

# WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

## Lead

Nurgul Djanaeva

## Contributors

Yevgenia Kozyreva, Bermet Stakeeva, Magdalena Randall-Schab, Matluba Karimova, Avazkan Ormonova, Chinara Kartanbaeva, Zeynep Banu Dalaman



## Structural barriers and negative trends

Across the diverse UNECE region of 56 countries, despite some progress, unequal participation of women and girls persist at all levels of political life. Women are underrepresented at ministerial level and other executive bodies. As of February 2019, only in 5 (Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Malta) women were heads of state, and only in 6 (Germany, Iceland, Norway, Romania, Serbia, the UK) heads of government. The progress in attaining political power in legislatures has also been slow. In the past 5 years, the percentage of women in legislature increased by 2.5% and ranged from 12 to 50, with average 27.8%. In 35 countries women's representation is below 30%. This is below the make-up of the average national population. Since 2014, a percentage of women in legislatures decreased in one out of five. This happened despite the fact that electoral quota to promote women's participation in parliaments are one of the most popular affirmative measures across the region and adopted in 40 countries.

Women and girls continue to operate on unequal terms with men and face a range of interconnected structural barriers. To eliminate them a multidimensional approach and a comprehensive strategy is required.

### Structural barriers include

- Patriarchal socialisation, gendered social roles and expectations reduce the number of women and girls willing to enter and pursue a political career. This is further strengthened by religious fundamentalism emerging in some parts of the region.

- Temporary affirmative measures such as quotas are often limited to parliamentary elections. Imperfect laws leave many loopholes that for instance allow for women to be replaced by men in legislatures or political parties not meeting the elector quota requirements and not facing any sanctions for non-compliance.
- Institutional infrastructure and working patterns (including political parties) designed by men do not serve the needs of women and girls. That includes unaffordable or unavailable childcare, inadequate maternity and paternity leave arrangements, working hours.
- Violence against politically active women and girls that takes a wide range of abuse and harassment (in person and online abuse, physical and verbal; direct and indirect). This is coupled with lack of legal framework to protect women politicians against all forms of violence.
- Poverty, economic dependence and inadequate financial resources prevent women from actively entering and participating in public life and politics.
- Insufficient state's commitment, resources and women's machinery to enhance women's representation at all levels of decision-making.
- Lack of inclusive measure to ensure that women and girls from minority groups such as LGBTQIA+, indigenous, Roma, migrant and refugee and IDP women, and women and girls with disabilities, actively and meaningfully participate in politics.
- It is also fundamental to recognise that women, because they are not a homogenous group, face many different forms of discrimination in their everyday life - on the basis of their race, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, age, possible disability... - that are amplified when they attempt to exercise their right to political participation.



## Progress on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action

In the UNECE many countries have a range of legal provisions and temporary special measures to ensure women's equal political participation (constitutions, laws, regulations, and temporary special measures such as quotas, reserved seats, benchmarks and targets). However, this de jure progress is not translating into de facto expected progress. Therefore, countries are called to take additional and measurable steps to increase women's real and equal participation in power and decision-making.

Identified in the BPFA barriers remain in majority of our countries. All these barriers work against gender balance in managerial positions. Much more strong are barriers for women's political participation in local elected bodies. Another set of barriers exist in women's participation in decision-making of Business sector.

Lack of Gender equality reporting Gap between political and financial commitments. Review of the implementation helped to show one of barriers on the road to the full and effective

women's participation in political processes as formulated in the BPFA – underfinancing of women's rights and gender equality.

Government commitments on Beijing, have they progressed or are they going backwards (de jure & de facto) Incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making is in process but still in many countries SDG strategies don't include this as a standalone goal and as crosscutting issues.

Legal reforms, introduction of Quotas sometimes with sanctions for non-compliance have been introduced. Affirmative actions, ensuring Financing led to improvement in the region. 19 countries reached 30% goal in national Parliaments, 15 % in western Europe, 4 of them in Eastern Europe (Macedonia–37,5 Slovenia – 36,7 Belarus – 34,5 Serbia – 34,4). Similar status of women in ministerial positions in the region. In some countries like Kyrgyzstan it is going backwards: decreasing in the national Parliament from 20% in 2015 to 15,8 % as of today and in local elected bodies from 15 to 11 %.

The use of quotas alone is not sufficient to ensure high levels of female political representation other forms of affirmative action is needed, especially concerning party lists. Applying the "zipper system" (alternating the sexes on the party list) is very successful in some countries such as Tunisia, Sweden. Its success can be seen not only in the high level of female parliamentarians but also in municipal councils in local elections. Several countries after reaching the gender balance in political positions are taking measures to increase the number of women in management positions and boards with a Target population -private and public sector companies.

In the region there was work on Implementing capacity building, skills development and other measures and Providing opportunities, mentoring and training in leadership, decision-making, public speaking, assertion of one's rights and political campaigning. But the majority was done by women's organizations, not by the State.

Financing is a challenge for majority of sub-regions. But there is work done by some few States beyond direct financing.



## Recommendations beyond Beijing+25

- To introduce where not present, and implement in full affirmative measures in legislation and regulations (also in political parties) to ensure parity and women's equal participation at all levels of decision making. It is critical that those measures include sanctions for non-compliance.
- To legally protect women and girls active in political life against all forms of violence, abuse and sexism.

- Development of effective Plan of and effective accountability mechanisms.
- Integration of the women's rights and gender equality into national SDG strategies and Programs.
- Advocate and ensure Financing. SMART investments to these strategies and plans.
- To follow up BPFA commitments taken in BPFA articles 190 (a), 190 (d), 195: (a), 195: (c) Adjust electoral systems on the political representation of women in elected bodies and consider, where appropriate, the adjustment or reform of those systems.
- Encourage greater involvement of indigenous, migrant women in decision-making at all levels.
- BPFA Strategic objective G.2. still needs high level of attention of all development actors so that effectively increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.
- To continue legislation reforms consistently and organize harmonization of the legislation. Because reports showed that very few State have taken measures to to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish violence against women in politics to fill this gap.
- There is a need to work systematically on these kinds of intersectional analyses in implementing and following up gender equality policy.

## Conclusions

BPFA Strategic objectives G. are Partially in the whole region, Partially implemented in the whole region, with 2/3 of the countries of the UNECE region lacking real reforms in legislation, social norms, practice and accountability. One of the UNECE sub-region – Central Asia - is officially recognized as one of the worst in women's rights and gender equality status.

Unfortunately the status of women's participation in political processes in the 1/3 of the UNECE region demonstrate that women's political rights continue to be abused and women still have the same concern as in t was in 1995; Now after 25 years, the BPFA article 182 remains a critical area of concern for women's movement. Regionally, low per cent of the members of legislative bodies and a lower percentage of ministerial positions are now held by women. Barriers to women's participation in political processes in the big part of the region remain as they were in 1995 and new barriers appeared (religious fundamentalism, weakening social infrastructure. In this light, the region's women's movement fully supports the SDG 5.5 and calls for effective accountability for reaching it.

## Useful sources

- BPFA section G. Women in power and decision-making
- CEDAW General Recommendation 23
- CEDAW
- Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015

- Reports of the Forum of women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan : “Beijing+20 - Review of the Beijing Platform for Action Implementation in Kyrgyzstan”, CEDAW Shadow report.
- Governmental report Beijing+25
- Data from <https://theworldonly.org/women-in-politics/>, IPU
- Альтернативный отчет коалиции общественных объединений Республики Таджикистан «От равенства юридического – к равенству фактическому» по реализации Пекинской платформы действий +25». ДУШАНБЕ-2019.