



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Sixth Expert Roundtable on the Common Principles for Support to Parliaments

From principle to practice: Enhancing parliamentary development through gender equality

Online, Tuesday, 9 December 2025, 14:00–15:30 CET

ROUNDTABLE REPORT

Background

Rooted in over 50 years of collective wisdom and experience, the Common Principles for Support to Parliament were formally adopted at the 131st IPU Assembly in October 2014. For over a decade, they have served as a guide to both parliaments and partners toward more effective, locally-owned support. As of 2025, they have now been endorsed by 82% of national parliaments (159 parliaments), as well as 33 parliamentary assemblies and partner organizations.

The series of regular Expert Roundtables serves as opportunities for the parliamentary community to spotlight dimensions of parliamentary support in greater detail and share knowledge and good practices. The Sixth Expert Roundtable on the Common Principles focused on the implementation of Common Principle 6: “Parliamentary support addresses the needs and potential of women and men equally in the structure, operation, methods and work of parliament”. This topic tied into IPU’s annual theme on gender equality in 2025, as it marked the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The discussions served to take stock of advances and obstacles in promoting gender equality in parliamentary self-development initiatives, as well as showcase innovative tools, products and strategies to better integrate gender equality in the conceptualization, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of actions.

The event brought together over 40 representatives from national and regional parliaments and 20 representatives from partner organizations.

Introductory remarks

Ms. Alyson Kozma, Senior Advisor for Gender, Women, and Democracy at the National Democratic Institute (NDI), moderated the Roundtable and situated the discussion within the broader context of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, and IPU’s [Achieving gender equality, action by action](#) campaign.

“The Common Principles are meant to be dynamic and actionable and not just exist on paper.”

Ms. Kareen Jabre, Director, Division of Programmes at the IPU, welcomed participants and highlighted the importance of Common Principle 6 in advancing gender equality across parliamentary structures, operations, and work. She recalled the [IPU Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments](#), adopted in 2012 and renewed in 2022, and its related [self-assessment toolkit](#). While progress had been made through initiatives such as gender focal points and gender audits, gaps remained. Ms. Jabre concluded by stressing the importance of the current discussion at a time when parliaments faced increasing pressures, making gender equality central to inclusive, effective, and resilient institutions.

Session 1: How has Common Principle 6 on integrating gender equality been applied in your Parliament and contributed to better parliamentary development?

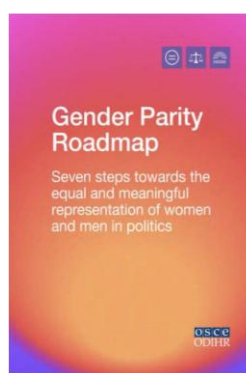
The first session examined how Common Principle 6 has been applied in parliaments, focusing on progress made, barriers and innovative strategies for advancing gender-sensitive parliamentary development.

Ms. Charlotte Cousins, Senior Researcher in Parliamentary Affairs at the Parliament of Ireland, shared key recent developments regarding gender-sensitive reforms and women’s participation in Ireland. Significant progress included the election of the first female Speaker of Parliament, the reconstitution of the Irish Women’s Parliamentary Caucus, and a gender-balanced management board within the parliamentary service. However, progress was still lacking. For example, a formal gender-sensitivity assessment had not been carried out yet despite its recommendation. While

maternity leave legislation had been adopted at local and national levels, it still had not been implemented at parliament due to complexities within the parliamentary allowance regime. Ms. Cousins noted that Ireland’s gender quota, introduced in 2012, initially had a strong impact, though its effectiveness had since plateaued.

Mr. Gilbert Bosco N’habay, Deputy Clerk of the Parliament of Sierra Leone, outlined transformative progress following the adoption of the 2022 Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act, which requires at least one woman candidate for every three nominees. As a result, women’s representation increased from about between 12% and 13% to 30% after the 2023 elections, making Sierra Leone second highest in women’s representation in West Africa and well above the continental average. He also noted an increase in women ministers, expanded training for parliamentary staff on gender equality and greater representation of women within the parliamentary secretariat. Through the *HeForShe* initiative, male parliamentarians voluntarily relinquished seats to women, underscoring the impact of political will and international cooperation.

Mr. Saša Gavrić, Gender Officer at OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), presented the organization’s toolbox for gender equality in parliaments, including a 2022 guide on mainstreaming gender equality across parliamentary functions, participatory gender audits conducted in 48 States, and a recently launched seven-step Gender Parity Roadmap. He highlighted regional peer-learning initiatives, including the Helsinki pledges endorsed by 16 parliaments, and the Sarajevo tool aimed at engaging male politicians. He noted that women’s parliamentary caucuses also played a key role in trust-building, reducing polarization and supporting long-term strategic planning.



Seven steps

- 1 Comprehensive national assessments & action plans
- 2 Embedding gender equality in constitutions
- 3 Strengthening gender-targeted legislative measures
- 4 Holding political parties accountable
- 5 Making parliaments gender-sensitive
- 6 Framing parity as a shared leadership responsibility
- 7 Monitoring, reviewing, revising and innovating



ODIHR Gender Parity Roadmap

During the interactive discussion, participants from parliaments and partner organizations provided insights into developments for women’s empowerment in their countries and organizations. They emphasized the importance of strengthening parliamentary capacities for both men and women; gender-sensitive lawmaking and oversight; advocating for a whole-parliament approach with male leader involvement; and the importance of collecting and sharing data and stories on women’s representation. The importance of gender audits and of forging partnerships for parliamentary reforms was also raised.

“We have seen that women MP caucuses in parliaments can be really a driving force for overall trust-building and reduction of polarization.”

Session 2: Fostering a gender-sensitive workplace for MPs and parliamentary staff and combating violence against women in parliament

The second session focused on gender-based violence in parliaments and explored effective actions to foster gender-sensitive workplaces for MPs and staff. Discussions addressed how parliaments can combat sexism, harassment and violence against women, while overcoming resistance and strengthening institutional cultures of safety, dignity and equality.

Ms. Annalou Nachura, Deputy Secretary General and Chief Counsel of the Legal Affairs Department of the House of Representatives of the Philippines and the House Co-Chairperson of the



Inclusive Voices publication, House of Representatives of Philippines

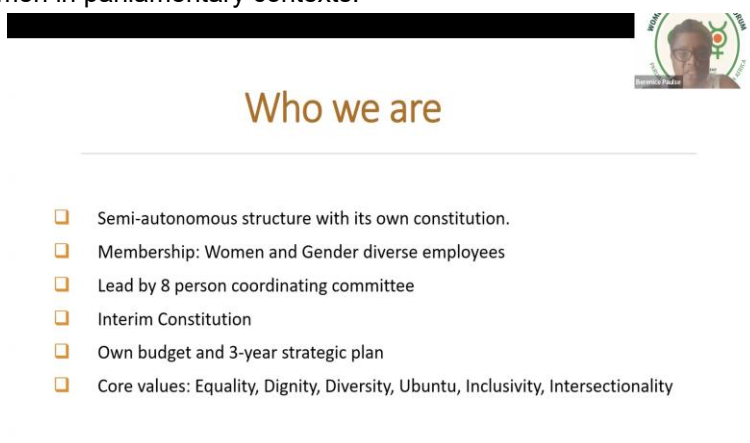
Gender and Development Focal Point System, shared a comprehensive set of measures adopted to address gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the Congress of the Philippines. She highlighted the use of innovative awareness-raising tools, including comic-style wall art, alongside mandatory gender sensitivity training to foster cultural change. The House launched a Women’s Priority Legislative Agenda to advance gender-responsive policymaking and published *Inclusive Voices*, a guide promoting the use of gender-fair language to eliminate bias in parliamentary discourse and documentation. Institutionally, a Committee on Decorum and Investigation of Sexual Harassment Cases was established, along with a dedicated hotline to provide immediate support and remedies for victims. Recognizing the importance of engaging men as allies, Ms. Nachura also described the creation of the “Men Opposed to Violence Against Women Everywhere” movement, which encouraged male parliamentarians and staff to actively support gender equality initiatives.

Ms. Berenice Paule, Chairperson of the Women and Gender Rights Forum of the Parliament of South Africa, presented the work of the Forum, which was established in 2020 to promote gender equality among parliamentary employees. The Forum includes women and gender-diverse staff and operates independently, with its own constitution and dedicated budget, enabling it to speak out on gender equality issues autonomously. Ms. Paule highlighted the Forum’s engagement in reviewing parliamentary policies through a gender lens, participating in strategic decision-making structures, and conducting casework related to gender discrimination and harassment. She also reflected on ongoing challenges, including contested power dynamics within the institution and the need to strengthen collaboration with political leadership and parliamentary structures to ensure sustained impact. She noted that a core reason for the high level of trust placed in the Forum was its provision of continuous emotional support to victims, not only during disciplinary proceedings but also throughout the entire process and beyond, ensuring that individuals were not left isolated once formal procedures were concluded.

“We learned that our experiences are often treated as homogeneous. This highlighted the importance of intersectionality. Being in a male-dominated institution also showed us how feminist institutionalism applies in practice.”

In the ensuing interactive discussion, participants emphasized the importance of adopting an intersectional approach when addressing gender-based violence in parliamentary settings. Participants also stressed the need for accurate and disaggregated data on institutional and domestic violence to inform evidence-based reforms and effective legislative responses within parliaments. It was noted that while some statistics exist, many were incomplete or fragmented looking at specific regions. One example mentioned was the [IPU’s and the African Parliamentary Union’s 2021 study on Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Africa](#), which documented various forms of violence experienced by women in parliamentary contexts.

The session concluded with a shared recognition that combating gender-based violence in parliaments required sustained political will, institutional accountability, inclusive engagement of men and women, and stronger data collection and knowledge sharing. Participants called for continued collaboration among parliaments and partners to build safer, more gender-sensitive parliamentary workplaces globally.



Who we are

- Semi-autonomous structure with its own constitution.
- Membership: Women and Gender diverse employees
- Lead by 8 person coordinating committee
- Interim Constitution
- Own budget and 3-year strategic plan
- Core values: Equality, Dignity, Diversity, Ubuntu, Inclusivity, Intersectionality

Presentation of the Women and Gender Rights Forum, Parliament of South Africa

Summary of key takeaways

- **Gender equality strengthens parliamentary effectiveness.**
Integrating gender equality into parliamentary structures, operations and planning makes institutions more inclusive, responsive and relevant to all citizens.
- **A whole-of-parliament approach is essential.**
Sustainable change requires engagement across all levels of parliament, including leadership, MPs, staff and political parties.
- **Men's engagement is critical to success.**
The active involvement of male MPs, leaders and staff is essential to shifting institutional culture, sharing responsibility for reform and ensuring gender equality is seen as a collective priority.
- **Tools and assessments must lead to action.**
Gender audits, self-assessment toolkits and parity roadmaps are powerful instruments when they are linked to political commitment, clear implementation plans and accountability mechanisms.
- **Legislative and workplace reforms go hand in hand.**
Measures such as parental leave, flexible working arrangements, women's caucuses, and gender-sensitive lawmaking improve participation, retention and representation of women in parliament.
- **Addressing gender-based violence is a core institutional responsibility.**
Effective responses include clear reporting mechanisms, dedicated committees, hotlines, gender-sensitivity training and zero-tolerance policies, alongside efforts to shift institutional culture.
- **Peer learning and partnerships accelerate progress.**
Collaboration with international and regional partners, peer exchanges and shared frameworks help parliaments adopt good practices, build capacity and sustain momentum for reform.
- **Political leadership remains a decisive factor.**
Even well-designed reforms can stall without leadership and sustained commitment. Continuous monitoring and follow-up are needed to turn commitments into lasting institutional change.