

Gender equality benchmarks for political parties

Taking action to promote gender equality in politics and political leadership

This toolkit offers a menu of benchmarks and indicators to support gender equality efforts in three areas of political party activity: internal party culture and organization; recruitment and nomination; and campaigns and elections processes. Parties, gender equality advocates, and organizations assisting them can use these as starting points in planning work on gender equality in politics. The benchmarks, which draw on research, best practice, and recommendations from around the world, are examples of desired results that parties may seek to achieve. The sample indicators, intended as suggestions, are tools for establishing baselines, and measuring and tracking progress.

The political arena should reflect the gender make-up of society. This principle is widely agreed. Yet, globally, only about 22% of elected members of legislatures, and just over 17% of government ministers, are women. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) enshrines women's right to equal participation with men in public life, recognizing that gender equality is a matter of justice. And Target 5.5 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals calls for "...women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making..." With a long road still ahead, political parties must perform an active role in the achievement of gender parity.

A gender policy with targets for increasing women's participation and representation at all levels and roles, strengthening their decision-making influence, and reflecting the practical needs and strategic interests of women and men in party policies and actions, presents a party's commitment to gender equality. Progress toward targets can be facilitated through a gender equality action plan with time-bound objectives, activities, indicators to monitor progress and build learning, and earmarked resources for implementation. Ideally, the plan should draw on a gender assessment in which women—including leaders, grassroots members, and potential supporters or recruits—identify barriers and aids to their political participation and effectiveness.

Barriers to women's political participation encompass individual, social, and political factors that interact across their public and private lives. Women often navigate "masculine" political cultures, face discriminatory stereotypes and practices, carry out a larger share of domestic and childcare labour, earn lower incomes, have limited access to political networks and financing, and risk violence and harassment in every sphere where they are active.

Changing rules helps, but women are often most disadvantaged by informal discrimination. Several decades of evidence demonstrates that measures such as legislated gender quotas are useful, but insufficient unless they are bolstered by other changes, including shifts in gender norms and biases, capacity building opportunities, and access to resources. Gender assessments and action plans must therefore address informal practices and gender attitudes in addition to formal rules and procedures.

The diversity of women's identities and interests should also be taken into account. Women differ along lines of class, age, race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, and more. Despite commonalities, the barriers and opportunities that hinder and enable them also differ. Parties should create opportunities for all women and reach out to all groups, including non-elites and vulnerable minorities.

Collecting baseline information, tracking change, and reflecting on learning are all crucial to progress. Although lessons should be shared, every context is unique. Gender equality advocates should analyze their own party and national contexts, and carefully monitor and evaluate results against their own baselines. This allows parties to learn what works and does not, adjust strategies when necessary, and celebrate and publicize success.

Action on gender equality for political parties

Produce a gender policy with targets for

- increasing women's participation in all areas and roles
- strengthening women's decision-making influence
- including gender equality and issues of concern to women in party policy and action

Conduct a gender assessment

- with the participation of women party leaders, grassroots members, and potential recruits or allies, of diverse identities and backgrounds
- to identify barriers, capacity gaps, and opportunities for women's political leadership and participation
- to analyze differences in how existing rules and practices in politics affect men and women
- to identify other issues of concern to women

Formulate a gender action plan to address barriers and capacity gaps and promote opportunities with

- time-bound objectives
- clear accountability mechanisms
- measurable indicators
- earmarked resources for implementation and monitoring

Select gender equality monitoring indicators that

- are disaggregated by sex and other relevant categories such as party role/seniority, age, regional origin, language, ethnicity
- accurately reflect progress toward objectives
- include both qualitative and quantitative data
- are linked to feasible data sources

Collect baseline data

- to gain a better understanding of the current situation
- to provide a reference point for measuring change

Resources for political party action on gender equality

Gender Equality Within Political Parties and Women's Cross-Party Cooperation: How to Build the Capacities of Women Politicians and Political Parties. 2015. Political Parties of Finland for Democracy – Demo Finland.

Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Guidebook to Promote Women's Political Participation. 2012. UNPD/NDI.

Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties. 2014. Warsaw: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Political Parties in Africa through a Gender Lens. 2014. Stockholm: International IDEA. By Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu.

From Words to Action: Best Practices for Women's Participation in Latin American Political Parties. 2008. Stockholm: International IDEA.

Promoting Women's Political Participation: A Monitoring Guide Promoting Women's Political Participation: A Monitoring Guide. 2015. By Mona Lena Krook.

