



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Celebration of International Women's Day - Invest on Women: Accelerate Progress

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As we reflect on these historic milestones of celebrating International Women's Day each year, we must note some progress, but prominent figures are quitting. The progress from 2023 on women's representation in Parliaments could have been faster and more varied. Globally, the share of women MPs stood at 26.9% on 1 January 2024, only 0.4 percentage points higher than it was 12 months earlier. This represented a similar rate of progress as in 2022 but slower than in the preceding years.

Currently, the **global share of women MPs is 26.9%**, presenting a yearly growth rate of only **0,4** percentage points. In the meantime, only **six countries have achieved parity** in parliament. However, the growth is slower than in the preceding years – elections in 2021 and 2020 saw an increase of women MPs of 0.6 percentage points. These are rates of progress we cannot afford. If we genuinely aim to reach the Sustainable Development Goals on time and address the challenges of our time before they become unmanageable, we need to solidify existing gains and be much more ambitious in our actions.

The IPU's latest [Women in Parliament 2023](#) report outlined renewals in 66 chambers in 52 countries in 2023. Women made up 27.6% of MPs in those newly elected or appointed chambers, an overall increase of 1.4 percentage points compared with previous polls in the same countries. This reminds us not only of the resilience of nations in the face of adversity but also of the enduring struggle for equality and justice. Today, we not only celebrate this significant day of the world by addressing the current and future challenges societies face globally, but also the perspectives, talents, and contributions of half of our population to the cause of Human Rights and Gender Equality commitments.

In 2023, countries that applied gender electoral quotas elected an average of 28.8% women to parliament, whereas countries that applied no quotas elected only 23.2%. However, we know that not just any quota strategy brings results. It requires maintaining ambitious targets, measuring its fit within the electoral system, and, most importantly, securing its strict enforcement.

It is practically and morally unsustainable. Studies have repeatedly shown that diverse and inclusive decision-making processes lead to better outcomes, greater innovation, and more sustainable solutions. Gender equality is, therefore, not only a matter of social justice but also a pragmatic imperative.

As we aim to invest in women and accelerate their progress, we must affirm female role models in politics as a powerful way to inspire and empower the next generation of women leaders. When young girls see women in positions of political power, they are more likely to believe such roles can inspire them. Female role models can break down stereotypes, challenge traditional gender norms, and demonstrate that women are just as capable and qualified as men to lead.

First, we need a gender lens in our work. More than a decade ago, the IPU came up with the concept of **gender-sensitive parliaments**, calling for institutions to transform their modus operandi to be more representative, better adapted, and more efficient in embodying gender equality and delivering on it for society.

A gender-sensitive parliament is one in which there are no substantive, structural or cultural barriers to women's full participation and equality between its male and female members and staff. It is not only a place where women can work but also one where women want to work and contribute. Transforming our parliaments into gender-sensitive institutions is a precondition for building trust and enhancing their efficiency, effectiveness, and legitimacy.

We also need **parity** at all levels and in leadership positions. We must consider parity not a luxury but a necessity for democracy, justice, and progress. But waiting for it to happen is not an option. This leads me to the need to institute **gender electoral quotas**, a strategy that delivers on parity.

But we cannot simply hope to reach parity if it is for women to end up trapped in a hostile, disrespectful, discriminating, and dangerous environment. The IPU landmarking studies on **sexism and violence against women in parliament** gave evidence of the widespread prevalence of gender-based violence against women MPs and women parliamentary staff. For example, our study on Europe found that more than 85% of the women MPs surveyed had faced psychological violence, and our study on Africa showed that close to 40% of the women MPs surveyed were sexually harassed during their mandate.

This is unacceptable and holds parliaments and other political institutions to account if they are to be truly inclusive. Strict policies and **zero tolerance** of violence against women, sexual harassment and bullying in parliaments must be implemented, with independent and effective complaints procedures backed up by tough sanctions and support for complainants.

Parliaments must not only set an example and eliminate gender-based violence in their institutions, but they must do so without ever losing sight of the fact that around 736 million women and girls from all walks of life around the world are victims of gender-based violence in the home and the public sphere. Suppose we genuinely want to deliver on gender equality. In that case, we must put an end to all forms of violence against women and girls by ensuring that laws and policies are effectively implemented and providing survivors with safe spaces to report violence, a range of services tailored to their needs and tools to combat further intimidation. We should also work to ensure that the criminal justice system bears the burden of holding abusers accountable.

In our pursuit of equality and women's empowerment, we must also recognize the critical role of **education as a catalyst for change**. Education is a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty and discrimination. Yet, gender disparities persist, particularly in accessing education, with millions of girls still being denied their right to learn. Addressing these disparities requires an approach that tackles structural barriers and deeply entrenched social norms and attitudes.

Moreover, we cannot ignore the gendered aspects of women's enrollment in education, especially in rural communities where traditional gender roles and cultural norms often prevail. In many parts of the world, girls face significant obstacles, including early marriage, household responsibilities, and lack of access to safe and quality transportation and schooling infrastructure. By legislating to address these barriers, we can ensure that all girls have an opportunity to receive a quality education.

Finally, we need a more equitable approach to women's health. Despite advancements in **healthcare**, women and girls continue to face unique challenges to their well-being, including limited access to social security, reproductive healthcare services and maternal mortality. Ensuring universal access to comprehensive healthcare services is essential for promoting women's rights and empowering women to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. As parliamentarians, we must prioritize policies and programs that address the root causes of gender disparities in healthcare and promote gender-sensitive approaches to health service delivery.

Dear colleagues, as speakers, we occupy a unique position of trust and responsibility, a position that demands our unwavering commitment and result-oriented actions to advance the cause of gender equality and women's empowerment. Women and girls worldwide are looking at us as drivers of progress – their progress.

To find solutions to the multifaceted challenges of our time, we must understand that no single parliament can tackle these challenges alone. Inter-parliamentary cooperation and parliamentary diplomacy are indispensable tools for utilizing our resources, sharing our experiences, and amplifying our voices on the global stage.

I call for all of us to redouble our efforts to build a world where every woman and girl can fulfil her full potential and contribute her talents to society.