



The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) – a joint project of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women) is launching an **online discussion** on ‘[Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality](#)’ from **25 January – 28 February 2016**.

## Concept Note

### Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality

#### Background

The e-discussion on ‘Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality’ will concurrently examine both the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight of the executive, as well as the extent of gender-sensitivity of parliament and highlight the role of women’s leadership in this process. It will focus on parliamentary oversight of government’s policies, activities and expenditure in favour of gender equality. How effectively does parliament hold government to account? What are the challenges, and what improvements – if any – need to be made to the system of parliamentary oversight?

It is likely to touch on matters relating to the enabling environment in which oversight can take place; political will to hold government to account; parliamentary capacity to carry out oversight; and the outcomes achieved through parliament’s oversight activities.

The outcomes of the e-discussion will contribute to the **second Global Parliamentary Report on ‘Parliament’s power to hold government to account: Realities and perspectives on oversight’** – a joint publication of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) due to be published in late 2016 ([www.ipu.org/gpr2](http://www.ipu.org/gpr2)). iKNOW Politics members’ experience, expertise, opinions and recommendations will support IPU’s and UNDP’s objective to mainstream gender throughout the report.

#### Role of Parliaments

Parliamentarians have a duty to exercise their oversight power in order to hold governments to account for gender equality. They should also monitor the efforts of the government to craft legislation and non-discrimination measures.

“Oversight” can be defined as any activity that involves examining (and being prepared to challenge) the expenditure, administration and policies of the government of the day. Oversight activities include such things as questioning ministers, holding public hearings, reviewing reports from government departments, examining audit reports, etc. For the purposes of this work, oversight does not include activities related to law-making, such as pre-legislative scrutiny.

Parliaments are key stakeholders in the promotion and achievement of gender equality. Parliamentary oversight processes provide an opportunity to ensure that governments maintain commitments to gender equality, such as obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While women parliamentarians have often assumed responsibility for this oversight, many parliaments are taking a more holistic approach by establishing dedicated mechanisms and systematic processes across all policy areas to mainstream the advancement of gender equality.

There has been overall progress towards gender equality in many countries, often reflected in the growing number of women in national parliaments; however, there is much room for improvement, specifically through actions and policies to further gender equality. These include, for example, reviewing national objectives and legal frameworks to ensure that they respond to the needs of both men and women; adopting affirmative measures; supporting women's parliamentary caucuses; making parliamentary bodies gender-sensitive; and working to dismantle religious and cultural barriers to gender equality.

### **Objective of the e-Discussion**

Participants in the e-discussion will contribute to the forthcoming joint report by IPU and UNDP: the second Global Parliamentary Report on *Parliament's power to hold government to account: Realities and perspectives on oversight*. The conclusions of this e-discussion will be incorporated into the report. More information is available at [www.ipu.org/gpr2](http://www.ipu.org/gpr2).

The report will mainstream a gender perspective by investigating the willingness and capacity of parliaments to keep governments accountable on the goal of gender equality and ensure parliamentary oversight is gender-sensitive, as well as the opportunities available to both women and men parliamentarians to engage in oversight.

The e-Discussion will remain open over a period of **5 weeks (25 January 2015 – 28 February 2016)**. iKNOW Politics members are encouraged to respond with concrete examples, experiences and recommendations to the questions outlined below.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Has parliament created mechanisms to oversee the government's gender equality commitments? How effective have they been? What are the reasons for their successes and shortcomings, and what could be improved?
  - a. To what extent does parliament scrutinize the budget from a gender perspective? Are parliamentarians able to hold government to account for the extent to which expenditure has produced results for women and men?
  - b. To what extent does parliament engage with the national reporting process on Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women? Does parliament monitor the executive's response to recommendations by the CEDAW Committee?
  - c. Is it possible to identify specific outcomes of parliamentary oversight of gender equality? Where a particular result has been achieved, what produced these outcomes?

2. To what extent does parliament monitor the impact of gender equality / non-discrimination legislation after it has been adopted? Do you have concrete examples how this has been done? What is the role of parliament when legislation is not put into practice, or does not have the intended effects?
3. What can be done to build political will for women and men parliamentarians to engage equally in oversight of gender equality issues?
  - a. Where caucuses of women parliamentarians exist, have they provided effective in building cross-party support for work on gender equality? To what extent have they been able to engage with government and hold it to account?
  - b. How extensively does parliament engage women's groups outside parliament to support monitoring progress and setbacks with regard to gender equality? What the opportunities to strengthen these partnerships?
  - c. To what extent are parliamentarians supported in undertaking gender-sensitive oversight training, staff, and budgets)?

Please feel free to respond to as many, or few, questions as you like. There is no requirement to provide responses to all the questions. Please participate by emailing [iknowpolitics@unwomen.org](mailto:iknowpolitics@unwomen.org) or by posting your comments online in the iKNOW Politics forum [here](#).

We warmly encourage members to forward this message to other relevant networks and invite experts and colleagues to participate in the e-Discussion. Please note that responses to the e-Discussion are not automatically shared but are first directed to the facilitation team for compilation.

We are looking forward to a rich and lively e-Discussion and to receiving your contributions!

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