GENDER EQUALITY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

GOOD TO KNOW

- A balanced political participation of women and men means a minimum representation of 40% of women and men in political and public life.

- Electoral systems have a strong impact on gender equality outcomes. Research and experience has shown that proportional list systems lead to more women being elected. This needs to be taken into account when reflecting about revisions of electoral laws.

- Political parties are gate keepers facilitating the entry and success of individuals in politics. Many aspects of the functioning of political parties' impact gender equality within the party, including the existence of quotas (for elections and for internal structures), the provision of trainings, particularly for women members and the existence of women's groups or the allocation of funding to candidates.

- An adequate legal framework is crucial to ensure the equal or balanced participation of women and men in public and political life. Efficient legal quotas or parity systems have proven to be effective measures for the promotion of gender balance. 17 Council of Europe member states have introduced such measures.

- There is no shortage of skilled and experienced women who could assume political functions; they must be made more visible and encouraged to stand. Addressing the male-dominated culture of politics and the functioning of the political fora would allow more women to enter and remain in politics.

- It is not enough to have prepared women candidates. We need prepared voters, who give them their votes. The media have a central role in enhancing or hindering women's political participation by perpetuating or challenging gender stereotypes.

- The reality is that in 2016 the percentages of women in Lower/Single houses were 25.6% and for Upper houses 23.9% elected and 35.8% appointed. In Regional parliaments the percentage of women was 25.6%.

WHAT DOES THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE DO ABOUT IT?

- Committee of Ministers (2003), <u>Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making.</u> Encourages a minimum representation of 40% women and men in public and political spaces.

- The <u>Analytical report</u> on the Third round of monitoring on the implementation of the Recommendation Rec(2003)3 provides 2016 data on the participation of women and men in legislative, executive, judicial and diplomatic areas as well as regarding Council of Europe institutions

- Parliamentary Assembly (2012), <u>Resolution 1898 (2012) on political parties and women's political representation.</u>

- European Commission for Democracy through Law – Venice Commission (2006), <u>Declaration on women's participation in elections (CDL-AD(2006)020)</u>

- European Commission for Democracy through Law – Venice Commission (2009), <u>Report on the impact of electoral systems on women's representation in politics (CDL-AD(2009)029)</u>

- European Commission for Democracy through Law – Venice Commission (2010), <u>Guidelines on political party regulation by OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission</u>

- Programmatic Cooperation Framework for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus – PCF/ Partnership for Good Governance - PGG (2017), <u>Regional study on women's political representation in the eastern partnership countries,</u> provides comparative data and general/country specific recommendations for governments and political parties.

GENDER EQUALITY ASPECTS

➨ Governments

Governments should ensure that political party laws and other relevant legislation do not disadvantage women.

<u>Recommendation:</u> The government should analyse gender neutral legislation to assess its differential impact on women and men and take measures to mitigate any adverse impact. Government should also encourage regional and local authorities to take appropriate measures to support women candidates and to raise awareness on the importance on women's representation in the political field.

Questions for consideration

- Is gender-disaggregated data available at national, regional and local level on women firstly, standing to be selected, who then become candidates and women who are successful and elected to office?

- Has relevant legislation been assessed to measure the impact on women and men in the field of elections and political participation?

- Have measures been introduced (quota, affirmative actions) to increase gender equality in this field?

- Has the government considered measures requiring political parties to include women high on their candidate lists?

- Has the government encouraged regional and local government to provide training and support to women candidates?
- Has the government developed awareness-raising campaigns for elected officials on gender issues and has it stressed the importance of female political representation?

➡ Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes can hinder women's political representation and reduce women's likelihood of putting themselves forward as candidates, and of being selected within the party. They also affect voters' decisions to elect women for a certain political function and play a role when decisions are made regarding the role of women and men politicians in assemblies.
<u>Recommendation:</u> Gender stereotypes should be challenged at all levels and in all sectors of society.

Questions for consideration

- Are women politicians made equally visible by media?
- How are women and men portrayed in the media? Do the media focus on appearance, private life or on expertise for women and men?
- Are women and men equally presented in public debates?
- Which portfolios are directed to women and men?
- How are women represented in educational material and subjects in schools?

➡ Political parties

Political parties are male dominated, with 85.8% men in leading positions. Women are often put forward for seats with minimal or no chance of winning in elections. Discriminatory or violent behavior against women by male colleagues is still common in parties.
<u>Recommendation:</u> Political parties should be willing to reflect and act upon existing discrimination and gender bias in their procedures on recruitment, selection and support of candidates and regarding their internal functioning.

Questions for consideration

- Do political parties have rules and measures for the promotion of gender equality? (e.g. quota for internal decision-making bodies or for elections, measures linking funding of political parties and gender equality, training for leaders or for women candidates).
- Are rules in place to ensure equality between women and men, when selecting candidates for elections?
- Is gender-disaggregated data on the sociology of political parties (membership, leadership, staff) available?
- Are there party rules and sanctions against discriminatory treatment, (sexual) harassment or attitudes towards women inside the party?
- Does a party implement supportive measures to encourage women party members?
- Do women assume leading functions in political parties?
- Is funding for campaigns equally distributed to women and men candidates?

- Do programmes of political parties include gender equality issues?

➡ Role of media

The way the media treat and interview different candidates in elections can perpetrate existing stereotypes and as a consequence affect voting decisions.

<u>Recommendation:</u> Media should give an equal visibility to women and men candidates and provide a non-stereotyped portrayal of women and men.

Questions for consideration

- Is there quantitative and qualitative data and research on the portrayal of women & women politicians in the media?

- Are women presented in media as experts?

- Are women invited to comment on other issues then health and education issues, such as finance, foreign policy, etc.?

➡ Career development in politics

The higher the level at politics, the fewer women. The reasons may be different: some women lack confidence to apply for senior positions, some lack the necessary preparation and training, others are excluded from senior positions because of non-transparent recruitment and promotion and systematic gender favoritism.

<u>Recommendation:</u> The processes to choose people to higher positions in party structures and political institutions should be developed to be more transparent and competency-based. Provide support and training to women elected to office to enable them to function more effectively in their new roles, and for their career development.

Questions for consideration

- Are gender-sensitive, competency-based rules in place concerning promotions?

- Have selection committees been made aware of possible gender bias in their procedures and ways of working?

- Are there rules concerning gender balanced representation in internal decision-making positions of assemblies or political fora?

- Is there appropriate training/assistance to women candidate or to women elected to office?

➡ Violence, harassment and sexism in political institutions

Studies and evidence are showing that political institutions are not exempt from violence against women. Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians are very real and widespread including disproportional high levels of online abuse. A <u>study</u> showed that psychological violence affected 81.8% of women parliamentarians while 22% where confronted with sexual violence.

<u>Recommendation:</u> tackle and take action to gender-based violence in the political arena and end impunity.

- Is data and/or evidence available on sexism and gender-based violence in the political arena?

- Are procedures for complaints and sanctions in place in the different institutions?

- Do complaints lead to sanctions?

DO NOT FORGET

- Strong Gender Quota legislation and voluntary quotas by political parties have a positive effect on gender equality outcomes.

- Women must be in an eligible position if closed lists are applied – if possible through a "zip" system. With open lists, the position on the list seems much less important, but it may also influence the result, so having women in upper positions on the list would be useful. In one-member constituencies, parties should propose women candidates in constituencies where the party has a chance to obtain a seat.

- Women candidates often have less time and access to financial and other resources for campaigning. Women may also need training, mentoring and support to enhance their skills on campaigning and doing politics.

- Decision-makers are sometimes not aware of gender equality issues and possible solutions. Working conditions of political institutions can negatively affect women's political participation.

- Women's wings inside a party or women's caucus in the Parliament can be a useful tool for enhancing women politicians' positions in the organization as well as the visibility of gender issues.

- Some groups of women are particularly under-represented in politics. Depending on countries, it can be young women, Roma women, migrant women or women with disabilities.

- Non-governmental organisations, in particular women's organisations can play a positive role to promote gender balance in decision-making , build capacity of relevant stakeholder and raise awareness on this topic in society

Gender equality considerations need to be tailored to the different types of interventions carried out through co-operation projects in the fields of elections and political participation:

AWARENESS RAISING

- Projects could include gender-sensitive solutions with political parties to improve gender balance.

- Projects could encourage party leaders to take measures to strengthen equal participation in elections.

- Projects could promote political awareness on groups of women who are particularly under-represented in politics (e.g. young women, Roma women, migrant women or women with disabilities).

- Projects could promote cross-party networks of women, develop and disseminate gender-sensitive messages for voters and civic education.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

- Projects should highlight relevant norms and findings in this area and could work with governments to take note of existing good practices on quota legislation.

- Projects could help national authorities promote gender sensitive legal framework, and institutional and practical arrangements to increase women's political participation.

CAPACITY BUILDING

- Projects could promote capacity building for women to enhance their skills on campaigning and doing politics.

- Projects could look at training of decision-makers, including party leaders. It could also help male leaders to support women's political development.

- Projects could support women politicians' network, peer exchange and promote solidarity.

- Projects could promote capacity building for specific groups of women, particularly underrepresented.

- Projects could support co-operation with relevant (women's) organisations, help advocate with international donors to support projects aimed at advancing women's political participation.

DEFINITIONS

- **Electoral systems**: Electoral systems can be interpreted either narrowly or widely. In a wide sense the term "electoral system" refers to the entire electoral process, including provisions concerning electoral rights and the election administration. In a narrow sense, the electoral system regulates the means by which voters express their political preferences and how votes are translated into political mandates/seats.

- **Political party**: A free association of individuals, one of the aims of which is to express the political will of the people, by seeking to participate in and influence the governing of a country through the presentation of candidates in elections. This definition includes associations at all levels of governance whose purpose includes presenting candidates for elections or exercising political authority through election to governmental institutions.

- **Positive actions/quotas/parity systems**: Such systems are part of the legal framework of many member states and are encouraged by different international standards (CM Recommendation Rec(2003)3, United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women: Article 4).

- **Functioning of elected assemblies**: The functioning of elected assemblies, including issues of holding several mandates, work hours, codes of conducts or status of elected members all impact on who is able to enter and remain in politics, including new comers who are not professional politicians.

- **Gender stereotypes**: Preconceived ideas whereby males and females are arbitrarily assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex.

GOT INTERESTED?

- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights – ODIHR (2014), Handbook on promoting women's participation in political parties

- United Nations Development Programme – UNDP (2016), Guidance Note: Strategies and good practices in promoting gender equality outcomes in parliaments

- Council of Europe website, Electoral assistance: Women voters and candidates