



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Parliamentary Forum at the 2025 UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Gender equality and health: fast forwarding progress

Tuesday, 22 July, 15:00–18:00
Conference Room 3
United Nations, New York

The Parliamentary Forum at the UN's High Level Political Forum (HLPF) is designed to engage parliamentarians in assessing progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the global level. Billed as a Special Event of the annual HLPF session, the Parliamentary Forum provides a major opportunity for parliamentary oversight of government action as well as for an exchange of best legislative practices on sustainable development from parliaments around the world.

This year's Parliamentary Forum will focus on two SDGs that are under review at the HLPF, namely, SDG 3, on health and human well-being, and SDG 5, on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In two fast-paced sessions, the meeting will highlight the concrete steps parliaments can take to advance these goals and help reset the entire SDGs framework.

Draft programme

15:00 Opening

Dr. Tulia Ackson, President of the IPU

15:10 SDG 5 – The role of parliaments in delivering on gender equality

SDG 5 is a key enabler for achieving the entire sustainable development agenda. Gender gaps in education, health and income stem from women's and girls' unequal status, voice and power, be it in law or in practice, in the household or in politics. This discrimination fuels gender-based violence against women and girls, including harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, all of which further hamper the well-being and empowerment of women and girls, and undermines the achievement of the SDGs for all.

In a context of pushback on women's rights, parliaments must stand strong and be institutions that are fully inclusive of women in all their diversity, in parity with men, and able to advance

gender equality in line with SDG 5. However, on 1 January 2025, women occupied only 27.2% of seats in national parliaments globally. This is a gain of a mere 0.3 percentage points since January 2024 and is a slowdown compared to an average annual increase of nearly 0.5 percentage points in the previous decade. The representation of young women is particularly low: globally, only 1.4% of MPs are women under the age of 30 and only 7.9% are women under 40. With this, the pushback on women's rights and empowerment is also felt at the level of women's participation in parliament.

Electoral quotas remain a determining factor for progress towards gender parity in decision-making. Countries that applied quotas in 2024 elected far more women MPs (31.2%) than those without quotas (16.8 %). For quotas to work they must be ambitious, duly enforced and combined with measures to create a conducive environment. Addressing the obstacle that violence against women in politics constitutes is another determining factor for progress.

General recommendation No. 40 (GR 40) adopted by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in October 2024 provides game changing guidance towards achieving equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making.

Echoing GR 40, the Plan of Action adopted at the 2025 IPU Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians in Mexico, called for:

- Parity in numbers – a 50:50 balance between women and men in parliament, across all age groups and in line with other categories of diversity.
- Parity in influence and power – ensuring that women and men have the same levels of leadership and influence in parliament.
- A parity culture – namely, safe and inclusive working conditions, gender-sensitive parliaments and zero-tolerance for sexism, harassment and violence, both offline and online.

Participants at the Parliamentary Forum will be invited to share insights on achievements made and the way forward towards ensuring parliaments achieve gender parity in numbers, influence and power, and are genuinely gender-responsive institutions.

The session will address the following guiding questions:

- How close is your Parliament to achieving parity in numbers among men and women?
- Does your Parliament currently apply measures to promote parity in influence and power? If yes, which measures?
- What works to have more women from marginalized groups in parliament?
- Are members of parliament leading gender-responsive laws, policies and budgets? What are the challenges on that front and how can inter-parliamentary cooperation be helpful?
- Is zero-tolerance towards sexism, harassment and violence applied in your Parliament? What is needed to advance towards parliaments free from violence against women members and staff?

Moderator:

Hon. Paddy Torsney, IPU Permanent Observer to the UN in New York

Presenters:

Mr. Mohamed Sabbari, first Vice-President of the Chamber of Representatives of Morocco

Ms. Gabriela Morawska-Stanecka, IPU Vice-President, MP, Parliament of Poland

Ms. Fatuma Dullo, MP, National Assembly of Kenya, Member of the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA)

Ms. Julie Ballington, Policy Advisor on Political Participation, Leadership and Governance Section, UN Women

16:30 **SDG 3 – No one left behind: The role of parliaments in health for all**

SDG 3 seeks to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”. This includes critical health priorities such as universal health coverage (UHC), reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health, and the reduction of disease burdens.

Global progress has been achieved in several areas, with most countries being on track to meet the under-5 mortality target, and effective HIV treatment cutting global AIDS-related deaths by 52% since 2010. However, minimal advances have been made after 2015 in critical areas such as the reduction of maternal mortality and access to health services. One woman dies every two minutes from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, while in 2021 about 4.5 billion people were not fully covered by essential health services. Stark health inequities also persist undermining progress on SDG 3 and the broader 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Health inequity remains a pressing challenge across all regions, driven by factors including discrimination, harmful social and cultural norms, structural barriers, and entrenched gender inequality. Women and girls in particular, continue to face systemic obstacles that limit their ability to make autonomous health decisions. Financial dependence, social expectations, and gender biases in healthcare provision contribute to poor access and substandard care. Meanwhile, individuals in marginalized situations frequently encounter stigma and exclusion both within healthcare systems and society at large.

In some contexts, legal and policy frameworks further entrench disparities. The categorization of people as “vulnerable and marginalized groups” often obscures the historical, political, and structural factors that have produced these inequities. This can diminish accountability and limit the scope of policy solutions. Moreover, effective promotion of the needs and right of some groups may sideline other marginalized populations, especially when political sensitivities deter open advocacy for less “visible” or politicized communities.

These challenges are compounded by increasing polarization and a growing pushback on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and broader gender equality efforts – threatening hard-won gains in human rights and inclusive health policies.

This session will provide a space for parliamentarians to engage in a constructive exchange on the importance of health equity as a foundational principle of SDG 3 and the SDGs more broadly. It aims to explore the role of parliaments in addressing structural barriers, safeguarding rights and ensuring inclusive health systems that leave no one behind.

The session will address the following guiding questions

- What are some examples of effective parliamentary action that promote health and protect rights, especially of populations in vulnerable and marginalized situations?
- How can parliaments serve as inclusive spaces for dialogue and accountability on equitable health access?
- How can parliaments best overcome and combat discrimination and stereotypes that lead to women's and girls' exclusion from essential health services, especially in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights?
- How can parliaments help ensure that policies in other areas such as education, food and climate also support people's health, especially that of the most vulnerable?

Moderator:

Ms. Farida Ilimi, MP, National People's Assembly of Algeria, Member of the IPU Committee on Health

Presenters:

Ms. Petra Bayr, MP, National Council of Austria

Mr. John Banza Lunda, MP, National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Dr. Sanjay Jaiswal, MP, Parliament of India, Member of the IPU Committee on Health – *invited*

Ms. Soyoltuya Bayaraa, Deputy Director of the Programme Division, UNFPA

17:50 Closing

Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the IPU