of women in politics and public life;

Acknowledgements

This paper summarizes the findings of a UNDP report, *Strengthening Women's Political Participation: An analysis of the impact of women's parliamentary networks in Europe and Central Asia*. UNDP is grateful to all colleagues and partners who contributed to these findings on women's political participation in the Europe and Central Asia region. We especially thank parliamentary representatives, local councillors, civil society representatives and colleagues in UNDP Country Offices who gave their time and insights to this project.

We are also grateful to colleagues who read multiple drafts and provided valuable comments to this assessment of UNDP efforts to advance gender equality in political participation in the region. Special thanks to the Central and Eastern European Network for Gender Issues for reviewing this summary.

This summary was produced by the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub, under the direction of Bharati Sadasivam, Gender Team Leader. Jaime Mikush and Barbora Galvankova in the regional gender team contributed to additional research, editing and final production.



