



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

Plan of action for gender parity in parliaments

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Part 1: Preamble and objectives

Preamble

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has a long history of promoting the equal representation of women in parliament, building on many years of collecting data and developing frameworks and resolutions to support women's participation in parliaments around the world. The IPU is the authoritative source for statistics, both current and historical, on the share of women in parliaments and the positions they occupy. It has published a long line of studies on gender equality in parliaments, including its pathbreaking work on gender-sensitive parliaments and sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament.

2025 marks a turning point. For 40 years, including through its Forum of Women Parliamentarians, the IPU has led efforts to redress the gender imbalance in political representation in national parliaments. At the Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians, held in Mexico City, Mexico on 14 and 15 March 2025, more than 470 participants, including 376 women and men parliamentarians from 56 countries, agreed on a plan of action for achieving gender parity in parliaments.



At the Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians held in Mexico City, Mexico, in 2025, more than 470 participants, including 376 women and men parliamentarians from 56 countries, agreed on a plan of action for achieving gender parity in parliaments. © Senate of Mexico

The premise of this plan of action is that gender parity is more than a question of numbers. Achieving 50:50 representation is a starting point, but simply electing more women is not enough. Women and men must also be able to exercise equal levels of power. In leadership and committee assignments, they should exert equal influence in policymaking in all areas and in setting parliamentary agendas. Furthermore, parliamentary working conditions must be inclusive and equitable to ensure that women and men can participate fully and equally in all aspects of parliamentary work. A parity culture is one that is free from sexism, harassment and violence.

This plan was subsequently adopted by the IPU Governing Council at its 216th session, held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 23 October 2025. The vision embodied in the plan of action reflects a parliamentary perspective on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General recommendation No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems.

Objectives

Women's participation in politics is a human right and is essential for promoting justice and gender equality. Without women's full and equal contributions, it is not possible to achieve democracy, secure peace, or promote sustainable development. For too long, women have been prevented from being equal partners in decision-making, including in parliaments. The time has come to adopt a new model of governance based on the 50:50 sharing of power between women and men.



Women's participation in politics is a human right and is essential for promoting justice and gender equality. © Senate of Mexico

This action plan recognizes three dimensions of gender parity in parliaments: parity in numbers, parity in influence and power, and a parity culture. These dimensions are related but distinct. The full, equal and meaningful participation of women in politics cannot be achieved without transformative actions in all three areas.

Parity in numbers means a 50:50 balance between women and men in parliament, across all age groups and in line with other categories of diversity. As at January 2025, only 12 chambers – 6 lower or single houses and 6 upper houses – elected 50% or more women parliamentarians. The representation of young women is particularly low: globally, a mere 1.4% of MPs are women under the age of 30 and only 7.9% are women under 40.

Parity in influence and power involves ensuring that women and men have the same levels of leadership and influence in parliament, with equal opportunities to determine parliamentary agendas and inform policies across all subject areas. Yet, currently, only 23.7% of parliamentary speakers are women. As at 1 January 2025, women held 265 out of 951 chair positions across the five types of parliamentary committees (foreign affairs, defence, finance, human rights and gender equality) covered in the IPU's Parline database. This represents 27.9% of committee chairs, up from 27.2% in 2024. However, when gender equality committees are excluded, the proportion of women drops to 19.6%. Strong women's parliamentary caucuses serve to amplify women's voices across parties.

A parity culture means safe and inclusive working conditions, gender-sensitive parliaments and zero tolerance for sexism, harassment and violence, both offline and online. The structures, operations and working methods of parliaments around the world tend to assume that MPs are men with few or no family obligations, and as men are not usually experienced in combining work and family life this creates a conflict with women. Inside and outside parliament, women may also face hostility due to gender norms that perpetuate the idea that women do not belong in politics. More than 80% of women MPs say they have received threats or been harassed online, while between 20% and 30% report physical attacks, property damage and/or sexual violence connected to their work as parliamentarians.

Achieving parity is a project to be undertaken by women and men together as active and equal partners in fostering gender parity in all the above three dimensions.

Part 2: Key action areas of the plan

Action area 1: Achieve parity in numbers

1.1 Elect equal numbers of women and men to parliament

Only 27.2% of parliamentarians worldwide are women. Despite these low numbers, many parliaments have seen dramatic changes in the numbers of women elected over the last 30 years, showing that it is possible to advance towards a model of 50:50 representation. In countries that had gender quotas in place, the proportion of women elected or appointed was 31.2% in 2024 compared to 16.8% in countries without quotas.

To advance gender parity in numbers, parliaments should consider the following measures:

- Ensure gender parity as a norm of governance is embedded in constitutions.
- Adopt or revise existing legislation on gender quotas to stipulate 50:50 representation.
- Take features of the electoral system into account when designing gender quotas to ensure the election of equal numbers of women and men.



Parliaments should consider taking features of the electoral system into account when designing gender quotas to ensure election of equal numbers of women and men. © IPU/Pierre Albouy

- Bolster the impact of quotas by introducing strong and meaningful sanctions, in particular the rejection of candidate lists that do not comply with quota requirements.
- As an incentive for advancing women's representation, tie public funding subsidies for political parties to the election of women.
- Equalize campaign resources between women and men by introducing caps on campaign spending and offering free advertising time on television, radio and online.
- Make care expenses reimbursable as a campaign expense.

1.2 Ensure diversity among the women and men elected to parliament

Gender discrimination exists alongside other forms of marginalization based on ethnicity, age, disability, socioeconomic status and other categories. These intersecting inequalities create further exclusions of groups of women, leading to especially low levels of representation among women from minorities, younger age groups and women with disabilities. Many of these groups have limited access to parliament despite the fact that their participation is needed for more inclusive and efficient policymaking.

To promote diversity within gender parity, parliaments should consider the following measures:

- Collect and monitor data on the representation of different groups of women in parliament that will be defined on the basis of specific national contexts.
- Adopt or revise existing legislation to nest diversity requirements within gender quotas, or gender parity requirements within measures for other groups, for example gender parity requirements within youth quotas.
- Ensure that women from all backgrounds are able to access and benefit from campaign support, including care-related expenses.
- Introduce campaign supports that address multiple forms of discrimination, for example added expenses incurred by women candidates with disabilities.
- Create diversity-sensitive parliaments to ensure an inclusive environment attuned to different forms of inequality and exclusion, for example through translation services into indigenous languages and accessible spaces for women with disabilities.

Action area 2:

Reach parity in leadership and influence in parliament

The impact of greater numbers of women in parliament will be limited if those women are excluded from leadership positions or restricted to leading committees covering only a few policy areas. Gender parity in terms of power requires that women and men have similar opportunities to set the agenda and to inform policies on all subjects.

To promote parity in terms of power, parliaments should consider the following measures:

- Establish alternation rules for top leadership positions, with women and men taking turns exercising these roles.
- Introduce dual leadership for parliamentary structures, where possible, appointing one woman and one man to serve as co-leaders.
- Require parity in leadership roles for all parliamentary functions, including the governing bureau and parliamentary committees.
- Support the establishment and functioning of cross-party women's caucuses with dedicated staff and expertise to amplify the influence and voices of women in parliament.
- Encourage the proportional and equitable distribution of women parliamentarians across all committees and in delegations to interparliamentary and international conferences.

Action area 3: Foster a parity culture in parliament

3.1 Create a gender-sensitive parliamentary culture and infrastructure

A gender-sensitive parliament responds to the needs and interests of both women and men in its structures, operations and methods of work, fostering an environment where women can and want to work. This includes taking steps to facilitate work-family balance and providing equitable resources for women and men to be treated as equals within the institution.

To create a parity working environment, parliaments should consider the following measures:

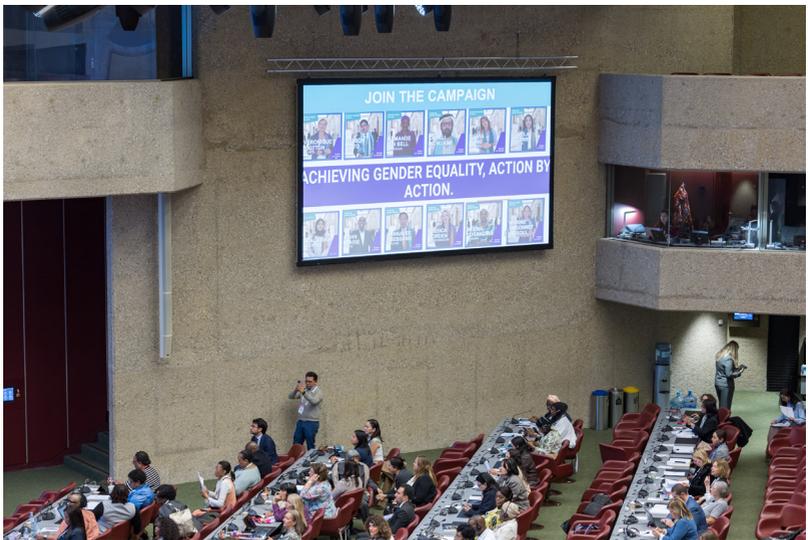
- Conduct a gender-sensitivity self-assessment of the parliament's work environment, culture and infrastructure to identify gaps and plan for reform in these areas.
- Adjust the sitting hours and calendar of parliamentary sessions and meetings to align with family obligations and school calendars.
- Allocate spaces in parliament for family rooms and childcare facilities.
- Establish a right to parental leave for both women and men in parliament.
- Introduce proxy voting procedures to enable members to cast votes if they are not able to attend sessions in person due to childbirth or breastfeeding.
- Ensure full equality in resources provided to women and men in parliament, in terms of office space, expenses and other facilities.

3.2 Adopt zero tolerance for sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament

Sexism, harassment and violence are common experiences among women parliamentarians, creating further gender-based barriers to their full and equal participation. A zero-tolerance policy towards such conduct inside and outside of parliament is vital for ensuring women's ability to participate fully and safely in all aspects of parliamentary work.

To ensure a safe and respectful workplace, parliaments should consider the following measures:

- Provide gender-awareness training for all members of parliament and parliamentary staff.
- Ensure the use of non-sexist and inclusive language in all official documents, including the standing orders of parliament.
- Introduce a code of conduct that requires all parliamentarians to be respectful, and penalize sexist language and behaviour.
- Develop and implement survivor-centered anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies in line with national legislation and applicable to all parliamentarians and staff.
- Pass laws prohibiting violence against women in politics, including online threats, harassment, and hate speech.



The Forum of Women Parliamentarians during the 151st IPU Assembly and related meetings in October 2025. © IPU

Foster partnerships for gender parity in parliament

To advance all three action areas, partnerships need to be fostered

Responsibility for gender equality is shared by all parliamentarians – men as well as women. Changing social norms and heightening gender awareness among men have resulted in stronger partnerships between women and men to advance gender equality. The IPU is well placed to initiate a project to collect information and monitor good practice in actions taken by men parliamentarians and further promote such action. Achieving gender parity also requires engaging closely with civil society organizations, international organizations, academia, the media and other stakeholders.

To foster partnerships for gender parity, parliaments should consider the following measures:

- Provide gender-sensitive training to men parliamentarians.
- Appoint a woman and a man as co-chairs of gender equality committees.
- Encourage the inclusion of men in parliamentary events on gender-related issues.
- Promote international study trips and other forms of exchange among parliamentarians to share strategies and experiences on creating parity parliaments.
- Establish a reference group for women and men in parliament to raise awareness, strategize and evaluate measures for promoting gender parity.
- Provide spaces for civil society and other stakeholders to inform the work of parliament on gender parity, for example through open public meetings, invitations to provide expert testimony and opportunities to give feedback on proposed legislation.
- Collaborate with the media to raise awareness of the importance of gender parity.



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