

Achieving
gender equality



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

10 actions *for* gender equality



ACTION BY ACTION

Achieving gender equality, action by action

Gender equality is not just a goal – it is a prerequisite for inclusive, resilient and democratic societies. Around the world, parliamentarians are uniquely positioned to drive change by shaping laws, setting budgets, and representing diverse communities.

The IPU's *Achieving gender equality, action by action* campaign aims to mobilize the global parliamentary community to accelerate progress in achieving gender equality in politics and society. With progress on women's representation in parliaments stalling, and a concerning rollback of women's rights in some countries, the campaign emphasizes the urgency of immediate action, inviting members of parliament to lead by example and commit to transformative actions that advance gender equality.

This guide presents 10 concrete actions that every parliamentarian can take – from enacting parity laws and combating violence against women in politics, to ensuring equal leadership, revising discriminatory laws, and fostering gender-sensitive institutions.

The 10 actions are organized in three key thematic areas:

- Promoting parity in parliament and politics
- Encouraging gender-sensitive institutions
- Combating gender-based violence and discrimination

Each action is supported by evidence, practical tools, and real-world examples from parliaments worldwide, demonstrating how these commitments can be translated into tangible outcomes.

The structure of the guide is designed for easy use. Each action is presented with a clear rationale ("Proof point"), guidance and resources for implementation ("Support and resources point"), and an inspiring example of success ("Inspiration point"). Whether you are looking to initiate reform, strengthen existing policies, or advocate for institutional change, this guide offers both strategic direction and practical support.

Now is the time to move from words to action. Join the campaign. Be the change, action by action.

1

**Enact
parity laws**
to ensure 50:50
representation
in elections and
political roles

Achieve parity
in parliament
and politics



PROOF POINT

Out of 190 parliaments worldwide, only about 70 have achieved 30% or more women members of parliament (MPs) in their lower or single chambers. Among these, just six parliaments have reached gender parity or have more women than men MPs. The ultimate goal remains to achieve equal representation – 50:50 – between women and men in parliaments globally.

Robust gender quotas continue to be a crucial driver of progress towards this goal. For example, in renewals held in 2024, only 16.8% of MPs elected or appointed in chambers without gender quotas were women. By comparison, in chambers where such quotas were in place, this figure was 31.2%. While the proportion of women MPs continues to inch upward each year, global progress has slowed in recent years. Notably, 2024 saw the slowest rate of improvement since 2017, underscoring the urgent need for action.



SUPPORT AND RESOURCES POINT

See the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) report *Women in Parliament 1995-2025*. See the International IDEA **Gender Quotas Database** and the IPU **Parline database**. See also the IPU resolution *The freedom of women to participate in political processes fully, safely and without interference: Building partnerships between men and women to achieve this objective* (2016); the *Kigali Declaration* (2022); **CEDAW Committee General recommendation No 40. on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems** (2024), for which the IPU was an official partner; and the **outcome document (action plan)** from the 2025 IPU Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians, held in Mexico.



INSPIRATION POINT

In 2014, Mexico enacted constitutional reforms mandating gender parity in candidate nominations for both federal and local congressional elections, requiring political parties to ensure the equal representation of men and women on their candidate lists. The reforms also included measures to ensure equal funding for male and female candidates, further levelling the playing field. These actions resulted in a rapid increase in women's representation: by 2018, women held nearly 49% of seats in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, placing Mexico among the top countries globally for women's parliamentary representation.

2

Achieve parity
in parliament
and politics

Eliminate violence against women in parliament and politics through legislation on online and offline violence and internal policies in parliament



PROOF POINT

Sexism, harassment and violence against women in politics are key obstacles to women's equal political representation. More than 80% of women MPs surveyed by the IPU say they have received threats or been harassed online, while between 20% and 30% report physical attacks, property damage or sexual violence connected to their work as parliamentarians.

Parliaments must adopt specific laws prohibiting violence against women in politics, including online threats, harassment and hate speech, as well as internal policies that include confidential counselling and independent investigations where required.



SUPPORT AND RESOURCES POINT

See the IPU issue briefs on sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians, published in **2016**, **2018**, **2021** and **2025**. See the IPU's ***Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament*** (2019). See also the IPU resolution ***The freedom of women to participate in political processes fully, safely and without interference: Building partnerships between men and women to achieve this objective*** (2016); the ***Kigali Declaration*** (2022); **CEDAW Committee General recommendation No 40. on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems** (2024), for which the IPU was an official partner; and the **outcome document (action plan)** from the 2025 IPU Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians, held in Mexico.



INSPIRATION POINT

In 2024, the National Assembly of the United Republic of Tanzania passed the **Presidential, Parliamentary and Councillors' Elections Act**, which makes violence against women an electoral offence.

**Include women
in politics in all
their diversity
through electoral
quotas and fair
and inclusive
selection
processes**

3

**Achieve parity
in parliament
and politics**



PROOF POINT

Women from underrepresented groups must have a seat at the decision-making table. However, their presence remains alarmingly low in parliaments: only 1.4% of MPs worldwide are women under age 30. Gender discrimination often intersects with other forms of marginalization – based on characteristics such as ethnicity, age, disability and socioeconomic status – creating even greater barriers for many women.

These overlapping forms of discrimination result in particularly low levels of representation for women from minority backgrounds, for younger women and for women with disabilities. Despite the critical need for their perspectives to foster more inclusive and effective policymaking, many of these groups continue to face significant obstacles to entering parliament.



SUPPORT AND RESOURCES POINT

Parliaments must promote legislated quotas for women from different segments of the population, such as quotas for young people which mandate equal numbers of men and women among them. This is called for by the IPU's ***I Say Yes to Youth in Parliament!*** campaign. Parliaments should also adopt or revise existing legislation to nest diversity requirements within electoral gender quotas. Incentives can also be given to political parties, such as through the allocation of campaign financing resources to underrepresented groups of women. See the **outcome document (action plan)** from the 2025 IPU Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians, held in Mexico.



INSPIRATION POINT

In Zimbabwe, 10 seats in the 280-member National Assembly are reserved for young candidates, in the age group 21–35, elected under the List Proportional Representation (List PR) system. Each list of candidates must alternate female and male candidates. In addition, 60 seats are allocated to women candidates, who are to be elected under List PR for the four parliaments following the enactment of constitutional amendments in 2021 (i.e. elections in 2023, 2028, 2033 and 2038). Each list of candidates must include at least (a) 10 women under age 35, (b) women with disabilities and (c) young women with disabilities. See the **entry for Zimbabwe** in the IPU Parline database.

4

**Assess your
Parliament's
gender
sensitivity** using
the IPU's
evaluation tool

Make parliaments
gender-sensitive



PROOF
POINT

A gender-sensitive parliament is a modern parliament – one that addresses and reflects the equality demands of a modern society. Ultimately, a gender-sensitive parliament is more efficient, effective and legitimate. Assessing parliament's working methods, culture and infrastructure helps to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to set priorities for continuous improvement. A gender-sensitive parliament removes barriers to participation, upholds equality across all functions, and fosters a respectful, inclusive environment.

Assessments are more than checklists: they are catalysts for change. When used meaningfully and regularly, they lead to stronger codes of conduct, more family-friendly policies, and institutional reforms that benefit all MPs and staff.



SUPPORT AND
RESOURCES POINT

See the IPU's self-assessment toolkit *Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments* to conduct an assessment in line with the *Plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments* (2012). See also the IPU resolution *The freedom of women to participate in political processes fully, safely and without interference: Building partnerships between men and women to achieve this objective* (2016); the *Kigali Declaration* (2022); **CEDAW Committee General recommendation No 40. on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems** (2024), for which the IPU was an official partner; and the **outcome document (action plan)** from the 2025 IPU Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians, held in Mexico.



INSPIRATION
POINT

Many countries have carried out self-assessments with support from the IPU. In the United Kingdom, this process resulted in the introduction of proxy voting for MPs on parental leave. In Serbia and Mongolia, the exercise led to the adoption of enhanced quotas and an increase in the percentage of women elected to parliament.

5

Make parliaments
gender-sensitive

**Achieve equality in
leadership roles for
women and men in your
Parliament through quotas,
co-leadership and rotation**



PROOF
POINT

More women in parliament does not necessarily mean more women in leadership roles. As of 2025, women hold 27.2% of parliamentary seats worldwide yet only 24% of Speaker positions. About 28% of chairs of foreign affairs, defence, finance, human rights and gender equality committees are women. However, when gender equality committees are excluded, the proportion of women chairs drops to less than 20%.

Strong women's parliamentary caucuses are also important mechanisms to support women's leadership and influence in parliament, serving to amplify women's voices across party lines.



SUPPORT AND
RESOURCES POINT

Gender quotas are increasingly being applied in parliaments across the globe, in order to ensure power-sharing or alternation in leadership positions among men and women. These are often internal quotas aimed specifically at promoting gender balance in parliamentary leadership roles. This is in line with the *Plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments* (2012); the IPU resolution *The freedom of women to participate in political processes fully, safely and without interference: Building partnerships between men and women to achieve this objective* (2016); the *Kigali Declaration* (2022); **CEDAW Committee General recommendation No 40. on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems** (2024), for which the IPU was an official partner; and the **outcome document (action plan)** from the 2025 IPU Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians, held in Mexico.



INSPIRATION
POINT

Under the **2015 Constitution of Nepal**, co-leadership between men and women in leadership positions in parliament is mandatory. See Article 91 – Speaker and Deputy Speaker of House of Representatives, clause (2): “Election under clause (1) shall be so held that there is one woman out of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker...”; and Article 92 – Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of National Assembly, clause (2): “Election under clause (1) shall be so held that there is one woman out of the Chairperson and the Vice-Chairperson of the National Assembly”. The Senate of France and the National Assembly of Ecuador have also adopted provisions to ensure gender balance in parliamentary leadership. The standing orders of the Parliament of Uganda mandate a 40:60 gender ratio in the leadership of parliamentary committees.

Foster a gender-sensitive culture in your Parliament by implementing policies for equality and work-life balance, and against discrimination, sexism, harassment and violence against women

6

Make parliaments gender-sensitive



PROOF POINT

Parliamentary working culture needs to be inclusive and gender-responsive, promoting equal opportunities and respect for all. Work-life balance is a particularly important consideration for women, who bear the brunt of care responsibilities. While some parliaments have put in place more family-friendly provisions such as remote or proxy voting, and childcare arrangements, these remain uneven across the world and are often insufficient to meet the needs of all MPs and staff. Gender stereotypes and sexism can also have a chilling effect on women's access to, and influence in, decision-making. With nearly four in five women parliamentarians surveyed by the IPU reporting psychological violence during their tenure, ensuring a safe and respectful institutional culture is not optional – it is fundamental to democratic integrity and equality.



SUPPORT AND RESOURCES POINT

Parliaments' internal policies should be revised to ensure they cater for the needs of men and women alike, embrace diversity, and do not discriminate against women. Self-assessments, audits and surveys can be a good starting point. Awareness-raising activities are equally important to build a culture of equality. The IPU report ***Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice*** (2011) remains a key resource for gender-responsive policies and practices, such as family-friendly infrastructure, parliamentary calendars and predictable voting time. A growing number of parliaments have also been addressing the issue of parental leave for MPs. See the IPU's ***Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament***. See also the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) publication ***Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region***.



INSPIRATION POINT

After completing an initial self-assessment in 2019, the Congress of Colombia adopted its first anti-harassment policy. A breastfeeding room was also put in place. The second self-assessment, in 2024, led to the identification of further areas of progress, such as making existing policies better known and fostering a more inclusive and sexism-free working environment. In Sweden, there is an official procedure for parliamentary staff to file a complaint, verbally or in writing, with the head of human resources, which leads to an investigation. The procedure includes measures to prevent any reprisals against, or contact with, the accused. The investigation is conducted in a fully confidential manner. Individual interviews are held with each of the parties, who may be accompanied by representatives. The interviews are recorded and each party is informed in advance of the internal investigation. The employer must ensure that the harassment has ceased. The parties have access to workplace medical services.

7

**Revise and
eliminate laws
that discriminate
against women
and girls**

Fulfill women's and girls'
rights and gender equality
in a world free from gender-
based discrimination and
violence



PROOF POINT

Legal discrimination remains a significant barrier to gender equality worldwide. As of 2024, according to the World Bank, **women on average had access to just 64% of the legal protections available to men**. A total of 92 countries still lack laws mandating equal pay for work of equal value, 20 prohibit women from working at night and 45 restrict women from engaging in jobs deemed dangerous. Women and girls left behind by discriminatory laws are often permanently excluded from the benefits of development.

However, enacting good laws that conform to the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination can help sustain efforts to move towards just, peaceful and inclusive societies, environmental and climate justice, equal participation in decision-making at all levels, universal access to essential public services, and economic prosperity for all.

The economic and social benefits of such legislative reforms are unequivocal. Countries that have eliminated discriminatory laws see higher rates of women's employment and improved economic performance. The World Bank has noted that **closing gender gaps in the law could boost global gross domestic product (GDP) by more than 20%**.



SUPPORT AND RESOURCES POINT

Parliaments are central to legal reform. As the bodies responsible for drafting, reviewing and amending laws, they have a duty to eliminate any legal barriers to gender equality. This includes not only repealing laws that discriminate, but also identifying gaps in legislation and closing them through rights-based, inclusive consultation frameworks.

The IPU-UN Women handbook *Gender-responsive law-making* urges parliaments to systematically assess the gender impacts of all laws. The IPU handbook *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol* calls on legislators to bring national law in line with international commitments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW Convention) and its Optional Protocol.



INSPIRATION POINT

Kenya stands out for having embedded gender equality in its legal framework. This process began with the **2010 Constitution**, which guarantees equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex. Building on this foundation, the **Matrimonial Property Act (2013)**, and reforms to the **Land Act** and the **Land Registration Act**, have affirmed women's equal rights to own, access and inherit land and property – a powerful shift against customary norms that have excluded women from ownership. These changes were driven by strong parliamentary advocacy, judicial engagement and civil-society mobilization, showing how lawmaking that centres women's lived experiences can dismantle structural inequality and empower women economically and socially.

8

Fulfill women's and girls' rights and gender equality in a world free from gender-based discrimination and violence

Prevent and punish violence against women and girls through strong and comprehensive legislation



PROOF
POINT

In 2016, the global economic cost of violence against women was estimated at 2% of GDP – about US\$ 1.5 trillion, equivalent to the size of the economy of Canada at the time. Violence against women is not only one of the most egregious manifestations of gender inequality, but also one of the most widespread and tolerated human rights violations globally. The CEDAW Committee calls it “one of the fundamental social, political and economic means by which the subordinate position of women with respect to men and their stereotyped roles are perpetuated” (**CEDAW Committee General recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women**).

Despite decades of activism and legal progress in many countries, critical gaps persist. These include marital rape exemptions and laws that allow perpetrators to escape justice by marrying their victims. Such loopholes protect offenders, silence survivors and perpetuate a culture of impunity. Closing these gaps is essential for achieving true gender equality and safeguarding the rights and dignity of women everywhere.



SUPPORT AND
RESOURCES POINT

The scale of the violence against women and girls is staggering. One in three women globally has experienced physical or sexual violence in her lifetime, and more than five women or girls are killed every hour by a family member. The harm is deeply personal – but also profoundly systemic and costly. This cost is borne not just by women, but by entire societies. Laws matter – but only if they are strong, survivor-centred and enforced. Parliaments must ensure that legislation explicitly defines all forms of violence, protects women in all their diversity – including those in rural areas or marginalized communities, as well as those with disabilities – and mandates support services, legal aid and accountability mechanisms. Budgetary oversight is crucial to ensure that laws are not empty promises and that survivors are not left unprotected.



INSPIRATION
POINT

In 2017, Tunisia adopted **Organic Law No. 58 on Eliminating Violence Against Women**, a landmark and comprehensive reform encompassing physical, sexual, psychological, political and economic violence in both the private and public spheres. The law introduces preventive measures and criminal sanctions, and mandates specialized police units and judiciary services for survivors. It also emphasizes training for law enforcement and judicial actors, aiming to dismantle institutional neglect. This achievement was the result of years of advocacy by women’s organizations and committed parliamentary leadership, demonstrating the impact of political will and inclusive, gender-responsive lawmaking.

**Track legislation
and monitor
budgets to
support gender
equality and
gender
mainstreaming**

9

Fulfill women's and girls'
rights and gender equality in a
world free from gender-based
discrimination and violence



PROOF
POINT

Legislation that appears to be gender-neutral can often conceal deep-rooted structural inequalities. Without active monitoring through a gender lens, laws and policies risk reinforcing rather than reducing disparities. The IPU emphasizes that parliaments are not only lawmaking institutions but also powerful oversight bodies. Yet many parliaments fail to conduct gender-sensitive post-legislative scrutiny or to routinely monitor the gender impact of laws. They also often overlook the need to ensure that national budgets allocate sufficient resources for gender equality.

According to the IPU-UN Women handbook *Gender-responsive law-making*, gender-blind lawmaking can perpetuate discrimination, especially when it ignores the diverse realities of women, including those facing intersecting forms of marginalization. Regular, gender-sensitive reviews of legislation and budgets are essential to advancing true equality.



SUPPORT AND
RESOURCES POINT

Parliaments have a vital role to play in embedding gender equality through the exercise of their lawmaking, budgeting and oversight functions. They must review laws to eliminate discrimination, using gender and intersectional analysis, and conduct gender-sensitive impact assessments when drafting new legislation. Tracking budgets through gender-responsive budgeting ensures that public funds reduce gender gaps. Oversight tools such as committee inquiries and audits help translate laws into real change. Mainstreaming gender and human rights into all oversight activities is essential. Strengthening institutional mechanisms – such as gender focal points and equality committees – and engaging civil society further amplify these efforts. See the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) publication *Policy Paper: Gender-sensitive Post-Legislative Scrutiny* (2020) and the IPU-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Global Parliamentary Report 2017 – Parliamentary oversight: Parliament's power to hold government to account*.



INSPIRATION
POINT

In Spain, **Organic Act 1/2004** was enacted to prevent and combat gender-based violence and to protect victims. The law mandated the establishment of the State Observatory on Violence against Women, an interministerial body responsible for analysis, institutional cooperation, reporting and action plans. One of the main reasons for setting up the Observatory was to create an official database to collate all information provided by public institutions with a focus on gender-based violence, to ensure that the scale of the phenomenon and its development could be analysed. This information would then be made available to key institutions, such as parliament, to inform oversight. In 2008, the parliamentary Commission on Equality set up a subcommittee with a specific mandate to review the implementation of the law. The subcommittee spent more than a year receiving submissions from a range of experts within and outside government. The resulting report and recommendations were unanimously approved by the Commission.

10

**Speak out
against gender-
based inequality
and violence
whenever and
wherever you see it!**



PROOF POINT

Silence reinforces inequality. Every time we speak up, we challenge the structures that normalize gender-based discrimination and violence. The cost of inaction is too high and is measured in lost lives, suppressed potential and deepening inequality. Gender-based violence, harassment, exclusion and bias flourish when they go unchallenged, in both the public and private spheres. Speaking out is critical to advancing gender equality.



SUPPORT AND RESOURCES POINT

Gender equality is a shared responsibility, requiring solidarity across all roles and political affiliations. When it comes to advancing gender equality and combating gender-based violence, every action counts. MPs and other parliamentary actors can speak out and act against all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination within and beyond their institutions. They can use their voice to defend and promote gender equality and women's rights and empowerment – in every public speaking opportunity, in every interview in the media, in social media posts, and in conferences and meetings. On special occasions such as International Women's Day, they can make their voice even stronger. MPs can sponsor gender-responsive legislation, establish or join gender equality caucuses and committees, and network with women's rights organizations and movements. By leading by example, MPs help build a parliamentary culture rooted in respect, integrity and equal participation. See the IPU report ***Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice*** (2011) and the UN Women **HeForShe** campaign.



INSPIRATION POINT

In Senegal, women MPs stood united to condemn insults and violent attacks inflicted on one of their colleagues in the exercise of her duties. Their firm action led to sanctions for the perpetrators of the attacks.

Male MPs are key allies in fostering a culture of accountability and inclusion. In the Gambia, male leaders – including the Deputy Speaker – played a decisive role in 2024 by defending the national ban on female genital mutilation amid attempts to repeal it. Their swift intervention helped safeguard women's rights and uphold legal protections.



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