

Parliamentarians for gender equality and women's empowerment

Regional conference for Eastern Europe and Central Asia

October 3-4, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova

– Concept note –

Background

Gender equality is both a requirement for responsive and accountable democratic societies, and key to the credibility and legitimacy of decision-making institutions. Women's presence in sufficient numbers in electoral politics and in leadership positions is an essential aspect of inclusive governance. Studies show that parliaments with higher proportions of women MPs are more likely to address gender issues.ⁱ But much work remains to ensure that parliaments prioritize gender equality and that a gender lens is applied in all legislative processes.

Globally, women's low levels of participation in politics and public institutions are a cause and effect of the lack of priority accorded to gender equality in the political establishment. Few countries have met the globally agreed minimum target of 30 percent representation of women in decision-making, despite international and OSCE commitments to apply temporary special measures to support gender balance in state bodies.ⁱⁱ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development envisions women's full and effective participation in decision-making in political and public life as key to achieving progress in 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There are at least 26 targets for gender equality across the goals, including targets specific to gender equality in decision-making.ⁱⁱⁱ By simultaneously emphasizing the importance of sound policies and enforceable legislation, Agenda 2030 presents a compelling new framework to advance gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

Against this background, the conference aims to bring together parliamentarians, local elected officials and civil society representatives from countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia including: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Representatives from other countries, such as Finland, Montenegro, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Slovenia, will be invited to participate and share their expert knowledge and experience in promoting gender equality and women's rights. The event will serve as a forum to exchange good practices on gender-responsive legislation and policy, promote coalition-building and focus on ways to address persisting and emerging challenges. UNDP, UN Women and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) are organizing this regional conference with the support of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova and in partnership with the Government of Sweden.

Regional context

Despite some success, progress towards a higher representation of women and gender-responsive parliaments and local assemblies has been slow.^{iv} In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, women's representation in the lower houses of parliament averages 20 percent.^v Women's representation in local elected office remains equally low, particularly in mayoral and leadership positions in local assemblies. Women represent just 15 percent of mayors.

Women face multiple obstacles to participating in political life. Cultural norms, structural barriers and discriminatory laws limit their opportunities to run for and be elected to political office. Women are also less likely than men to have access to the political networks and financial resources needed to gain and remain in elected office and leadership positions. When women do reach decision-making posts, they continue to face these and other obstacles, such as lack of institutional support, gender stereotypes about women's roles and professional capacities, and challenges balancing private and professional life.

To address these challenges, women and men in parliaments and local assemblies have established governance structures, networks, support mechanisms and strategic plans to improve women's participation in decision-making. In addition, temporary special measures and affirmative actions have mitigated institutionalized forms of gender discrimination in parliaments and local assemblies.^{vi} The OSCE participating states have committed to "consider possible legislative measures, which would facilitate a more balanced participation of women and men in political and public life and especially in decision-making."^{vii} These and other efforts must continue to ensure gender-responsive processes, mechanisms and structures that allow both women and men politicians and staff to contribute equally to work of parliament.

Legislation to address persistent and deepening challenges to gender equality is rarely prioritized. Yet laws and policies are urgently needed to address gender inequalities in labour market participation, employment and wages, especially inequalities created by unpaid care work. It is crucial for parliamentarians to understand the gender impacts of legislative proposals and to have the methodologies to assess these impacts. Laws against various forms of gender-based violence and discrimination need to be enforced. Laws and policies with a gender perspective are also needed to respond to new and emerging challenges arising from migration and refugee flows, the spread of extremist and traditionalist movements, and climate change and disaster risk.

How parliamentarians respond to these challenges will be key to their countries' progress on Agenda 2030 and realization of its crosscutting gender equality targets. There is now a unique opportunity to create a broad coalition of elected officials and civil society, including gender advocates and women's organizations, to sustain the demand for gender-responsive



Parliamentarians for gender equality and women's empowerment

approaches in parliamentary work and secure the passage of key laws to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

Objectives

Provide a forum for regional coalition-building and peer learning through:

- Exchange of good practices on amplifying women's voices in legislatures (e.g., specific procedures, institutions such as parliamentary (women's) caucuses and/ or committees, lobbying efforts).
- Identification of persisting and emerging challenges that require gender-responsive approaches and specific laws and policy (e.g., combating violence and harmful practices, addressing unpaid care work)
- Presentation of concrete measures to improve the gender-responsiveness of parliaments (e.g., gender impact assessments of parliamentary bills)

Methodology

The conference will be conducted in plenary and working sessions, including exchanges with expert practitioners from within and outside the region. Practical case studies, using examples and approaches from other regions, will be discussed in working groups.

Logistics

The conference will be held at Radisson Blu Leograd Hotel in Chişinău. Simultaneous translation will be provided to and from Russian, Romanian and English languages.

Expected outcomes

- Parliamentarians have the knowledge and tools to strengthen the gender-responsiveness of parliamentary functioning and legislative processes
- Increased visibility of the work of women parliamentarians to advance gender equality, both on national and regional level
- Identification of common gender equality goals to advance the SDGs and OSCE gender equality commitments in participating countries.

Participants (80-100)

- Members of parliaments and local assemblies
- Civil society representatives and parliamentary experts from national and international organizations
- UN Women, UNDP, ODIHR, and other UN regional and Country Office representatives.



Parliamentarians for gender equality and women's empowerment

ⁱ Though correlation is not systematic. J. Squires and M. Wickham-Jones, 'Women in Parliament: A Comparative Analysis', UK Equal Opportunities Commission, 2001, pp. 88–99; D. Dahlerup, 'From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 11(4), 1988; N. Mekki, *Tunisia: Equality in Gender and Constitution*, Vienna, International Peace Institute, 2014.

ⁱⁱ 30 percent target endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1990 and reaffirmed by the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. OSCE participating States have committed to "consider providing for specific measures to achieve the goal of gender balance in all legislative, judicial and executive bodies..." OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 7/09 on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life, Art 1: <http://www.osce.org/mc/40710?download=true>.

ⁱⁱⁱ SDG target 5.5 seeks to 'ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life' with indicator 5.5.1 "Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments." SDG target 16.7 seeks to 'ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels' with indicators 16.7.1 'Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions'; and 16.7.2 'Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group.'

^{iv} *Strengthening women's political participation: An analysis of the impact of women's parliamentary networks in Europe and Central Asia* (UNDP 2016). <http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/library/gender-equality/strengthening-womens-political-participation.html>

^v *Women in National Parliaments*, Inter-Parliamentary Union: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> 1 June 2017. See also the women in politics 2017 map: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/4/women-in-politics-2017-map>

^{vi} Temporary Special Measures to achieve women's participation in decision making and politics are the subject of CEDAW General Recommendation No. 25.

^{vii} OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 7/09 on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life, Art 2: <http://www.osce.org/mc/40710?download=true>. See also OSCE Decision No. 14/04, 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality: <http://www.osce.org/mc/23295?download=true>