



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

145th IPU Assembly

Kigali, Rwanda
11-15 October 2022



145th IPU ASSEMBLY
2022 | Kigali, Rwanda

Assembly
Item 3

A/145/3-Inf.1
16 August 2022

Concept note for the General Debate on the theme: *Gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world*

We live in a world of crises. Whether it is the health crisis, the climate crisis, armed conflicts, or the social, economic and security-related consequences of each of them, they all have something in common. None of them are gender neutral.

Crises exacerbate existing inequalities, including gender inequality. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic¹ resulted among other negative effects in amplified violence against women and girls and the ensuing economic crisis has hit women harder than men. The climate crisis also has a strong gender dimension. For example, it is estimated that 80% of people displaced as a result of climate change are women,² making it less likely for girls to continue schooling and for women to find sustainable livelihood opportunities. They are at higher risk of sexual exploitation, trafficking and forced marriage.

These multiple crises threaten to reverse progress achieved in recent decades in advancing gender equality and more generally sustainable development that leaves no one behind. Gender gaps in access to education and health were closing. Women's role in decision making had continued to increase, with 26% of MPs being women in 2022, up from 13% in 2000. Gender equality in decision-making is good for sustainable development, peace and the environment; evidence shows that building gender parity in governance can create the conditions for better policies in all these areas.³

History has shown that when faced with crisis, societies are better off by investing in gender equality as a sustainable, effective and inclusive response. Rwanda is a prime example. Through a gender-responsive constitution, Rwanda has achieved – and even surpassed – gender parity in Parliament, with over 60% women members of the lower house. This has had a positive impact on women's and girls' empowerment across the board, as well as on sustainable development for all.

Investing in women's and girls' empowerment helps mitigate the impact of crises on society at large. This requires commitment and effort to tackle entrenched practices and ways of thinking as well as laws and frameworks that, at best, do not pro-actively contribute to gender equality, at worst perpetuate gender inequality.

¹ The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimated that during the first six months of lockdown, there had been as many as 31 million new incidents of sexual and gender-based violence.

² UNDP and Global Gender Climate Alliance, *Gender and Climate Change: Overview of linkages between gender and climate change* (2015). <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/gender-and-climate-change-overview-linkages-between-gender-and-climate-change>

³ One study shows that there is a correlation between higher percentages of women MPs and more ambitious climate policies (see in: <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2019/09/countries-with-more-female-politicians-pass-more-ambitious-climate-policies-study-suggests/>). IPU research also shows that women leaders prioritize issues such as social welfare. More women in parliament also increases chances of resolving international disputes through peaceful means (see in: Mary Caprioli, *Gendered conflict* (2000): <https://experts.umn.edu/en/publications/gendered-conflict>).

Parliaments must tackle inequalities in practice and in the law, and help make societies more equal and resilient. To do so, they must have the capacity to act for gender equality. Their action must be grounded on a solid, gender-responsive legal and policy framework. They must also transform themselves into institutions that respect and embody gender equality. They must become gender equality prime movers.

October 2022 will mark the 10-year anniversary of the IPU *Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments* (GSP)⁴ adopted unanimously at the 127th IPU Assembly held in October 2012 in Quebec City.

The GSP Plan of Action provides a groundbreaking outline of key action areas to strengthen parliament's capacity to embody and promote gender equality. These include acting on:

- Numbers and positions: have an equal number of women and men in parliament and across all parliamentary bodies, including in leadership positions.
- Frameworks: establish a strong legal and policy framework for gender equality.
- Processes: introduce mechanisms and expertise to mainstream gender in parliament's work.
- Culture: apply zero tolerance towards sexism and promote a work-life balance.
- Partners: work with political parties and parliamentary staff who promote gender equality.

The evidence is there. Parliaments that are gender-sensitive, that have gender-equality structures and mechanisms in place, and that invest in capacities to mainstream gender equality in their work are better able to seize the momentum of a crisis to reverse long-standing inequalities. This was further evidenced during the COVID-19 crisis:

- In the Philippines, the House of Representatives Committee on Women and Gender Equality tabled a Bill to ensure gender-responsive and inclusive protocols and programming to address the gender-differentiated needs of women during COVID-19 and other public health concerns, emergencies and disasters.⁵
- In Fiji, Parliament seized the momentum to reinforce social protection schemes that benefit women.⁶
- In Cyprus, Parliament adopted legislation criminalizing sexism and rape.⁷
- In Colombia, in response to the 200% increase in reports of domestic abuse in the country, the Congressional Women's Equality Commission launched a social media campaign called #MujeresSinVirusdeViolencia.⁸

Regardless of the pandemic, parliaments have embarked on processes to enhance their gender sensitivity and increase the participation of women:

- In Ireland, the Speaker set up a Forum on a Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament which held wide consultations and issued a set of recommendations on how Parliament could become more gender sensitive.⁹
- In Peru, Parliament accelerated the pace of implementation of new legislation requiring gender parity in political party lists.¹⁰

However, there is still a long way to go. To build more resilient, peaceful and prosperous societies in the face of multilayered and worsening crises, parliaments must continue to lead the way. As no country has achieved full gender equality, this is one transformative endeavour that is equally important everywhere.

⁴ IPU, *Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments* (2012): <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/action-gender-e.pdf>.

⁵ IPU, *Strategic inter-parliamentary dialogue: Gender-responsive recovery post-COVID-19 – Women's economic empowerment* (2021): <https://www.ipu.org/file/12441/download>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ IPU, *Strategic inter-parliamentary dialogue: Gender-responsive recovery post-COVID-19 – Gender-sensitive parliaments and gender-responsive legal reforms* (2021): <https://www.ipu.org/file/12446/download>.

⁸ IPU, *Country compilation of parliamentary responses to the pandemic*: <https://www.ipu.org/country-compilation-parliamentary-responses-pandemic>.

⁹ See: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/members/office-holders/ceann-comhairle/forum-on-a-family-friendly-and-inclusive-parliament/>.

¹⁰ IPU and UN Women, *What will it take to reach gender parity in political participation in a post-COVID-19 world?* (2021): <https://www.ipu.org/file/12503/download>.

During the 145th IPU Assembly, the General Debate should serve as a forum for the parliamentary community to demonstrate and deepen its commitment to delivering on gender equality and towards fulfilling the IPU *Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments* – adopted 10 years ago – as an antidote to the multiple crises that are blocking the path to sustainable development and peace.

To make the General Debate as meaningful, concrete and action-oriented as possible, participants may wish to answer the following questions:

- (1) What gender-equality priorities have been addressed by your parliament in response to today's crises?
- (2) How has your parliament translated the 2012 IPU *Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments* into your own context in the past 10 years?
- (3) What would you pledge to do in the current term of your parliament to make it ever more gender-sensitive and able to support your gender equality priorities?

For instance:¹¹

- *I pledge to promote the creation of a gender equality body within parliament or to enhance the functioning of an existing gender equality body within parliament (for example, a dedicated parliamentary committee, caucus, working group, desk).*
- *I pledge to adopt a new policy in parliament to eliminate all forms of sexism, harassment or gender-based violence.*
- *I pledge to undertake a gender self-assessment in my parliament based on the IPU *Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments: A self-assessment toolkit*.¹²*
- *I pledge to support efforts to build the capacity of men and women members of parliament on gender equality (for example, in the induction of new members, through dedicated training sessions on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other relevant frameworks).*

¹¹ For other examples of action, see the IPU's *Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments*: <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/action-gender-e.pdf>.

¹² This toolkit should help parliaments evaluate how gender sensitive they are, assess their current practices and policies, identify possible areas for reform, plan for change, and establish mechanisms to monitor progress and can be found at: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/toolkits/2016-11/evaluating-gender-sensitivity-parliaments-self-assessment-toolkit>.