



Gender Parity Roadmap

Seven steps towards the
equal and meaningful
representation of women
and men in politics

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Acknowledgements

ODIHR would like to express its gratitude to the following peer-reviewers who provided valuable feedback to the first draft: Anna Juhola (Demo Finland), Bénite Dibateza (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association), Cécile Gréboval (Council of Europe), Céline Georgi (CEDAW Committee Secretariat, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), Hannah Johnson (International IDEA), Mariana Duarte (Inter-Parliamentary Union), Tània Verge (Universitat Pompeu Fabra), Sarah Childs (University of Edinburgh), Yanna Parnin (Council of Europe), Zeina Hilal (Inter-Parliamentary Union). ODIHR would also like to thank the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for their input.

Gender Parity Roadmap: Seven steps towards the equal and meaningful representation of women and men in politics

Published by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)
ul. Miodowa 10
00-251 Warsaw
Poland
www.osce.org/odihr

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ISBN: 978-92-9271-455-0

Design: Filip Andronik



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Gender parity — the global norm for the equal and meaningful representation of women and men

The advancement of gender equality aims to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men, as well as the just distribution of power and resources. Gender equality should enable both women and men to shape politics, and it is increasingly accepted that politics and decision-making processes should embrace the participation and contribution of the people they affect. However, most political institutions were shaped by men and continue to be dominated by patriarchal systems of power and masculinity norms. The gendered nature of political institutions, in turn, means that many laws and policies are gender-blind, lacking gender analysis or gender impact assessments to determine how they deliver for women as well as men. To counter these developments, political institutions need to change and become fully gender-responsive so they can deliver for all.

Gender equality in politics has been at the heart of worldwide efforts to promote women's rights. The 1948 United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹ established that "Everyone has the right to take part in the government of [their] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives." The 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)² established the duty on States Parties to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life, ensuring women, on equal terms with men, the right to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies and the right to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy. Additionally, CEDAW obliges states to take temporary special measures³ — targeted, time-bound policies or actions, including legislative gender quotas, aimed at accelerating de facto equality between women and men. They are not considered discriminatory and remain in force until their objectives of equal participation and opportunity have been achieved.

In the intervening decades, these commitments have been deepened and expanded. For example, in 1990, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted a resolution⁴ establishing a target of women in at least 30 per cent of leadership positions by 1995, with a view to achieving the equal representation of women and men by the year 2000. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,⁵ adopted at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, identified women in power and decision-making as one of its twelve strategic objectives. It called on governments to establish the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, including by using positive action to “substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men.” The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation Rec(2003)3,⁶ calling for gender-balanced representation as “representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life [that] should not fall below 40%”. Many more UN and regional commitments followed, all calling for the equal and meaningful representation of women and men.

The global framework was strengthened by the 2024 CEDAW Committee General Recommendation 40 (GR 40)⁷ on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making. Drawing from the CEDAW Convention and other international and regional treaties, GR 40 clarifies that 50/50 parity is not just a target but a human rights obligation. Parity should be both a core principle of governance and a driver of transformative change, and women should have an equal say in all decision-making systems on a par with men.

CEDAW Committee General recommendation No. 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems

General Recommendation No. 40 is a visionary roadmap for achieving parity and the equal, inclusive representation of women in decision-making positions across various sectors. It highlights the structural barriers, patriarchal norms, gender-based violence and gender stereotypes that limit women's involvement in these systems. The Recommendation emphasizes the need for systemic and sustainable action to achieve gender parity, including in addressing contemporary and future challenges such as climate change, ongoing conflicts and digital transition. GR 40 recommends specific legislative, policy and other measures that states should take to achieve parity in decision-making at all levels. Its pillars of action

— including 50:50 parity, equal power, youth engagement, the intersectional inclusion of women and structural transformation — are all closely aligned with other international gender equality standards.

Through Ministerial Council decisions and OSCE Parliamentary Assembly resolutions, the OSCE has long recognized the need to mobilize and act in support of gender equality in politics. In 2004, Ministerial Council Decision No. 14/04,⁸ the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, mandated ODIHR to assist in the development and implementation of specific programmes and activities to promote women's rights, increase the role of women at all levels of decision-making and promote equality between women and men throughout the OSCE region. ODIHR's mandate also recognizes the different needs and experiences of women from traditionally under-represented groups. For example, the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area⁹ emphasizes the right of Roma women to participate on an equal basis with men.

OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 7/09¹⁰ on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life called on participating States to:

1. Consider providing for specific measures to achieve the goal of gender balance in all legislative, judicial and executive bodies; (...)
2. 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;
3. Encourage all political actors to promote equal participation of women and men in political parties, with a view to achieving better gender-balanced representation in elected public offices at all levels of decision-making; (...)
7. Take necessary steps to establish, where appropriate, effective national mechanisms for measuring women's equal participation and representation;
8. Support, as appropriate, non-governmental and research bodies in producing targeted studies and awareness-raising initiatives for identifying specific challenges in women's participation in political and public life and, in promoting equality of opportunities between women and men;

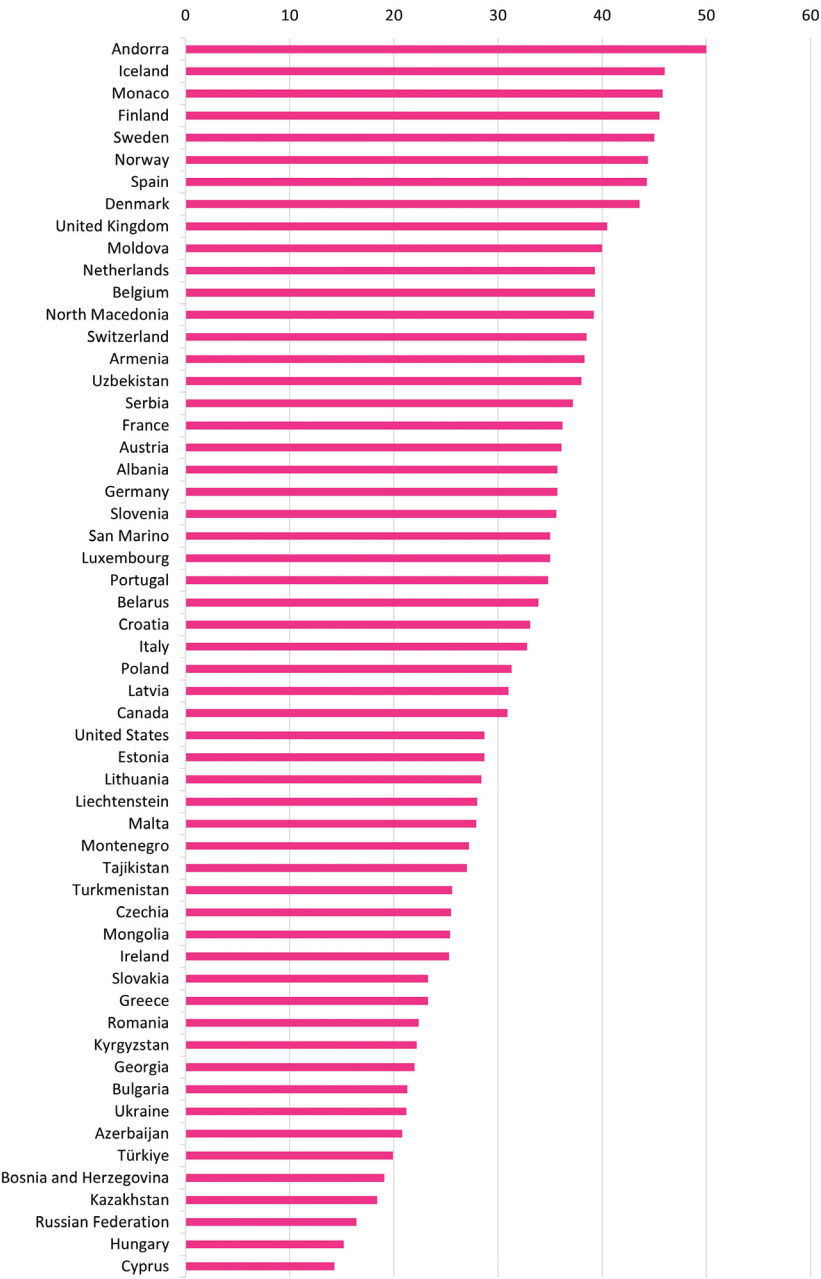
9. Encourage shared work and parental responsibilities between women and men in order to facilitate women's equal opportunities to participate effectively in political and public life. (...).

Global and regional commitments over the last thirty years provide solid support for promoting gender equality in politics. The most common statistic used to measure women's political empowerment is the share of women in parliament. In the OSCE region, women's presence grew from 11 per cent in 1995 to 31.6 per cent in January 2025.

2025 marks the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. In that time, just one OSCE country has reached gender parity in their national parliament. In recent years, the growth of women's representation has stagnated, and the OSCE region is now witnessing escalating narratives against gender equality, which are having a detrimental effect on women's political participation. Temporary special measures are being abolished, and no new ones are being introduced. Political polarization is steadily increasing, while sexism and violence against women in politics is pervasive, impacting female politicians' decisions on whether to run for office, advocate certain policy solutions or leave their elected posts.

In this publication, ODIHR presents a seven-step roadmap for OSCE participating States — their parliaments, governments, political parties and other state agencies — to work towards achieving gender parity. It complements the results of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's 2025 Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians¹¹ with its visionary approach to parity as parity in numbers, influence and culture. These steps aim to inspire participating States to draft their own, national roadmaps to gender parity, tailored to their specific circumstances and needs.

Women’s representation in national parliaments of the OSCE region



Source: Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, IPU Parline: global data on national parliaments, data from 1 January 2025.¹²

STEP

1

Conduct comprehensive national assessments of gender equality in politics and adopt impact-oriented action plans

There is no easy path to reaching gender parity in politics, especially as it needs to happen within different legislative and executive bodies across various levels of governance (national, regional and local). In order to plan the reform process carefully, states should start by completing a national assessment of gender equality in politics. The ODIHR [assessment methodology](#) approaches gender equality in political life through (i) access, (ii) voice, and (iii) transformation, and provides detailed guidance on how to conduct an assessment. This enables states to identify the existing barriers to women's political participation in their country and map out a range of actions to remove these barriers in the short to medium term. The results of this assessment should feed into a multi-year, national action plan on gender equality, for adoption by parliament.

Promising practice

National assessment in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In 2023, ODIHR, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the state-level Agency for Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina conducted a national assessment that produced clear recommendations for the Bosnian authorities and political parties. A cross-party initiative, comprised of women leaders from all major political parties, is now following up on these recommendations to promote the gender parity agenda in the country.

STEP
2

Set gender equality as a constitutional principle

At a time of mobilization against gender equality and backsliding on gender equality, it is important to use a range of tools to protect existing gender equality standards and introduce new ones. Many OSCE participating States have enshrined women's rights in their national constitutions. Explicit constitutional provisions on gender equality — including on the equal political representation of women and men, the duty to take temporary special measures or the direct application of CEDAW standards — could also be complemented or interpreted to include a constitutional commitment to achieving gender parity.

Promising practice

France's constitutional commitment to parity

In 1999, the French parliament amended Article 1 of the constitution, to “statutes shall promote equal access by women and men to elective offices and posts,” and Article 4, to require that political parties “contribute to the implementation of (this) principle.”¹³ Furthermore, in 2000, a new electoral law — popularly known as the ‘parity law’ — was adopted, mandating parties to nominate an equal number of women and men in elections. This has led to a gradual increase in the number of women MPs, despite the very complex electoral system.

STEP

3

Introduce or strengthen gender-targeted legislative measures

Legislative measures can include, among others, legislative gender quotas, gender-targeted party and campaign funding, the obligation to conduct gender audits and implement party-specific gender action plans or provisions on gender balance in institutional leadership or integrity frameworks. These are important tools for increasing the number of women candidates and supporting their visibility, campaigns and overall advancement in legislative and executive functions. When working on new measures, it is important to conduct impact assessments and consider how well they are likely to work in a specific political and electoral system. All legislative measures should also be accompanied by awareness-raising activities and effective rules for implementation. Lastly, all measures should be reviewed and reassessed regularly against their intended outcomes.

Promising practice

Legislative quotas in Uzbekistan and Moldova

Twenty-six OSCE participating States have introduced some form of legislative gender quota, obliging political parties and other entities running for election to nominate minimum numbers of male and female candidates. Promising practices can be found in Moldova and Uzbekistan: thanks to regular reviews and revisions of the quotas, they have increased the representation of women in their parliaments from a few per cent in 1995 to 40 per cent and 38 per cent respectively in 2025.

STEP

4

Hold political parties accountable

State-run actions, such as quotas and other legislative measures, are important but are only part of the solution. In the majority of OSCE countries, political parties are still central to the advancement of gender equality in politics, because they are the gatekeepers to political life. Political parties also take important decisions on policy, on which citizens then cast their vote at elections. This is why political parties need to ensure gender parity within party bodies. They should address barriers and harmful practices and set clear frameworks for addressing violence against women committed within the party. Empowered women's wings, gender equality committees, voluntary gender quotas, **gender audits** and gender equality action plans can be useful.

Promising practice

Spain's party-specific gender equality action plans

Over the last two decades, Spain's political parties have been using gender audits and gender action plans to work on gender-balanced representation, gender-sensitive policies and organizational arrangements. These developments within parties have also strongly influenced the actions of successive parliaments and the executive.

STEP

5

Make national parliaments truly gender sensitive

As the central institutions of every democratic political system, parliaments should act as forums for cross-party dialogue; a precondition for successfully implementing a gender parity agenda. Parliaments should **lead by example**. By conducting **parliamentary gender audits**, setting up leadership groups and implementing gender equality policies, parliaments across the OSCE region demonstrate their commitment to gender equality reforms and show how they improve lawmaking and lead to more effective government.

Promising practice

North Macedonia's parliament transforming from within

With an already high level of women's representation in parliament and leadership positions, in 2019, the Assembly of North Macedonia conducted a gender audit. This led to the development of three, consecutive, multi-year, gender equality action plans, the latest for the period 2025-2027. These action plans have enabled the parliament to prioritize gender equality, by introducing a Gender Advisers post, amendments to the Rules of Procedure, an annual plenary session dedicated to gender equality and many other important innovations.

STEP

6

Frame gender parity and gender equality in politics as the shared responsibility of both male and female leaders

With some exceptions, it is still predominantly women advocating for gender equality; but gender equality is an institutional issue, not a women's one. Given that men occupy most institutional leadership positions, it is therefore also the responsibility of male leaders. In practice, they play an instrumental role in ensuring broad support for gender equality among parliamentarians and other stakeholders. ODIHR's *Sarajevo Tool for Engaging Male Politicians in Achieving Gender Equality in Politics* gives guidance on how to inspire and strengthen the engagement of male politicians in promoting gender equality, with concrete recommendations, examples of good practice and further resources.

Promising practice

Sweden's parliamentary working group for gender equality

As one of the first parliaments in the world to do so, Sweden's *Riksdag* set up its Reference Group on Gender Equality in 2006. Since then, the Group has changed its format and working practices, but has always focused on making parliament gender-sensitive. In its current convocation, the Group has an equal number of women and men MPs and is chaired by the parliament's male First Deputy Speaker.



STEP 7 Monitor, review, revise and innovate

There are always delays and resistance to reforms, and sometimes they may deliver less than intended. It is important to monitor and refine the implementation of national action plans on gender equality in politics. The outcomes should be reviewed and the measures and activities revised or added to as necessary. The entire national action plan should be reviewed at regular intervals and a new one prepared that reflects the work still to be done to achieve gender parity at all levels across the legislature and executive.

* * * * *

Achieving gender equality in politics is possible with steadfast institutional commitment backed by clear plans and reliable data. Robust monitoring and regular reviews should be embedded into each step of the process. Good practices from around the world show that progress accelerates through sharing what works. Significant transformation seldom happens overnight; it emerges as the result of collective efforts and the steady accumulation of small, targeted reforms. By uniting across parties, institutions and communities, political spaces can be transformed into places of equal opportunity and power.

ODIHR works directly with parliaments, governments and political parties on achieving gender parity. For further information, please contact office@odihr.pl.

Endnotes

- 1 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 217 A, 10 December 1948.
- 2 [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#), United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 34/180, 18 December 1979.
- 3 [General recommendation No. 25: Article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention - temporary special measures](#), CEDAW, 2004.
- 4 Resolution E/RES/1990/15, UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), 1st sess.: New York, 24 May 1990.
- 5 [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), Fourth World Conference on Women, adopted 15 September 1995.
- 6 Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Recommendation [Rec\(2003\)3](#), 12 March 2003.
- 7 [General recommendation No 40](#). On the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, OHCHR, 25 October 2024.
- 8 [Ministerial Council Decision No. 14/04](#) - 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, OSCE, Sofia, 7 December 2004.
- 9 [Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/03](#), Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area, OSCE, Maastricht, 1-2 November 2003.
- 10 [Ministerial Council Decision No. 7/09](#) on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life, OSCE, Athens, 4 December 2009.
- 11 [IPU Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians calls for gender parity in parliament](#), IPU, 17 March 2025.
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- 13 Constitution of October 4, 1958 (as amended up to the Constitutional Law No. 2008-724 of July 23, 2008, on the Modernization of the Institutions of the Fifth Republic), France.

