



CONSOLIDATED REPLY

of the e-Discussion on:

Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality

April 2016



**CONSOLIDATED REPLY_iKNOW Politics e-Discussion:
Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality**

LAUNCHING MESSAGE Spanish French Arabic

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. 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.

The oversight role of parliamentarians is linked to the very notion of external accountability, the democratic control of the government by the parliament, among other bodies. Since gender equality improves the quality of democracy, the parliamentary oversight of gender equality is a key aspect of modern parliaments and a fundamental contribution for the achievement of sustained democratic practices.

Against this backdrop and to contribute to the forthcoming **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) - iKNOW Politics is moderating an e-Discussion on '**Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality**'. The e-Discussion runs from **25 January - 28 February 2016** and seeks to highlight 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. One of the main objectives of this e-Discussion, thus, is to find best practices that will help to strengthen external accountability and the consolidation of sustained democratic practices.

The conclusions of this e-Discussion will be incorporated into the global report. More information on the report is available at www.ipu.org/gpr2.

iKNOW Politics members (politicians, experts, academics, CSOs, and think tanks) are encouraged to respond with concrete examples, experiences and recommendations to the questions outlined below. Please follow the following steps to send your comment(s):

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 or by posting your comments online in the iKNOW Politics forum below. The full Concept Note can be accessed [here](#).

Questions

**CONSOLIDATED REPLY_iKNOW Politics e-Discussion:
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1. PARLIAMENT MECHANISMS FOR OVERSIGHT

-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?

-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?

-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?

-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. MONITORING OF GENDER EQUALITY

-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. MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT EXPERIENCIES IN OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

-What can be done to build political will for women and men parliamentarians to engage equally in oversight of gender equality issues?

-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?

-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?

-To what extent are parliamentarians supported in undertaking gender-sensitive oversight training, staff, and budgets?

Please note that there are different options to send your contributions:

1. Login with your iKNOW Politics member credentials. If you are not a member yet, please sign up using the profile icon on the top right of this page. Please check your email to confirm registration. Once a member, you will be able to use the comment section. Comments will wait for the approval of the iKNOW Politics Team.

2. Use the below comment section by signing in with one of your social media accounts.

3. Send your contributions to iknowpolitics@unwomen.org.

CONSOLIDATED REPLY_iKNOW Politics e-Discussion: Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality

List of participants

The e-discussion was hosted on the iKNOW Politics online platform and received thirteen contributions, nine in English and four in Spanish. The contributions were submitted by international organizations, Members of Parliament, judges, policy specialists, academics and civil society.

1. [Kevin Deveaux](#), Former Senior Parliamentary Technical Adviser, and Former Parliamentary Development Policy Adviser, both within UNDP. Mr. Deveaux was also elected to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly in 1998, and re-elected in 1999, 2003 and 2006.
2. [iKNOW Politics](#) contribution based on IPU's/UN Women's 'Common Principles for Support to Parliaments', which include a specific call for parliamentary support to address the needs and potential of both men and women in the way parliaments are structured and run.
3. [Riccardo Pelizzo](#), Vice Dean for Academic Affairs at Graduate School of Public Policy, Nazarbayev University. Political development specialist, his work is focused on political parties and legislatures, having provided expert advice to legislatures in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.
4. [International IDEA](#), an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. International IDEA's mission is to support sustainable democratic change by providing comparative knowledge, and assisting in democratic reform, and influencing policies and politics.
5. [Sonia Palmieri](#), Expert in gender and political participation, with an emphasis on parliaments. Dr. Palmieri has fourteen years of combined experience supporting parliaments as well as women's access to, and participation in, political institutions. She is the author of seminal reports on women in parliament, including IPU's 2012 'Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice'.
6. [Marilyn Cham](#), is Inclusive Political Processes Specialist at the United Nations Development Programme, particularly focused on parliamentary support. She worked within the Parliamentary Development Team, also within UNDP.
7. [Maissan Hassan](#), is Programs Manager of the Women and Memory Forum (WMF) in Egypt. Founded in 1995, the WMF is composed of a group of women academics, researchers and activists concerned about the negative representations and perceptions of Arab women in the cultural sphere.
8. [Lotte Geunis](#), is Parliamentary Development Officer within the Governance and Peacebuilding Bureau for Programme and Policy Support of the United Nations Development Programme in Brussels.
9. [Helga Stevens](#), is Member of the European Parliament. Within the European Parliament, she is Member of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs; Member of the Delegation to the EU-Kazakhstan, EU-Kyrgyzstan, EU-Uzbekistan and EU-Tajikistan Parliamentary Cooperation Committees and for relations with Turkmenistan and Mongolia.
10. [Mercè Pigem](#), former Member of the Spanish Parliament (Congress of Deputies of Spain), from 2000 to 2013. She was also Spokesperson, within the Congress of Deputies of Spain, of its Commission for Equality.

CONSOLIDATED REPLY_iKNOW Politics e-Discussion: Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality

11. [Meritxell Batet](#), is Member of the Spanish Parliament (Congress of Deputies of Spain) from April 2004. She is Secretary of Studies and Programs of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party, and Associate Lecturer of Constitutional Law at Pompeu Fabra University.
12. [Alicia Gutiérrez](#), is President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, and Member of the Chamber of Deputies of the Province of Santa Fe, in Argentina.
13. [Alanís Figueroa](#), is Judge of the Federal Electoral Tribunal of Mexico. She was Executive Secretary, Alternate Electoral Adviser and Executive Director of Electoral Capacitation and Civic Education of the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico. She was President of the Federal Electoral Tribunal of Mexico from 2007 to 2012.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

The thirteen contributions made to the e-Discussion on “Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality” were consolidated by the Team managing the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics platform (iKNOW Politics). The following summary highlights the key experiences, practices and recommendations resulting from the online discussion, which was hosted and moderated on www.iknowpolitics.org

Parliament Mechanisms for Oversight

The establishment of instrumental mechanisms to ensure adequate control of gendered oversight is necessary. Among the structures identified of having positive impacts on parliamentary oversight of gender equality are women’s caucuses or gender and human rights committees. Alternatively, gender can be treated as a cross-cutting issue, affecting all policy areas.

Four different models for parliamentary oversight of gender equality were put forward:

1. Parliament asks the government for information: Questions to all policy areas are asked by both men and women MPs. Questions are asked about the beneficiaries of government policies and their consequences on different groups.
2. Parliament asks the government for public clarification of policy: Focused on policy development, Parliament checks if the data on which the policy is based was sex-disaggregated and uncovers whether there was sufficient consultation of women in the design of the policy.
3. Parliament obtains information from sources outside the government, e.g. through systematic communication with women’s organizations and gender experts.
4. Parliament expresses its views to the government and the public: Making recommendations aimed to eliminate gender-based discrimination, encouraging the adoption of a gender lens in the debates, and controlling government’s commitments to international gender equality rules (CEDAW, UNSCR 1325...).

It was agreed that oversight mechanisms, often limited to parliamentary questions and requests for documentation, should be improved and expanded. Some countries have taken measures to address this shortcoming. In the Spanish parliament for instance, a procedure to monitor the effectiveness of the Law Against Gender-Based Violence (LO 1/2014) was developed and as a result improved the quality of the oversight process. After the passing of the Integral Law Against Gender Based Violence and the Law of Equality, both declaring new rights, jurisprudence was effectively articulated and implemented, together with a reform of the Penal Code. In addition, the role played by the seventeen Autonomous Communities

CONSOLIDATED REPLY_iKNOW Politics e-Discussion: Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality

of Spain has sometimes pioneered the advancements of gender equality at the national level, culminating in the creation of the Ministry for Equality in 2008 and gender related issues being discussed under the legislative Commission of Equality.

In the context of Argentina, gender equality laws are very important; for instance, Argentina was the first Latin American country to establish legal quotas, institutionalizing the 30% mark for women candidates in political parties' lists. A good example to promote gender equality came from Mexico, where both, the Chamber of Deputies and of Senators of the Federal Congress have Commissions of Gender Equality. Both Chambers also have dedicated structures for the implementation and planning of gender equality actions within the Congress.

A contribution from the European Parliament emphasized that for the gender mainstreaming process to succeed, it must go beyond gender budgeting. For instance, the European Parliament, with the support of UN Women, established monitoring and reporting processes to oversee the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). For instance, the Women's Rights committee work to ensure that all policies made address "double victimization" – women who are disabled are vulnerable to violence because of their gender and their disability. In addition, the European Parliament recently voted on a report on mainstreaming gender in the institution, including specific measures to promote work- life balance. Structures, such as the European Union Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, played an important role in advancing legislative changes.

Monitoring of gender equality

Parliaments are key drivers in the development of solid monitoring processes of gender equality and can set a precedent for other institutions.

Parliaments with higher rates of gender balance were found to be more effective in their oversight function¹. Promoting gender balance in parliament is thus essential for increasing legislative capacity, performance and legitimacy. Women caucuses, such as the one created in the National Senate of Argentina in 2008, the 'Banca de la Mujer', complemented the Parliaments' efforts to improve the monitoring system (articles 2 and 4 of the caucus' constitution), as well as the effective implementation of international treaties related to gender equality. Also the "Bancada femenina", the women caucus of Uruguay, is seen as a regional reference²; it helped to develop legislation related to domestic service, parental leave for adoption, workplace sexual harassment, etc.

Several institutions can support Parliament in the monitoring process, such as civil society, audit institutions and other decision-making bodies. Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs), for instance, can facilitate gender responsive budgeting by collecting and sharing the required information throughout the entire budget cycle. In the planning stages, Ministries of Finance need reliable revenue projections to outline macro-economic policy frameworks and make realistic allocations. Parliament needs access to

¹ Kinyondo, Abel Alfred, Riccardo Pelizzo, and Aminu Umar. "A functionalist theory of oversight." *African Politics & Policy* 1, no. 5 (2015): 1-25.

Pelizzo, Riccardo, and Frederick Stapenhurst. *Parliamentary oversight tools: A comparative analysis*. London. Routledge, 2012.

² Johnson, Niki. "The Women's Caucus in Uruguay: a Critical Actor for the Substantive Representation of Women in Parliament" *América Latina Hoy*, no. 66 (2014): 145-165.

CONSOLIDATED REPLY_iKNOW Politics e-Discussion: Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality

facts and figures on a regular basis to review revenue projections, assess proposed allocations and monitor spending. The European Commission works with EU member states to transpose and implement EU law that relates to equality and non-discrimination. As such, the Directive on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was successfully implemented.

Civil society, and in particular women's groups are important drivers of change and in collaboration with Parliament initiate processes with positive outcomes on gender equality. Increased numbers of women in Parliament usually strengthens collaboration with feminist and women's groups. National Councils for Women and NGOs can support the efforts made by women parliamentarians, for example by advocating for the establishment of quota systems.

Members of Parliament Experiences in Oversight Activities

Dialogue between civil society and public representatives to ensure steady advancements on gender equality is key to oversight, with elected representatives, advisers, and assistants establishing regular consultations with women's groups on gender-related policies. The nature of these dialogues can be both, national and international. One respondent for example travelled to Ethiopia with three other female colleagues from the European Conservatives and Reformists Group and met with female politicians and women's rights groups from all over the world. Networking and awareness about global trends relevant to addressing women's needs and issues were identified as important elements to further advocate for changes in national legislation. Nationally, open doors days are considered useful to improve the relationship between Parliament and civil society and, in particular, with women associations.

In Argentina, for example, meetings in Parliament with women's organizations advocating for gender equality and quotas had positive impacts on other legislation important to the national context such as gender-based violence, LGBTI issues, and women trafficking.

On the importance of making gender mainstreaming a crosscutting issue, the call for an in-focused perspective was made. In Spain for example, the work of the Equality Commissions, together with advocacy campaigns by women activists, made that gender equality is perceived a pre-condition of a functioning and inclusive democratic system.

Adding a gender perspective on each policy area of parliament, including health, education, security, international relations, remains, however, in many countries a challenge. The role of ideologies and structures of political parties influences the way MPs deliver on the gender-equality agenda and how they participate in oversight activities. Being part of a women caucus was identified as a possibility to overcome potential barriers. Given its cross-party nature, women caucuses allow for alliances on issues such as sexual and reproductive health or to the fight against gender-based violence, among others. In Moldova, for example, the Women MPs Platform improved the participation of women in decision-making, through regular policy consultations with underrepresented women. With the help of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), five Regional Forums that have debated issues pertinent to the SDGs framework were organized, where above 200 women preponderantly from vulnerable groups for the first ever time received the opportunity to address their concerns directly to decision-makers.

External support from specialized bodies was recognized as essential for MPs to develop and improve oversight mechanisms. The UNDP for example helped to ensure women have the skills and support to work effectively within and with political parties and parliament. 39 of UNDP's 68 parliamentary strengthening projects specifically promote parliamentary oversight of gender equality and women's

CONSOLIDATED REPLY_iKNOW Politics e-Discussion: Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality

empowerment. The projects include for example gender mainstreaming in parliament (quotas, rules of procedures, etc.), gender legal reviews and promoting gender-sensitive laws, candidate training, induction and mentoring programmes; and awareness campaigns to counter gender stereotyping of candidates. Good examples of countries in which UNDP had implemented different programmes to enable mechanisms for parliamentary oversight of gender equality, include the PALOP, Colombia, Swaziland, Nepal, Guinea-Bissau, Moldova, Rwanda, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Nigeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Somalia, Sudan, Gambia, Tunisia, Argentina, and Iraq.

Useful resources

- Project for Strengthening Technical and Functional Capacities of the Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI), National Parliaments and Civil Society for the control of Public Finances in PALOP and in Timor-Leste, accessible [here](#).
- e-Learning Portal for Parliamentary Development, accessible [here](#).
- Resources developed with support from UNDP to strengthen parliamentary oversight of gender equality:
 - Iraq- Draft Bill establishing the Independent High Commission on Gender Equality, accessible [here](#).
 - Jordan- Political parties' gender strategy, accessible [here](#).
 - Lebanon- Gender legal review of Lebanese legislation, accessible [here](#).
 - OPT- The Political System and the Status of the Women and Youth leaders, accessible [here](#).
 - Regional- Algiers Declaration on Arab Women's Political Participation, accessible [here](#).
 - Parliaments and Gender Equality. Gender Mainstreaming in Legislatures, accessible [here](#).
 - "¿Quién promueve la igualdad en los Parlamentos? Experiencias de bancadas, comisiones, unidades técnicas y grupos mixtos en América Latina y El Caribe", accessible [here](#).
 - "Bancadas, comisiones y unidades técnicas de igualdad: Rutas para institucionalizar el trabajo legislativo por la igualdad en América Latina", accessible [here](#).
 - "¿Qué tan diversos son los Parlamentos en América Latina y el Caribe?", accessible [here](#).
- IPU's Gender-Sensitive Parliaments Report, accessible [here](#).
- IPU's Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments, accessible [here](#).
- IPU's Common Principles for Support to Parliaments, accessible [here](#).