

**ENoP Best Practices Compilation**

# **Gender Equality and Women's Political Participation**

**ENoP**  
EUROPEAN NETWORK OF  
POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS

# The Work of Political Foundations in the Area of Gender Equality and Women's Political Participation

A Compilation of Best Practices by ENoP Members

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## FOREWORD

Gender equality and the political participation of women are not only essential for the advancement of human rights but also crucial for the well-being and progress of society as a whole. When women are given equal opportunities to engage in political life, societies benefit from diverse perspectives, innovative ideas, and inclusive decision-making processes. Women bring unique experiences, insights and priorities to the table, enrich policy discussions, and promote a more comprehensive understanding of societal needs. By actively involving women in political decision-making, we foster a more inclusive and representative democracy which reflects the interests and concerns of all citizens.

Despite significant progress, women still face substantial obstacles when seeking political participation worldwide. Deep-rooted gender stereotypes, societal norms and cultural expectations often perpetuate biases that discourage women from engaging in politics. Discrimination, prejudice and unconscious biases hinder their access to leadership positions, which results in underrepresentation and a power imbalance. Limited access to education, economic resources and social networks further compounds these challenges, thus creating a systemic disadvantage for women who aspire to enter the political arena.

Traditional gender roles and expectations reinforce the notion that women's place is solely within the private sphere, often relegating them to domestic responsibilities and limiting their visibility and agency in public life. Cultural norms that prioritise male leadership and perceive women's political involvement as a deviation from societal norms often discourage women from pursuing political careers. Overcoming these cultural barriers requires concerted efforts to challenge and change deeply ingrained beliefs and norms, and to foster an environment that supports and encourages women's active participation in political decision-making.

Change cannot be imposed from the outside but must be embraced and championed by those within a culture. When tackling the issue of women's political underrepresentation, it is essential to navigate cultural sensitivities and engage with local communities. Implementing strategies without considering local cultural factors may lead to resistance, backlash or unintended consequences. We can develop contextually relevant, respectful and sustainable interventions by approaching the issue with cultural awareness and sensitivity. Incorporating cultural considerations also enables us to identify and mobilise cultural assets that can be leveraged to advance gender equality. Every culture has progressive voices, individuals and traditions that can be instrumental in challenging existing norms and promoting inclusive practices. We can build alliances and foster dialogue that encourage positive change by working collaboratively with local stakeholders – including community leaders, civil society organisations and cultural influencers – and ultimately promoting ownership and sustainability.

Equal rights and opportunities are a benchmark of a just society. The pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment remains a critical task for all individuals and organisations that tirelessly work to challenge the prevailing norms and dismantle the barriers that hinder the full participation of women in political life. Among these agents of change, European political foundations have emerged as catalysts for advancing gender equality and empowering women in third countries.

The European political foundations highlighted in this publication have recognised these imperatives and have taken significant strides to address the gender gaps that persist in political spheres worldwide. They have worked tirelessly to amplify women's voices, challenge gender stereotypes and dismantle discriminatory barriers. Through capacity-building initiatives, policy advocacy, and the creation of networks and knowledge-sharing platforms, these foundations have contributed to strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring the meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes.

With great pride and enthusiasm, ENoP presents this publication as a comprehensive collection of best-practice examples showcasing the remarkable work undertaken by European political foundations in gender equality and women's political participation across the globe. This compendium serves as a testament to these foundations' dedication, vision and tireless efforts in promoting inclusive political systems across the globe.

However, it is not enough to merely acknowledge and appreciate these achievements. It is essential to disseminate these best practices, to share and further develop the knowledge and experience from European political foundations in pursuing gender equality and women's empowerment. By doing so, we hope to inform, inspire and guide policy-makers, activists and practitioners in creating gender-inclusive political systems.

This publication aims to offer a roadmap for progress—a testament to the transformative potential of European political foundations in driving change at the intersection of gender, politics and civil society. It showcases innovative and proven strategies and approaches, thriving initiatives, and lessons learned, while emphasising the adaptability and transferability of these approaches across diverse organisational, cultural, social and political contexts.

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## INTRODUCTION

This compilation of good practices for gender equality has been created by the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP) in the framework of the ‘Strengthening ENoP as Actor in Support of Democratic and Pluralist Societies’ project, which is co-financed by the department for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) of the European Commission. This compilation of good practices is meant to explore project activities that ENoP members and/or local partners (political foundations, think tanks, political parties or civil society organisations) have implemented – in the fields of gender equality, the protection of women’s rights, and the political participation and engagement of women – with the final aim of supporting women’s position in society.

What is gender equality? The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)<sup>1</sup> defines it as ‘equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys’. *It adds that Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born female or male. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, thereby recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.*

From a historical point of view, the principles of the right to equality and the prohibition of discrimination are established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948. Its preamble states that ‘recognition of the inherent dignity of the equal and inalienable rights

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1 [www.eige.europa.eu](http://www.eige.europa.eu) : definitions

of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’ and specifies that ‘the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom’. Article 2 recognises that ‘everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedom set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status’.

In 1979, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW), which is often described as an international bill of rights for women. By ratifying the CEDAW, countries have an obligation to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women by adopting measures to respect, protect and fulfil all the rights contained in the CEDAW at national level. Article 7 of the Convention establishes the following:

*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:*

*(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;*

*(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;*

*(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.*

During the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (after those in Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985), governments adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which set their commitments to enhance women’s rights. Member States have reaffirmed and strengthened their commitment throughout the global five-year reviews of the progress of the Platform for Action. In September 2015, the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda and its new 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with 169 targets that aim to end poverty, combat inequalities and promote prosperity. Objective 5 of the

SDGs is dedicated to ‘achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls’ and details nine precise targets<sup>2</sup>.

This is the global frame for gender equality. From a European Union perspective, the signings of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 and the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 have officially recognised equality between women and men as a fundamental right and one of the member countries’ shared values. In 2000, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights – legally binding since the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 – declared that ‘equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas’. EU legislation has played a great role in the support of gender equality and in the progress of the European welfare state through its dedicated programmes, policies and legislative measures. In this framework, the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 presents policy objectives and actions with the aim to encourage substantial progress towards gender equality by 2025. The main goal is to have a Union where women and men and girls and boys in all their diversity have equal opportunities. The Strategy’s key objectives are:

i. ending gender based violence;

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ii. challenging gender stereotypes;

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iii. closing gender gaps in the labour market;

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iv. achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy;

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- 2     Targets of the UN Agenda 2030 Objective 5 on Gender Equality: 5.1) End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere; 5.2) Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation; 5.3) Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; 5.4) Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate; 5.5) Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life; 5.6) Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences; 5.7) Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws; 5.8) Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women; 5.9) Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

v. addressing the gender pay and pension gaps;

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vi. closing the gender care gap;

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vii. achieving gender balance in decision-making and in politics.

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The EU's new Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Relations 2021-2025 (GAP III) aims to accelerate progress on empowering women and girls, and safeguard the gains made on gender equality during the 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action. 'The participation and leadership of women and girls is essential for democracy, justice, peace, security, prosperity and a greener planet,' said the High Representative for EU External Action Josep Borrell after the adoption of the Plan. EU Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen added that 'stronger engagement on gender equality is key to a sustainable global recovery from the Covid-19 crisis and building fairer, more inclusive, more prosperous societies'.

As recently stated by President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, 'gender equality is a core principle of the European Union, but it is not yet a reality'. In fact, the gap is wide between the *de jure* and *de facto* situations.

The world has recently celebrated International Women's Day, but it is difficult to ignore 'the enormous obstacles that women still face – from structural injustices, marginalization and violence, to cascading crises that affect them first and worst, to the denial of their personal autonomy and rights over their bodies and lives' as recalled by UN Secretary General António Guterres. Furthermore, Afghan and Iranian women are currently fighting for their rights in front of male dominance and patriarchal laws and traditions. The last UN Progress Report on the Sustainable Development Goals in 2022 affirms that the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030 and at the current rate of progress it may take another 286 years to remove discriminatory laws and close prevailing gaps in legal protection for women and girls.

The list of gender injustices and inequalities is endless. Because of the object and target of this publication, the focus will be on data concerning women's participation in decision-making. The 2023 edition of the Women in Politics

map has just been published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU<sup>3</sup>) and UN Women and it clearly shows that although more women than ever hold political decision-making positions globally, gender parity is far from being achieved. As of 1 January 2023, 11.3% of countries have Heads of State who are women (17 out of 151 countries, monarchy-based systems excluded) and 9.8% have Heads of Government who are women (19 out of 193). Only 13 countries – mostly in Europe – have gender-equal cabinets with 50% or more women<sup>4</sup> and those women tend to lead policy areas related to gender equality, human rights and social affairs<sup>5</sup>. The new data also indicates that the global proportion of Members of Parliament who are women has increased to 26.5%, compared to 25.5% in 2021.

However, the map also reveals great disparities. European Nordic countries are at the top of the regional rankings (45.7%) while the Middle East and North Africa regions remain at the bottom (1.7%). It is noteworthy that, for the first time in history, not a single functioning parliament in the world is male-only. Based on the findings of 47 countries that held elections in 2022, the report also shows that in those elections women took an average of 25.8% of seats for election or appointment. Six countries now have gender parity – or a greater number of women than men – in their lower or single chambers<sup>6</sup>: New Zealand has joined last year’s club of five consisting of Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Rwanda, and the United Arab Emirates.

The report stresses that legislative quotas were a decisive factor again this year in the increases seen in women’s representation. The idea behind the quota system is to recruit women into political positions. Three types of gender quotas are used in politics<sup>7</sup>: i) reserved seats (constitutional and/or legislative quotas), ii) legislated candidate quotas (constitutional and/or legislative), and iii) political party quotas. While reserved seats regulate the number of women elected, the other two forms establish a minimum for the share of women in the candidate

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3 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) – [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

4 Albania (66.7%), Finland (64.3%), Spain (63.6%), Nicaragua (62.5%), Liechtenstein (60%), Chile (58.3%), Belgium (57.1%), Mozambique (55%), Andorra, Colombia, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway (50%)

5 Women and gender equality (84%), family and children affairs (68%), social inclusion and development (49%), social protection and social security (45%), indigenous and minority affairs (44%)

6 As of 1 January 2023

7 Definition adopted by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

list, through a legal requirement or a measure written into the statutes of the political party. Legal gender quotas can be mandated by the Constitution (like in Burkina Faso, Nepal, Philippines, Uganda) or by electoral law (like in various Latin American countries, in Belgium, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Slovenia, in France), but they can also be decided voluntarily by political parties. In some countries, such as Germany, Norway and Sweden, a number of political parties have introduced quotas for their own lists. In other countries, only one or two parties have opted for the use of quotas.

At local level, the reality of women representation in politics is no different from the national level. Indeed, it is far from equal. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) has been gathering data for many years concerning the participation of women in politics at local level in Europe<sup>8</sup>. The latest data was reported in the 2019 publication *Women in Politics – Local and European Trends*<sup>9</sup>. Although the research – taking into account 39 European countries – indicates a positive trend in the old continent, the equality of representation of women and men in political life is far from being achieved. According to this report, only 15% of mayors in Europe today are women. The countries with the highest percentage of women mayors are Iceland (36%), Sweden (32%), Finland (31%) and Norway (28%). As for municipal councillors, women represented 29% with the highest percentage being in Iceland (47%), Sweden (43%), Ukraine (42%) and France (40%). No country has reached perfect parity at local level, although countries such as Finland, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden had attained parity in the European Parliament<sup>10</sup>.

An overview of women's participation in local government from 133 countries around the world has recently been published by UN Women<sup>11</sup>. This global data<sup>12</sup> also indicates that women's representation at local level is higher than in parliament but is still far from equal. Only 20 countries in the world have reached over 40% of women's representation and 28 countries have between

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8 The first European Conference of Women Elected at Local Level gathered in Pisa in 1983 upon the invitation of Mayor Fausta Giani Cecchini, and was followed by the initiative of the Standing Committee of Women Elected at Local Level created in 1992

9 *Women in Politics – Local and Regional Trends*, 2019, Sandra Ceciari

10 Following the European Parliament elections in 2019, Sweden had 55 % of women MEPs and Finland had 53.8 %

11 [www.localgov.unwomen.org](http://www.localgov.unwomen.org)

12 As of 1 January 2020

30 and 40%. 70 countries have between 10 and 30% and 15 countries have less than 10%. Women's representation is the highest in Central and Southern Asia (41%) and North America (35%). The countries with the highest percentage of women elected at local level are Antigua and Barbuda (67%), Bolivia (50%), Belarus (48%), Senegal (48%), Tunisia (48%), Iceland (47%), Costa Rica (46%), New Caledonia (46%) and Uganda (46%). We can also observe at local level that countries with legislative quotas have higher women's representation compared to those without quotas and that the adoption of gender quotas has significantly changed countries' trends in women's representation at local level.

An important issue to consider is whether there is a link between gender equality and democracy. Although the data concerning women's participation in politics at national or local level may indicate that equal participation of women and men is not a guarantee for democracy, women's participation is in fact an indispensable condition for democracy, because women account for over half the population of our society. When the majority of a society does not have full political rights, then this society cannot be considered democratic. As stated by the authors of an article on Gender Equality and Democracy<sup>13</sup>, *although the percentage of women in parliament shows no direct impact on a society's level of democracy, the norm of gender equality is intimately involved in the process of democratization. Democratic institutions certainly existed long before gender equality, but today growing emphasis on gender equality is an important factor in the process of democratization.* In the end, gender equality is a fundamental human right, and true democracy cannot ignore it and cannot exist without respecting it.

Political foundations play a crucial role in the process of building a democratic society by promoting political pluralism, the protection of human rights and the rule of law, and they are one of the most important types of democratic defenders globally. By definition, they cannot ignore gender equality either. Thanks to their work around Europe and the rest of the world, political foundations provide platforms for political education, capacity building, policy-making, international development, foreign aid and mediated political dialogues. In doing so, they play a pivotal role in promoting gender equality as a fundamental principle and condition for democracy.

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13 Authors: Ronald Inglehart, University of Michigan; Pippa Norris, Harvard University; Christian Welzel, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin

In this context, ENoP – serving as an umbrella organisation of communication and dialogue with the European institutions – is seeking to provide an insight into the work of political foundations on gender equality through this compilation of good practices, as well as offer recommendations for an improved members approach and more effective EU policies on this issue.

**This compilation will consider the following:**

- i.** illustrate how the project activities of political foundations impact societies and contribute to the improvement of gender equality, the protection of women's rights, and the political participation and engagement of women;
- ii.** indicate the possible strengths and weaknesses of current projects and actions that address the aforementioned issues;
- iii.** identify possible room for improvement in existing projects and actions;
- iv.** provide recommendations for the European institutions and other relevant stakeholders on how to support political foundations and improve their collaborative work.

Despite the difficulty in precisely classifying an activity and the links that exist between the different activities, the good practices have been classified according to three chapters:

- i.** Access to knowledge: capacity-building initiatives;
- ii.** Political influence: women's networks and academies;
- iii.** Raising awareness: holistic approaches to empowerment.

Analysis of the best practices will be developed according to these three models, and their intersectionality and place in a more global approach will be stressed in the conclusions.



# METHODOLOGY

## **Background**

The aim of the publication is to develop a compilation of good-practice examples that will provide the European institutions and other stakeholders with insight into the work of political foundations on gender equality, as well as recommendations for improving ENoP's approach to this crucial issue in order to build a progressive society and accomplished democracies.

## **Geographical scope**

This work has been commissioned by ENoP in the framework of the 'Strengthening ENoP as Actor in Support of Democratic and Pluralist Societies' project, which is co-financed by DG INTPA of the European Commission. It therefore focuses on global good practices and policy solutions within the scope of the EU, its Institutions and Member States.

The regions studied in this publication are:

- i. the Western Balkans
- ii. Eastern Europe
- iii. the Mediterranean region
- iv. Asia
- v. Eastern Africa
- vi. Western Africa

The case studies were selected based on the following criteria:

- i. they contain innovative elements;

- ii. they have achieved concrete results;
- iii. they have recorded results relevant to people in the country, in the region and in the organisation;
- iv. their model is sustainable and replicable to other regions, countries or organisations and different levels of government.

We are aware that this selection is not balanced from a geographical point of view at global level and we hope to be able to provide a wider vision in the future.

### **Data**

Members with good practices have been selected by the ENoP secretariat. These members and their partners include::

- Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom
- Indítsuk Be Magyarországot Foundation
- Christian Democratic International Center (KIC Sweden)
- Centre Party International Foundation (CIS Sweden)
- Institute for Social Integration (ISI)
- Boris Divković Foundation Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the FES Office in Belgrade
- Olof Palme International Center
- Naša Stranka, a socio-liberal party in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- European Liberal Forum
- Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and its office in Singapore

Online exchanges with representatives of these organisations and their contributions were vital for the completion of this publication. We send them our best acknowledgments and sincere thanks.

These conversations have helped to identify the best practices which have been presented in the three chapters of this compilation, namely:

- Capacity-building initiatives
- Women's networks and academies

- Raising awareness

The author has also used her own research channels and tools as well as her own experience and knowledge to enrich the compilation. Additionally, she has worked in close cooperation and with the support of ENoP Coordinator Jasmina Mršo, to whom she wishes to extend special thanks.

### **Contribution of members**

Besides the general data, the expert deepened her knowledge during exchanges with members who completed the expert's overview of their work, in particular the content of the case studies and the profiles of women leaders presented in the compilation. The secretariat representative helped to establish these contacts and participated in the conversation. The support of the secretariat representative has been instrumental for the expert to have a clearer and more objective vision of the operational background.

### **Timing**

As indicated in the written agreement between ENoP and the expert, the compilation of the mission has followed three stages:

- In the first stage, the expert provided ENoP with a draft outline and a draft working methodology. The methodology will be adapted for publication, at the end of the work.
- The second stage corresponds to the first draft of the study. In order to prepare this draft, the expert interviewed members whose case studies were selected for presentation in the compilation.
- The third and final stage involved a consultation process organised by the secretariat at the beginning of April 2023, with the results available in the second week of April. The expert then reviewed comments and suggestions from the members, and prepared the final version of the study for 26 April 2023.

The study will be presented at a launch event in Brussels in June 2023.

### **Other**

The expert has written in English. The text will be checked by a native English speaker before publication.



## CASE STUDY I

### CAPACITY-BUILDING INITIATIVES: ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE

Capacity building is a crucial factor and support for women's empowerment. It is the most common and basic approach to give women a specific support in order to advance in a certain sector, whether it be in political activism, the public sector, or community organising. In particular, capacity building provides the necessary preparation, knowledge and confidence to achieve their aspirations. It can be exclusively for women to support them in achieving their objectives through specific programmes responding to their needs, or it can include women in programmes where men also take part, aimed at reinforcing capacities and skills to meet determined goals. Capacity building can enhance women's abilities through training in appropriate skills, which is particularly important as it encourages and helps women's leadership in a complex and difficult environment, especially when it comes to political participation.

What is typical of this model is that it is needs-based and sometimes even ad hoc. A yearly or quarterly assessment of the needs of the organisation is done, specifically on the needs that their female members have for advancing in the ranks of the organisation. Political foundations usually do this assessment with partner organisations in third countries and create capacity-building schedules based on the identified needs of the partner organisation and the women who are active in the partner organisation (e.g. political parties, political foundations, civil society organisations, representatives of the public sector or governments).

Several political foundations and/or local partners are at the origin of capacity-building initiatives on gender equality and women's empowerment. This chapter will describe three initiatives/activities of three different foundations, with

the aim not only to inform on the role of ENoP members in supporting women's empowerment but also on the needs to be taken into account in the formulation of new and innovative EU policies in this field. Finally, the aim is to inspire other and further initiatives supporting gender equality and women's empowerment.

## **Empowering Women in Politics - EWIP**

**by the Centre Party International Foundation (CIS)  
and Christian Democratic International Center (KIC)**

This is a multiparty women's capacity-building programme aimed at increasing the participation and influence of women active in politics in Africa. To achieve this, EWIP offers capacity-building workshops to politically active women, to party leadership and to men married to politically active women. EWIP covers 4 countries in the Sub-Saharan region, namely Kenya, Uganda, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. From 2023, the programme covers Ghana too. The programme is led by the Centre Party International Foundation (CIS)<sup>14</sup> and is implemented in collaboration with the Christian Democratic International Center (KIC)<sup>15</sup>. KIC is responsible for the implementation of the programme in East Africa (Uganda and Kenya), while CIS is responsible for the implementation of the programme in West Africa (Burkina Faso, Togo and Ghana). It is funded by the Swedish Government and more specifically by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

The EWIP programme was developed based on learnings from the Program for Young Politicians in Africa (PYPA). The PYPA programme is a multiparty capacity-building programme for youth in Africa that was started in 2012 by KIC, and was implemented in collaboration with CIS, the Olof Palme International Center and the Green Forum. While implementing the PYPA programme, it was observed that young people face more obstacles than older people and that women face more difficulties than men. Therefore, young women suffer from double discrimination and need particular support. In this framework, it was decided to set up the EWIP programme.

The application for funding was presented in 2018, and the EWIP programme was then started in 2019. It addresses the issue of women's leadership in politics and it

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14 [www.cisSweden.se](http://www.cisSweden.se)

15 [www.kicSweden.org](http://www.kicSweden.org)

foresees different activities which are adapted to the country and the surrounding environment and context. For example, special activities are scheduled when there are elections. The programme is flexible but it is centred on two strategies which need to be followed in each country and in each activity. These two strategies were designed on the basis of two priorities: the necessity to work on women's confidence and public speaking, and the necessity to convince men of the importance of gender equality. The two strategies are thus to strengthen the capacities and confidence of women active in politics, and to make the management of political parties more receptive to the specific needs of women.

Within this perspective, EWIP has two main tracks, each with its own target group. The first track targets women who are active in political parties and include various capacity-building trainings with a particular focus on strengthening women's self-confidence. The second track targets decision-makers, especially the leadership of political parties – almost all of whom are men – but also men who are married to politically active women.

An important component of the programme therefore has a special focus on engaging men, as they dominate politics, set the rules and make the decisions. The main target group is made up of the leadership of political parties, who are invited to workshops focusing on strategies to increase women's participation. The work done with political parties includes providing assistance in gender-mainstreaming internal policy documents, structures and practices and helping to make the necessary changes with a gender-equality lens. Sometimes the multiparty approach is used, however in East Africa the majority of party management trainings are done in a single party. The reason for this is that parties are sensitive when it comes to discussing sensitive issues like gender policies and policies against sexual harassment.

The EWIP programme in Western Africa is implemented in Togo and Burkina Faso. It is coordinated and implemented by CIS Sweden together with its local partner l'Institut pour la Gouvernance et le Développement (IGD), a policy institute based in Burkina Faso. In Togo and Burkina Faso, women's participation in politics is reduced and faces many challenges. Based on the UN-IPU 2023 ranking regarding women in national parliaments, Burkina Faso is 134th out of 186 countries, with 16.9% women in the national parliament (12 out of 71 members). Togo is in 117th position, with 19.8% women in parliament (18 out of 91 members).

The EWIP programme pays particular attention to young women and women who do not yet hold decision-making positions. Around 30 women active in

political parties represented in the country's parliament were trained each year for 10-13 days (10 in East Africa and 13 in West Africa) in three sessions over the course of one year. The programme has an extra focus on self-confidence and communication. Participants get the opportunity to develop skills such as personal leadership skills, and interviewing and debating techniques. Special training is also organised for some candidates in the run-up to elections. However, different approaches are used in Eastern and Western Africa. In Eastern Africa, KIC has focused on Members of the County Assembly in Kenya and Councillors in Uganda, both of whom hold power. The rationale here is to train them so that they can deliver and gain traction in their political careers. In Western Africa, in Burkina Faso the situation is more difficult now after the two coups d'état in 2022. Political party activity has been suspended but capacity-building activities of the EWIP programme are able to be organised.

In Kenya, KIC is implementing the programme with The Oslo Center as its local partner, which is an independent, non-governmental organisation with vast experience in areas pertaining to democracy assistance and human rights. Uganda is ranked 50th in the UN-IPU 2023 ranking regarding women in national parliaments, with 188 women out of 556 seats (33.8%) in the national parliament (after the January 2021 elections). During a recent CEDAW review<sup>16</sup>, experts commended the great progress made in the education sector, but also inquired about the cost of political campaigning for women which discourages them from entering politics.

For years 2019 and 2020, the primary target group for training in Kenya were female members of county assemblies from six political parties and their senior party management, whereas in Uganda the primary target group was Local Council 5 (LCV) Councillors. These Councillors came from 5 different political parties.

The programme's activities have been adapted to the background and needs of each country:

- Institutional capacity building (Kenya)
- Capacity building for women councillors (Uganda)

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16 11 February 2022: CEDAW review of the eighth and ninth periodic reports of Uganda

- Party management, which in Uganda has touched on the dialogue with the institutions, and in Kenya the male gender champions to support on nominations.

Each course was attended by 120 people and has increased the confidence and skills of the women involved.

### **The Husbands' Initiative / The Male Gender Champion Initiative**

An interesting part of the EWIP programme has a special focus on engaging men who are married to politically active women. They are invited to workshops on the importance of women's participation in politics and the importance of supporting and assisting their wives with housework and childcare for example. The workshops are also a moment of dialogue between women and men. A lot of them speak about problems of jealousy during the campaign because women's engagement in the campaign provokes insecurity for men and mistrust. Another issue is the risk of violence for women candidates. Partnership is crucial for the success of women candidates and also for the sake of the couple. Lack of communication comes from both sides and the programme tries to establish and encourage this. The selection of the husbands is not imposed. When women's training is organised, the concept of husbands' participation is introduced, and women are invited to speak to their husbands about it and perhaps bring them to the subsequent sessions. Separate sessions are organised first, and are then followed by combined sessions where dialogue can be enhanced. It appears that husbands are proud both for their women's participation in political elections but also generally speaking. Women come from different parts of the country despite the training often being organised in the capital. In Uganda it was taking place in Kampala for example. Traditional areas are much more difficult than urban areas in this respect.

In Kenya, KIC's partnership with The Oslo Center implements the concept of the male gender champion instead of the husbands' dialogue. This is due to the specific needs of women in Kenya who are serving as members of county assemblies and generally receive good support from their husbands. The idea is thus to engage men in various political parties to understand the challenges of women within their parties, and therefore encourage these men to become champions and supporters of women within their parties. This component of the programme delivered substantial results in the last election in Kenya, where male



gender champions provided security, campaign material and support during the nomination process for women in political parties.

Facilitators do play an important role during the husband and male-gender-champion sessions, particularly in the way the sessions are structured. At the beginning of the workshop, a presentation is made introducing things such as gender norms and gender roles. Participants are then asked to share their experiences. At the end of the workshop, a change in the atmosphere and the attitudes of the participants was noticed.

### **The challenges of the EWIP programme**

The first thing that the EWIP programme managers would say was ‘it is difficult and requires time to work with political parties with a gender equality lens, but it is possible and very interesting!’ It clearly appears that this work must be continuous, built for the medium and long terms, and constantly repeated. One of the many obstacles encountered is that it is difficult to reach the right people – the men who hold the keys to power in the party, and leaders that are important to get on board in the discussion in order to change the rules. This also requires a long time, including meetings, discussions, procedures, and the adoption and integration of new rules.

The role of local partners is pivotal, because they are well acquainted with the rules of the country, they are part of political life, they know the culture and traditions well, they know the stereotypes that exist, and they can help to find the right way to lead the conversation. Local partners also have a local network which is of great support in establishing contacts and connections. In fact, the local partners spend a lot of time exchanging with the parties, involving them, and having them in the meetings. It is sometimes difficult to have men in the meetings, but it is essential to get them on board.

Capacity building for party leadership is a challenging initiative where the organisers need to take into account the power competition that women have to face against men who are clearly not ready to give up their place in decision-making. Women are present, they are in parties but most of the time the decision-makers are men. Capacity building needs to address men in decision-making and involve them in a process where they will become aware of the importance and necessity of women and women’s participation in politics.

The EWIP programme is also an example of a multiparty working system, where different political parties work together on the issue of women's participation. This collaborative method creates a context where each person learns from the other and emulation encourages the improvement of the performances of each person. However, this collective atmosphere also often encourages people to make commitments that are difficult to maintain by parties and their leaders in the long run.

Finally, the EWIP programme has also revealed a very serious and delicate issue for women: sexual harassment. Unfortunately, this problem is common in Africa and elsewhere. One of the parties has adopted rules against sexual harassment but they have never implemented them because they are scared about the consequences, even in the party itself.

### **The results of the programme**

According to the programme managers, the programme has so far given more concrete results in Uganda and Kenya, where the work has been done with the parties' headquarters, organising meetings and exchanges there and making it easier to involve party leaders and see an impact on the ground. The situation is more difficult in Burkina Faso, where there is no political stability at the moment and it is difficult to raise an interest in the programme. Generally speaking, it was observed that Burkina Faso has more patriarchal and conservative structures, whereas Togo is more open and it is less difficult to work on gender equality.

The EWIP programme has had an impact in the quota debate taking place in these countries. In Eastern Africa, women have reserved seats so quotas are not an issue. However in Western Africa, namely Burkina Faso and Togo, it is very much an issue. The debate is going to take time. Burkina Faso has a quota law of 30% but it is not binding and political parties find ways not to follow it, for example by paying a fine. In this context, the EWIP programme has achieved an important result: a national strategy for women's proportional representation in political parties has been drafted, and it contains objectives and actions to reach this. The first aim is to reach parity in decision-making bodies in the parties and the second aim is to reach parity in the electoral lists. The text has been adopted and validated. In Togo, some parties are very keen to implement it. The Congress of these parties need to adopt the strategy, and men are advocating for it. In Kenya, two parties have asked for and obtained the right to amend the constitution of

the parties in that sense. Consequently, if a party leader is a man, the deputy leader needs to be a woman. Notably, a woman is now the leader of one party.

### **The evaluation**

The evaluation carried out in early 2021 contains many story-telling quotes<sup>17</sup> from the experience in Eastern Africa which prove the positive results of the EWIP programme:

*‘The EWIP training has given me the confidence, strength, courage and energy to speak in public.’*

*‘I now express myself without fear, I impose myself more, with confidence and serenity.’*

*‘I speak with less stress, more confidence and I feel I am more convincing.’*

*‘During the meetings of the party’s executive committee I now give my point of view. Before the training I did not know how to structure my arguments, whereas now I am even able to convince more women to join my political party.’*

*‘In my village in particular I now have much more influence. The population has more confidence in me and supports me more and more in my political activities.’*

It is worth noting that, through the EWIP programme, for the first time in Uganda political parties worked on their gender policies and policies against sexual harassment which is a strong result at party level. Additionally, parties in Kenya worked on documents that helped women during the last general election, particularly regarding the nomination process and the support given by men during election campaigning.

Achieving structural changes is largely about changing norms and power relations, which takes a long time to achieve and depends on many different factors. However, the following quotes from male representatives of party leadership are indicative of the beginning of some changes:

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17 [www.cisssweden.se](http://www.cisssweden.se)

*‘We have been made aware of the difficulties women face in politics. We now know that the barriers to women’s participation are a lack of self-confidence, gender norms and roles.’*

*‘I now understand that gender norms and roles are factors that disadvantage women.’*

The evaluation shows many strong results from the husbands’ initiative:

*‘I learned a lot at the training. Women already face difficulties in their political engagement and I should not add to them. I should instead help her to overcome these difficulties.’*

*‘I have understood that the support of the husband is fundamental for the political career of the woman. This is why I support my wife’s political action more now.’*

*‘I trust my wife more than before. She now has my full support in her political involvement.’*

*‘I sometimes take care of the children when my wife is busy with political activities and commitments that are essential for her.’*

*‘Arguments have become rare between my wife and me because I don’t make a fuss about her attending meetings.’*

The wives were also interviewed for the evaluation and they confirmed the statements of the husbands:

*‘My husband now trusts me more and I now have the financial and moral support of my husband for the conduct of political activities.’*

*‘My husband now accepts the constraints and obligations of my political commitment, such as me going to meetings.’*

*‘He accepts making up for my absence by taking care of the children and other family obligations.’*

*‘My family life has become peaceful; there are fewer arguments.’*

*‘The support of my husband gives me more self-confidence, which makes me more assured and able to carry out my professional activities effectively.’*

*‘I am now able to reconcile my private life, my professional life and my political life.’*

### **The obstacles**

Funding is the most important obstacle for the implementation of the programme. Implemented activities depend on the available funding but this is reduced. The organisations leading the programme are small and they do not have enough people to prepare an application for a bigger programme. It is therefore difficult for them to foresee and implement a larger project. The funding used is national funding (from Sweden) as it is not possible to get funding at European level at the moment. This is an important issue, because it is crucial that these kinds of initiatives are recognised at European level and have European support from political and financial points of view.

### **Lessons learnt**

The programme has several innovative aspects that are worth considering. An important aspect is that it is implemented by different political foundations, linked to different political parties and also has multiparty targets. In addition, the multicountry implementation of the programme is also of great interest, because it foresees the possibility to adapt to different contexts and targets and thus also fosters the potential of replicability, even if it would need to be adapted to a national or local background. The needs of women change from country to country but also according to the area of the country, and more specifically from urban to rural contexts.

Training needs to take into account the needs, education, traditions and objectives of women from different settings. For example, the KIC representative stressed that in Uganda many women – and also men – did not have any knowledge of the local government act and it was important to adapt the training to these circumstances. Specific adaptations need to be followed for political parties’ training session administrators, as many political parties do not implement any gender policies.

The part of the programme dedicated to the husbands of politically active women and male gender champions is certainly one of the most significant innovations of the programme, with great participation and even unexpected results.

### **Capacity-building initiatives in Bulgaria** **by the Institute for Social Integration (ISI)**

The Institute for Social Integration (ISI)<sup>18</sup> was founded in 2002. Among its founders are leading experts – sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, jurists, diplomats, economists, journalists. They are all united by their willingness to address the problems related to integration and disintegration in Bulgarian society, social and economic gaps, and alienation and social vulnerability. ISI's main activities are organising trainings and educational courses, conducting and publishing research and scientific studies, and organising discussions and fora. The organisation also supports the realisation of democratic processes in the Bulgarian societal and political space, participation in policy-making processes, and debates related to policy implementation.

In this framework, the Institute has established various capacity-building initiatives that aim to achieve gender equality and increase the political influence and participation of women. The initiatives of the Bulgarian Institute for Social Integration are good examples of the many ways that capacity building can be enhanced and organised.

Mixed capacity-building initiatives, with an equal number of women and men participating, were a first model of capacity-building initiatives organised by the Institute. These allowed women's involvement in activities concerning political participation. It was started in 2003 with a project aimed at increasing professionalism in politics and encouraging civic participation. It was a short, one-year project that was made possible with the support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). The project started with a campaign to recruit participants for the training modules. The aim was to respect the following criteria for participation:

- i. participants should be under the age of 41;
- ii. they should speak at least one foreign language;
- iii. at least two thirds of participants should come from small municipalities.

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<sup>18</sup> [www.isi-bg.org](http://www.isi-bg.org)

The aim of the project was to develop the role of representative governance as a social inclusive model. The project wanted to achieve this by stimulating the building of a new political culture for the younger generation through formal education, and by creating a generation of politicians who would meet the expectations of citizens for responsibility, integrity and the defence of public interest. Among the lecturers, trainers and coaches were nationally renowned specialists. The workshops were held in different regions of the country. During the implementation, the team of the Institute decided to further improve the project by developing an internship project for successful candidates who graduated from the training modules.

On the occasion of the final seminar, the participants described their ideas and vision – how to train politicians for example. They wrote about what they had learned and what had been useful and they developed four future projects, thus forming the idea for their future cooperation in a network.

Most of the participants were elected municipal councillors, mayors, and members of parliament. The project created a wide network which constituted a strong professional resource to effectively support the policy-making process. The network also established an alumni club, with nine regional clubs and a common national coordinator.

The methodology and content of the training conducted by the team of the Institute generated high interest. For the participants – an equal number of women and men – it led to high efficiency, new knowledge and skills, and provoked new attitudes in the successful graduates. Participants were trained to make presentations, have discussions, and complete home assignments. Thanks to its success, the project was repeated. It was also the opportunity to launch a new long-term project called the 'Academy for Social Policy'.

Another type of initiative was capacity building for women political activists. The involvement of women in training and thus in political activities was a great result from the first initiative of mixed capacity building. To support and respond to women's needs, the Institute has organised training for women activists which have allowed them to learn about election campaigning, public speaking, effective negotiation, and team management. These trainings have encouraged them to enter political life. Women's growing interest in politics has pushed the political parties to take into account gender equality and take initiatives in this sense. For example, the Socialist Party has set up a Women's Council within the party. Now, although the General Assembly of the Party still counts more men

than women, women are involved in activities and the party programme takes into account women's issues.

Capacity building for local government officials has been another priority of the Bulgarian Institute for Social Integration. This initiative was strongly supported by the National Association of the Municipalities in Republic of Bulgaria<sup>19</sup>, which was in charge of the organisation of training for local government officials, both women and men. They were trained on how to enable good management and teamwork, promote a good policy and build advocacy. This initiative allowed women to learn new skills in terms of management knowledge but also local government administration. This allowed women to be appointed to local administration positions, thanks to the skills they had learnt from the training.

Finally, a conference was organised by the Institute in November 2023 in Plovdiv. In this conference, women and men discussed women's participation in politics and how women stand for the rights of other women. The main issue which arose from this discussion was the importance of solidarity among women in order to support each other in politics. The conference was supported again by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

### **The results**

The Institute witnessed that the lack of skills and knowledge of political leaders – for example regarding the constitution, the electoral system, governance principles, and the legal and ethical framework – is a real problem for the development of a legitimate democratic political system in Bulgaria and leads to the intervention of non-public actors in the political process. In this context, the project was a real support for the reinforcement of democratic life and women's participation was a great innovative element.

The main interest of the initiatives of the Bulgarian Institute for Social Integration was to observe how the Institute tackled the different targets that are necessary for a mature political life. In this regard, they trained government officials to ensure the party had good people to appoint and to elect, but they also coached skills such as party activism following the elections.

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19 [www.namrb.org](http://www.namrb.org)



These experiences can exist and be launched elsewhere, although the model and content need to be adapted to the size of the foundations, to the party, to the territory to cover, and to the people involved.

### **The challenges**

This case clearly shows the challenges faced by foundations, institutes and local actors for the organisation of this kind of initiative. Financial support is vital to them and no initiative can be taken without external support, even when the needs are huge in terms of training and knowledge as the Bulgarian partner has underlined. Nothing could have been done to support democratic life, local democracy and gender equality without the support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Therefore the importance of budgetary support for women's initiatives is evident. Without any external support, women's activities are difficult to organise and gender equality is difficult to overcome. Nevertheless, if women work together, support each other and raise their voices, they can increase their power and gender equality can be achieved.

Another challenge that we can ascertain from the Bulgarian experience and particularly from these types of initiatives is that there is a need for a balance between innovative elements and repetition. There need to be new programmes for existing members and there needs to be repetition of old trainings for new members. It is also necessary to get the support and work with different structures (e.g. in-party and systemic structures from governments, media and civil society).

Women's interest in politics is certainly another challenge and the capacity-building trainings were a good way to capture women's intent and encourage them to enter political life, while reassuring them about their potential skills.

Meeting expectations is another challenge. Each participant – whether a man or a woman – is simultaneously looking for a role for themselves and in the party. This is also why they are attending the programmes. To train activists, volunteers and members means achieving the highest potential for all of them. People need to be recognised and supported so that they feel valuable and motivated, or else they will leave the programme or even the party.

### **The impact**

The main thing is that an ongoing initiative like this, which is spread throughout sectors, branches and political families, can create substantial impact. Even by

strengthening basic skills of individual groups of women, it will make a difference as they are grouped together. If something like this is repeated in numerous sectors of a society and multiple regions of a country, the impact will be greater.

In this sense, the Bulgarian initiative can be a good source of inspiration for the number of stakeholders involved, for the synergies created, for the geographical impact and for the progressive model followed by the Institute.

### **What to learn?**

There are many different elements to learn from this initiative, and each of them have an impact on the implementation and success of the project. Firstly, a lot depends on funding. With sustainable funding, it is possible to organise a needs-based academy and target specific groups. With limited funding, the organisers have to choose specific topics and concentrate on certain issues. At the beginning, the most popular subjects are gender equality in general, the political system of a country, budgeting, public speaking, and social media use. Therefore the main lesson is how the Institute and the partner party tackle different facets of political life and representative democracies (e.g. elections, government officials, party politics) in order to achieve a politically mature party and, ultimately, society.

Secondly, the participation and involvement of men is a support for gender equality. They have quotas for all their participants in general capacity building programmes. Subsequently, they have progressively implemented trainings only for women – during the training for government officials and for the academy for example. Conferences also play a role, but they are part of the general initiative and are mostly used to give visibility to the programme, to the issue and to the participants, which is nonetheless a great way to add another dimension to the initiative.

Finally, the Institute initiatives show the importance of collaboration between the different stakeholders in order to enlarge and strengthen cooperation. This can be seen between local authorities and civil society, but also party activists, government officials, mayors, and elected and appointed officials. Their collaboration was a great added value for strengthening local democracy and women's participation, which certainly seemed to increase in local administration and in politics.

This approach has been innovative because of the intensity and high level of participation it ensured, but also because it has targeted specific groups and worked on precise issues which are important for a party. For example, general capacity building linked to elections was organised, women from more rural areas were involved, and mixed trainings were organised for women and men, as well as local governments officials. This has been an innovative initiative in Bulgaria and a new working model.

To conclude, it is important to consider what type of funding is best for these kinds of initiatives, as well as how the activities need to be organised. It certainly depends on the length of a programme. If it is an ongoing programme, a framework partnership is needed for at least two years. If the funding is provided on a yearly basis, then it is good to organise the programme in three modules during the year. It is also important to organise tasks and events in the middle of the programme to keep the participants connected and engaged. If it is one-time funding, then it is best to assess the basic needs of the target group and dedicate at least three full working days to learn from this. If the participants, beneficiaries and stakeholders are a group of professionals, a training can be facilitated by a professional. The knowledge is usually within the target group itself and the facilitation will just provide a flow of knowledge and information that creates a best-practice exchange and an exchange of advice amongst professionals.

## **Capacity-building tools on gender equality**

**by the Olof Palme International Center**

The Olof Palme International Center<sup>20</sup> is a feminist organisation and promotes gender equality and anti-discrimination in all its projects. This is done directly, for example through activities intended to contribute to increased equality and reduced discrimination, and through projects and operations which – although they do not directly focus on gender equality and non-discrimination – can be designed in such a way as to promote gender equality, and combat discrimination. In this respect, the Palme Center tries to ensure that all its projects and operations are gender-mainstreamed. In practice, this means that the operations are founded on a gender equality and power analysis that is included in the planning, implementation and follow-up of the project. There is a range of capacity-building material for training on gender equality which is used by the

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20 [www.palmecenter.se](http://www.palmecenter.se)

Olof Palme International Center and can inspire and/or be taken on board by other organisations.

### **Gender equality analysis**

Each programme or project that is planned within the Palme Center begins with a gender analysis. This is a tool used to plan and implement activities in a way that contributes to gender equality. A method sheet explains how it is done. A gender analysis always consists of two elements: a quantitative analysis and a qualitative analysis.

The quantitative analysis focuses on numbers and distribution (often in percentages). Different types of statistics are an important source for mapping quantitative gender equality. This might involve looking at the distribution between women and men when it comes to participation in projects, who is invited to the conferences, women and men who are invited as speakers or what is the distribution in the project team.

The qualitative analysis focuses on the conditions and opportunities for both women and men, with the aim of ensuring that everyone has the same access to participate, and power to influence. This might involve analysing the potential effects or consequences that the different activities can have on women and men, or thinking about the obstacles that can prevent their participation in activities or in decision-making processes.

There is a wide range of methods that can be used when performing gender analysis. A method which is often used is the 4R Method:

- Representation (distribution between women and men);  

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- Resources (how resources are distributed between women and men);  

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- Realia (understanding how gender patterns influence the organisation or context in practice, and what consequences they have);  

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- Realise (action plan).  

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The gender analysis must be performed in dialogue with the partner organisations. It is essential to include the perspective of the target group.

Another aspect that needs to be looked at is the question of who has the access to and the control of resources. These include economic resources (e.g. income), material resources (e.g. property and home), productive resources (e.g. land and labour), political resources (e.g. leadership and access to decision-making bodies), social resources (e.g. family networks and economic status), knowledge (e.g. access to information and education), and time.

Gender analysis must take into account needs. Women and men often have different needs, which require different means and measures. There are the practical needs that women and men have in their daily lives, as well as strategic needs which involve change at societal level, such as legislation, equal pay, and political representation.

Gender is one of several grounds for discrimination which often interacts with other grounds of discrimination, such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, sexuality, and religion. This is why an intersectional perspective must always be applied when performing a gender analysis.

### **Gender equality integration: mainstreaming**

Gender equality integration is also called mainstreaming. It means ensuring that the gender equality perspective is present in each step of the activities. These are the steps foreseen by the Palme Center:

- Idea and design: performing gender analysis, and designing goals and indicators

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- Planning of budget and resources

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- Implementation: capacity building, dialogue, documentation

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- Follow up (monitoring): what questions are asked and to whom? Dialogue and documentation

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- Evaluation and learning: what questions are asked and to whom? How do we use what we have learned?

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Gender equality mainstreaming means systematically making visible and analysing the consequences that the various activities, proposals and decisions have for women and men. The core element of gender equality integration is

analysis. In order to exercise gender equality integration, it is important to understand how situations affect women and men differently.

### **Gender equality vocabulary**

It is important to know the vocabulary related to gender equality. The Palme Center details some terms which are often used in gender equality:

- **Feminism:** It is both a theory and a political movement consisting of different approaches with the same objective: to change the power structures related to gender. The feminist movement also works on ways to ensure that women and men have the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities in society.
- **Gender:** The concept of gender does not refer to the biological sex but the aspects of sex that are socially and culturally constructed, namely the beliefs, ideas and actions that shape our social gender. This concept was introduced in the humanities and social sciences in the 1980s.
- **Equality:** Equality is about all individuals' equal value regardless of gender, race, religion, social class, etc. In the political context, it is also about influence and social conditions. Equality can be justified from different points of departure, for example religion, natural law ideas, liberalism, socialism and democracy.
- **Gender equality:** gender equality means that women and men should have the same opportunities and rights. Equality between men and women assumes an equal distribution of power and influence; equal economic independence; equal conditions and opportunities in the fields of entrepreneurship, work, working conditions and development opportunities at work; equal access to education and opportunities for developing personal ambitions, interests and talents; shared responsibility for home and children; and freedom from gender-based violence.
- **Power structures:** power structures refer to the hierarchical order in which the different groups in society are given power. Feminists have coined the term gender power structure, which posits that there is an order in society in which women have less power than men. There are also power structures that are controlled by social class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, etc.

## Case Study I – Capacity-building initiatives: access to knowledge

- Patriarchy: patriarchy refers to family or social systems in which political and economic power, both within the household and in the public sphere, are held by older men. Patriarchy has been widely used as a social scientific name for the social system in which women are subordinate to men, especially in early women's studies. Patriarchy as a deep social structure can still be manifested in many ways at work and at home.
- Structure: structure really means 'building'. The word is used to describe the whole or the pattern that is made up of the parts. The word is often used abstractly, and then refers to some 'construction' or 'order'. Social structure is about how society is made up of people and their institutions: companies, organisations, agencies, schools, colleges, and so on.
- Norms: norms relate to the 'normal' or accepted behaviour in a social group or a society; conventional practices. A system of norms indicates the normal pattern that the actions of individuals should comply with. Norms can be divided into categories such as legal, economic, moral, aesthetic, technical, etc.

In this regard, the Palme Center also raises some questions and discussion points which are related to the vocabulary and are often analysed in capacity-building sessions:

- i. What is the difference between biological sex and gender?
- ii. Can a man have a female gender?
- iii. What do you think it means that Sweden has a feminist foreign policy?
- iv. Can a society be equal without gender equality?
- v. How is the situation for gender equality in your country/community/workplace/organisation/family?
- vi. Can you identify any power structures in your society?
- vii. Can you identify any norms in your society?

### **PowerPoint: Gender equality benefits all!**

The Palme Center often uses a PowerPoint presentation which can be useful for workshops and it can easily be adapted. The main chapters are the following:

- Who am I?
- What is the work or political background of the organisation?
- Gender equality background: some data and historical evolution
- Objective 5 of the UN 2030 Agenda: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- What is feminism? (A tool). What is gender equality? (A target).
- Should we ask for women's quotas in decision-making?
- What is domestic violence?
- The differences between female and male language
- What does your audience perceive?
- What to think about when speaking in front of an audience
- Techniques of domination and counter strategies
- Strategies of inclusion
- How equal is your organisation?
- Where to find more information on gender equality

### **Toolkit for gender equality training**

The Palme Center also offers a toolkit for organisations that want to hold gender equality training. It helps to prepare a presentation. The Olof Palme International Center website ([www.palmecenter.se](http://www.palmecenter.se)) contains this toolkit as well as all the other helpful and innovative tools related to gender equality.



## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE BEST PRACTICES IN CAPACITY BUILDING?

### STRONG POINTS

- 1.** Capacity building is a powerful working method to reinforce capacities in general, which is crucial for women's empowerment. It is highly recommended to give confidence to women, and to train candidates in specific things which often represent weaknesses, such as public speaking, communication, and media relations.
- 2.** Capacity building is commonly used in international cooperation with third countries, as it allows the transfer of experience and expertise from one entity to another, following give-and-take rules which in fact has reciprocal added value for partners. It is therefore a very fruitful instrument of international cooperation for development.
- 3.** Knowledge and expertise are crucial elements of capacity building as they are at the core of the activities of the partners. Reinforcing capacities means being able to respond to women's needs on the ground with adapted tools and methods in terms of knowledge, management, resources and involvement.

### NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

- 1.** Assessment is pivotal in order to know women's and partners' needs. It is therefore the first phase of a capacity-building action. It must identify the specific requests according to which specific activities must be put in place, with adapted and effective tools.
- 2.** Adaptation to the context is also important. Specifically, adaptation to the culture of the country, to its legislation, and to its political and electoral system are all crucial for women's empowerment. The local context is also important. The situation of women is very different in urban and rural areas for example. Capacity-building actions need to take these elements into account to achieve effective results.

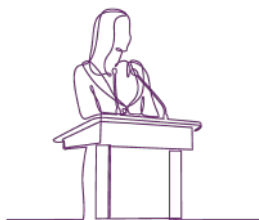
**3.** Funding and resources are fundamental for the organisation of capacity-building sessions as they involve travelling, hotel expenses, interpretation, and experts' fees. This can lead to huge budgets that small organisations cannot afford. However, small organisations do not have the capacities to prepare big projects and respond to complicated calls for proposals. Furthermore, long-term funding is needed for the effective planning and implementation of such projects. Projects that have short-term funding (e.g. for one year) are not conducive to results. These challenges need to be taken into account by donors.

## SUGGESTIONS

**1.** The involvement of (a) local actor(s) and local ownership are key for a successful and sustainable capacity-building project. Local actors know the context, they know how to manage certain situations, they can anticipate obstacles and challenges, and they can establish local contacts and cooperation links which are vital for the impact on the ground.

**2.** Training is the most basic action for capacity building. It can be training related to the political system, the local government asset, the electoral system, or more specific women's needs like public speaking, gender budgeting and mainstreaming. Capacity building often involves peer-to-peer learning and mentoring where mentors transfer their experience and knowledge to mentees who can learn from people who are more experienced. This is a proven support for women candidates or newly elected women to face the difficulties that women in politics often face. The mentoring approach can help newly elected women to face daily challenges that they meet, such as the difficulty to conciliate their private and professional lives, or the adaptation to a political environment and patriarchal rules. The support of an experienced woman or man can help her to continue and not give up.

**3.** Time and continuity are essential to ensure concrete results, impact and sustainability. Capacity building is certainly more effective when repeated actions and initiatives are foreseen in the same place, region or country to respond to women's needs and to support their empowerment. Time and continuity are also crucial to develop trust with political parties which is essential when working with sensitive topics.



## CASE STUDY II

# WOMEN'S NETWORKS AND ACADEMIES: POLITICAL INFLUENCE

**W**omen's networks and academies are common and combine capacity building with additional elements necessary for increasing women's political participation. These elements include strategic and long-term approaches, liaising opportunities, support groups, lobbying, and continuous cooperation among participants.

What is typical of this model is that it aims to create strong connections between the participants, based on their shared experiences and needs. It leads to creating networks within an organisation, and strengthening the links and the involvement of women. It can also cross parties and countries, bringing together women with similar goals and experiences around a topic within a country or a region, while also taking into account the differences.

Political foundations usually design the network or academy with their partner(s) on the ground, based on the identified needs of the partner for increased political participation of women. The recruitment process for the network is open to both currently politically active women and potential new activists, which ultimately also leads to the increased participation of women in politics.

Networking is a unique tool to bring together women with different experiences and backgrounds, and from different countries and levels of representation. This creates vast and strong alliances which are highly valuable in the exchange of best practices and information. It is crucial to forming and bringing women's voices to the fore, and creating vast and strong alliances which can have powerful results.

## **Initiative 50%**

### **by D66 International and the Boris Divković Foundation**

Initiative 50% was launched by CIS Sweden together with the Boris Divković Foundation (BDF) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was supported by BDF and the project until 2019, when D66 International<sup>21</sup> from the Netherlands took over. The initiative supports Naša Stranka – a social-liberal party in Bosnia and Herzegovina – in achieving the goal of having 50% women amongst their elected and appointed officials.

The Boris Divković Foundation was established in 2013 with the aim of advancing political science and political practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region. The Foundation is named after the late vice president of Naša Stranka. Its work is marked by its ultimate objective of harmonising political activity with basic moral principles, which is the idea that Boris Divković advocated for during his political engagement<sup>22</sup>.

Initiative 50% is a project aiming at strengthening women's political participation, with an inclusion of the equal representation of women and men in political decision-making processes. The initiative is called Initiative 50% because it promotes 50% women as a whole concept. It aims for 50% women's representation in party bodies, 50% women elected from the party list in elections, 50% of appointed women, 50% women participating in events, 50% women's representation in media, and 50% campaign funding for women.

Initiative 50% gathers female candidates and political activists from Naša Stranka which, unlike the other political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina, does not have any type of women's organisation within the party. In this context, Initiative 50% is a tool for the implementation of gender equality within the party, its organs and leading management.

The initiative supports women's participation in decision-making by promoting women's leadership, as well as by organising capacity-building trainings like public speaking, presentation skills, individual public relations campaigning

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21 D66 International is a social liberal political party in the Netherlands which positions itself in the centre of the political spectrum. The party was created in 1966. [www.international.d66.nl](http://www.international.d66.nl)

22 [www.liberalforum.eu](http://www.liberalforum.eu); see also: [www.bdf.ba](http://www.bdf.ba)

and social media management. Conferences, events, as well as advocacy and lobbying within party structures to ensure women get elected, appointed and promoted are other components of the initiative.

Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>23</sup> is known for having one of the most complex political systems and hybrid governmental structures. It has a tripartite Presidency that reflects its three constituent peoples – Bosnians, Serbs and Croats – and it comprises two autonomous entities and one autonomous district. Nevertheless, the country has shown some of the best practices on gender equality in comparison with other countries in Southeast Europe in regards to gender law mechanisms and their protection. In 1998, the Provisional Election Commission adopted a minimum 30% quota for women on every party list. In the 1998 elections, this resulted in an important increase in women's representation at all legislative levels. In 2000, this rule was codified into the Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina and applied to all party lists in the 2000 national and municipal elections. The electoral law was reformed at the same time to provide an open-list proportional electoral system which subsequently reduced the impact of legislative candidate quotas. It is important to emphasise that Bosnia and Herzegovina was the first country in the region to adopt a Gender Equality Law in 2003, which enabled the formation of the first gender mechanism in Bosnia. This solid legal framework has led to the formation of newly established gender narratives and has made political parties more aware of the gender-sensitive approaches in politics, especially when it comes to the quota representation of the less represented sex.

The UN-IPU 2023 report ranking women in parliaments sees Bosnia and Herzegovina in 120th position. After the elections held for the lower chamber in October 2022, there are 8 women out of 42 members (19.1%). Regarding the upper chamber, where elections were held in February 2019, there are 3 women out of 15 members (20%). At local level, the CEMR data indicates 18.3% women despite the quota system foreseeing a minimum of 33% of the underrepresented sex, with 6 women out of 145 mayors (4.2%). At regional level, women represent 18.3%, and there are 2 women out of 10 presidents (20%) despite there also being a minimum quota of 33%.

This is the background of the initiative of the Naša Stranka party as part of the achievement of the important goal to have 50% women elected. The initiative

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23 Gender Quota Database: IDEA – Inter-Parliamentary Union – Stockholm University

gathers female candidates as well as other activists and the main aim is to train them through workshops and other activities to engage them in politics as effectively as possible. The initiative also works with activists from the non-governmental sector and more widely in order to spread and reinforce the idea of gender representation to all parts of social life in the country. The ultimate aim of the programme is to strengthen and build the capacity of political activists within Naša Stranka for independent and equal political activity. To do this, the party wants to achieve the equal positioning of women within the party, the equal representation of women in all internal party bodies and organs – especially in decision-making positions – and to achieve the result of 50% elected women in the elections. The programme also aims at building a network of female political activists and candidates who jointly and unanimously approach political action.

### **The results**

As of now, Initiative 50% has gathered more than 70 female political activists in total. In the last general elections in 2019, Naša Stranka achieved a historical success when 61% of the total elected representatives were women. The current statistics regarding gender representation within the party bodies and organs are the following:

- 47% women in the Presidency;
- 42% women within the main board;
- 60% women within the supervisory board;
- 60% women within the ethics committee;
- 50% women in the regional board of presidents;
- 34% within the local board of presidents.

Initiative 50% has definitively built a strong female political network where the members support each other during their political activities.

### **The main obstacles and challenges**

The main obstacle for Initiative 50% is that it is multi-faceted and this is why it needs a wide range of support – from funding to political buy-in within the leadership.

Funding opportunities are a big issue. Funding has to be constant, whether it is self-funding or funding in partnership. It is more difficult to achieve such results for cross-party programmes, but the Swedish examples prove that it is still possible. In this case, it is a less personal and less tailored approach. There are advantages and disadvantages. It clearly appears that there should be more incentives from donors to parties to have such programmes promoted. If there are more and more parties like this, more women will get involved and more gender equality will exist. Also, civil society and government stakeholders need to be more open to learning from party-oriented programmes.

Other challenges for this initiative are getting women involved, motivating more women to participate, getting the support of the party leadership, and constantly advocating for the Initiative 50% principle.

### **The impact**

One of the main reasons for satisfaction for the author of Initiative 50% is that the brand has become well-known in the country. This is important and there is hope that it will be a source of inspiration. The initiative has also been an added value for the party, which has become recognisable by the 50% principle. It has become an inspiration for the liberal network which has developed as a leader in gender equality and the participation of women in politics.

The influence of 50% participants has increased the visibility of women in the domains where they were active. Women activists in the party became capable of leading different political processes and getting to leadership positions.

In terms of replicability, the Boris Divković Foundation has the aim of spreading the idea of Initiative 50% across the Western Balkan region. Consequently, it has been decided to initiate a project of capacity building, thus strengthening and building the regional network of female politicians, political activists and experts from liberal political parties. Cooperation has so far been established by Naša Stranka in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the Liberal Democratic Party in North Macedonia and the Liberal Party in Montenegro. The goal is to further extend to other liberal parties of the region in Serbia, Albania and Kosovo.

In the context of the enlargement of this capacity-building initiative to other liberal parties of the region, two regional women's conferences were organised: one in Ohrid in North Macedonia and one in Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In these conferences, the participants did a brainstorming session for joint

regional gender projects. It was decided that the regional network of female politicians and experts should be established as a hub for joint gender regional political activities. It was also decided that initiatives should be set up, as well as the initiation of a regional mentoring programme for the political activists of liberal parties in the Western Balkans. As part of this project, the research on the ‘Political participation of women in the liberal parties in the Western Balkans’ was also published.

### **The innovative aspects**

The main characteristic of the initiative is that it is supported by the party’s leadership. This strong point is the crucial issue for any other similar initiative. It could not work or even exist without the support of the party’s leadership. Men are certainly part of it and their role is also crucial for implementing such an initiative.

Initiative 50% is clearly an innovative instrument. The main value of the programme is the 50% principle as such. It is a tangible recognition of gender equality as a core element of democracy. Capacity building, conferences, events, as well as advocacy and lobbying within party structures are used in order to ensure that women are elected, appointed or promoted to leadership positions. It is evident that political willingness and background support is crucial to put on such a strong initiative within a party. External support, particularly in terms of funding, is also of great importance.

### **The Hungarian Women’s Academy**

#### **by the Indítsuk Be Magyarországot Foundation**

In Hungary and in Eastern European countries the number of women in politics is still low and women face more challenges in politics than men. The Indítsuk Be Magyarországot Foundation has taken the initiative to start fighting this through its project called the Hungarian Women’s Academy which wants to motivate women to engage in politics<sup>24</sup>. The Indítsuk Be Magyarországot Foundation was founded by the Momentum Movement party at the end of 2018, and is working on issues which are crucial in Hungarian Society such as civic participation, media freedom, anti-corruption and equality. The Hungarian Women’s Academy

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24 Friedrich Naumann Foundation: Female Politicians Encouraged to Take Over Orban’s Illiberal Regime (10 December 2020)



is a project supported by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom<sup>25</sup>. The project aims to educate and empower women to get engaged in politics. Among its goals are to increase the number of elected women in Hungary and to connect active female participants in politics.

Women have the same political ambitions as men, but somehow only a few female leaders succeed. Women in politics face resistance, discrimination and social stereotypes. Hungary held its first free elections in 1990 after the fall of communism and only 7% of the elected members were women. According to the IPU-UN Women in Politics map which presents global rankings for women in parliamentary assemblies, as of 1 January 2023 Hungary is in 152nd position out of 186 countries. After the parliamentary elections held in 2022, out of 199 members of parliament the number of elected women was 26 (13.1%). At the 2019 European elections, 8 out of 21 elected MPs were women. At local level<sup>26</sup>, women mayors represent 20.4% and women councillors represent 30.4%. At provincial (megye) level, women councillors represent 12.7% and women presidents represent 10.5% (2 women).

Hungary is considered to be a conservative country when it comes to gender roles. Despite a positive shift in Hungarian society regarding the political role of women in recent years, women's representation in politics still has a lot of progress to make. Currently there are no quotas that would empower women to take a step forward and become a leader. This is one of the reasons why female empowerment has become a priority for the Indítsuk Be Magyarországot Foundation, which decided to launch its Women's Academy – the Horizont programme – in 2019. They believed that running Horizont in this environment would bring value not only to Momentum Movement but to Hungarian political culture as a whole.

Horizont is a 1-year programme for aspiring women politicians, aiming to support them in entering and succeeding in the Hungarian public sphere. Since the start, the programme has followed the same principles of supporting diversity, building a community and empowering instead of prescriptive mentoring. In the third year of the programme, around 200 women from a very diverse background applied

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25 Based on the principles of liberalism, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom offers political education in Germany and abroad ([www.freiheit.org](http://www.freiheit.org))

26 Data gathered by CEMR in 2019 and provided by the Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities (TOOSZ)

to the programme. The organisers have a nationwide programme, with participants coming from big cities and small villages. The age of participants ranges from 21 to 64 and around one third of them are not or have not been members of any political party. In the first six months of the programme, three in-person workshops are organised in which there is great emphasis on getting to know each other. Building a self-supportive network is a crucial foundation of the competitive world of politics. In the second half of the programme, participants work on self-defined and scoped projects. The organisers do not give them precise goals or supportive projects. Instead, it is up to the members to define what they want to achieve, how they want to achieve it and what role they foresee for themselves. The organisation provides project management support centrally, and participants have personal mentors to support them in their subject matter.

Horizont has completed two editions and has recently launched the third one. In total, six in-person workshops, dozens of online calls (the first two editions were organised during the Covid period) and multiple alumni meetings have been organised. The Academy achieved concrete results: one previous participant is now a member of the Parliament; others became politicians in local communities, are working in leading positions within Momentum Movement, or are playing key roles in their local communities.

What we can learn from this is that the Hungarian Women's Academy has limited resources. Some trainees are paid as they are led by professionals, and others are volunteers. As the programme progresses, people become more involved and expectations grow. Accordingly, this requires a strong commitment. Funding comes from the Foundation which has a state programme. In Hungary, if the party achieves 1% at the general elections, it receives financial support from the state and therefore is able to finance this kind of activity. However, this requires substantial support in the party when the decision regarding budget allocation is decided. Key resources for the programme come from the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.

The participation in the programme is also interesting. The Foundation does not want to reach top model politicians. Out of 60 participants, 25% have not been active in politics this year. Democracy demands the participation of all citizens, and to build and reinforce a democratic society means trying to get as many people as possible involved in the project. This is particularly true for women who face different obstacles in their decision to participate in a political activity. Above all, this programme wants to reach women and young women who need

support to enter political life. Some of these women and young women may have some experience but they are isolated and face many difficulties to reach their objective of public involvement. The Horizont programme is designed for women who have joined the party but do not hold any position in the party, or for those who have a position but they are not in the right position and need support to find the right path to follow. Finally, the programme is designed for local heroes – those who do not have public roles but are important for the local community and can play a pivotal role in local politics.

The programme is publicised within the party and the Foundation, through the Alumni event, and especially through their internal platforms like Facebook. There is great interest. Selection criteria are used and there are reasons for rejection. For example, skills and political knowledge are considered as main characteristics to join the programme, but the absence of interest in political issues is viewed as a negative. There needs to be room for progress for the participants. The organisers look for a core group of talented women. For example, it is considered interesting if somebody has different and original views. This aspect of taking into account a range of criteria for participation is certainly an important added value. In fact, the programme is a great chance for inclusion and diversity, including from a territorial point of view, to bring the voice of the weakest part of the population into democratic life. Participants constitute a very diverse group. Their ages range from 20 to 65 years old. It is also an occasion to build intergenerational dialogue. Education is also diverse, as some participants have a university degree and some people do not have a diploma (10/15%). Roma have taken part in the programme, which the organisers are very satisfied about and they hope to strengthen their participation. The diversity of territorial bases is also a good aspect for Hungarian political life. Budapest has a central place in the Hungarian political system. The Horizont programme also gathers women from small villages – 40 of the participants come from outside Budapest.

Representativeness is another aspect to take into account in this kind of programmes. Who the participants are, where they come from, what their problems are, what their needs are and whether they are from urban or rural areas are all important factors to consider. Creating a network of women who represent different aspects of society, daily life issues and social origins is important to put on a dynamic and representative group and to ensure support for a strong and complete voice of Hungarian women.

The importance of the local level is another crucial point. The programme is focusing on the local level this year, as democracy is rooted at local level with local democracy. The local level is often the starting point for a political career, especially for women. In this sense, this programme is clearly a great help and encouragement for women, for example for those living in small villages and who want to engage in public life. The local level offers a unique chance to jump into political life. This is also true because of the electoral system. There are no quotas for women in Hungary, but the members of the municipal council are voted individually and the vote is for the whole list only in villages with less than 1 000 inhabitants. If the list is close it depends more on the parties. However, if the voter is called to choose an individual the electoral campaign is crucial and the candidate holds the keys to being successful in their hands. For this reason, it is vital that this kind of women's networking provides opportunities for capacity-building exercises.

Generally speaking, involvement in politics at local level can be easier for a woman because it allows for better conciliation of private and public life. In spite of this, participants in the Horizont programme have also witnessed the obstacles they can face. Women can be the victims of strong opposition because of stereotypes and violence – particularly online these days – and this often discourages women from getting involved in politics.

The results of this programme are very motivating and push the organisers to continue. They are aware of some unsuccessful projects but they also underline the important achievements. Some programmes have not been completed, but a good percentage of participants succeed in their projects and achieve satisfactory results. Some participants were candidates at local level, some tried to launch a civil society project with their local community, and some started committing to or facilitating political life at local level, for instance a woman who tried to organise an opposition party at local level, which did not exist before. These signals are not only positive but clearly fundamental for democratic life.

The sustainability of the programme depends on the budget and mainly on voluntary resources at the moment. There is a great interest in the initiative and finding other budgetary resources is vital for its continuity. Networking needs time, links, and exchanges of experiences, ideas and practices. Support deepens and strengthens with time. Obtaining resources for a programme is crucial to ensure its effectiveness on the Hungarian reality and involving more women in politics.

The programme is easily replicable because of its local dimension. It can be modified according to the needs of another community or region, it can be adapted to urban or rural issues, and according to the network's implantation. It can also be useful for women facing the challenges of a big city or for women living in an isolated area.

Regarding the parties, the Academy is not meant to push participants to become members of the party. It is important to differentiate the initiative from the party and offer an open space for the growth of participants. Nevertheless, the programme was designed to strengthen the position of women in middle management, within the party also, and it was made to help women to grow in Hungarian society.

In terms of Europe and the place of the European Union in the initiative, more needs to be done. During the programme, the EU framework and legislation were presented. Two sessions with two members of the European Parliament were organised but this is not enough when compared to the place that the EU has had in the progress of gender equality legislation and its support for democracy. There is clearly a gap to fill here and a bridge to build.

### **The Social Democratic Regional Women's Leadership Academy by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)**

The Social Democratic Regional Women's Leadership Academy is another example of a best-practice initiative for women's networking<sup>27</sup>. The Academy aims to bring Western Balkan women politicians and activists together as a broad front to fight for an equal, developed, responsible society based on the European values of peace and prosperity – a woman-friendly society. This political and educational programme was organised by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Office in Belgrade in cooperation with the Women's Leadership Academy in Serbia. The programme was addressed to women from social-democratic political parties and organisations in the Western Balkans. The Regional Women's Leadership Academy has been a unique initiative for female activists from leftist parties, movements, civil society organisations and trade unions in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia. Its objectives are to inspire and move women's leadership

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27 [www.fes.de](http://www.fes.de)

based on the values of law, equality and solidarity by offering knowledge and skills that are the foundations of success for the participants. Women across the region come together to form a united front fighting for equality, development, responsibility, peace and solidarity to build a safe society. This comprehensive effort involves empowering women from social-democratic parties and similar organisations with a range of knowledge, mechanisms and tools that can be used to better implement social-democratic values in their work. By doing so, women will be able to feel acknowledged and equal in all aspects of life. The initiative also wants to connect and encourage women's work for peace, good neighbourliness, regional cooperation and development.

Several editions of the Academy have been organised which have represented an exercise of capacity building and networking. The participants were selected based on political experience, organisational position, leadership potential, dedication to issues of equality, and motivation and readiness for further political and social engagement. Selection was processed by the Academy's expert team.

In 2019, two events were organised. A seminar was organised in Ruma in Serbia from 23 to 27 October gathering around 30 female participants from the Western Balkans and covering a broad range of specific skills such as public speaking, campaigning and political communication. Another seminar was organised in Belgrade from 13 to 14 December of the same year.

In 2020, the Academy organised another two events in Belgrade from 17 to 20 September and from 15 to 18 October. For the capacity-building aspect, special focus was again given to practical political education on topics like political campaigning and communication, leadership, and public appearance.

In 2021, the Academy was organised – with the same format and topics – from 23 to 26 September in Belgrade, and from 21 to 24 October 2021 in Sarajevo. Representatives were again gathered from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia and the programme retained the same format with some capacity-building moments of work. The selection of participants was modified and applicants were also asked to write a brief essay on gender equality.

In 2022, the Academy consisted of two events. The first event was a three-day seminar from 23 to 26 June in Podgorica in Montenegro. The second event was also a three-day seminar from 22 to 25 September in Belgrade. New issues were inserted in this edition.

Generally speaking, in each of the two seminars per year special focus is given to political education (theory and discussion) on the following topics:

- social democracy and gender equality

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- the European gender index

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- the situation of women in the region

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- international legal frameworks for achieving gender equality

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- gender-based violence against women

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- eco-feminism

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- bio-politics and women's health

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- national mechanisms for achieving gender equality

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- care economy

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An important part of the education was the practical political skills. These skills included political campaigning and communication, leadership, public appearance, online communication, and competences for women's leadership. During the workshops, participants were engaged in group tasks, including creating gender analyses for their respective countries, developing proposals for practical policies addressing specific problems defined within the group, and revising the programs and statutes of their own organisations in line with gender-equality guidelines.

### **Concrete outcomes**

During the work at the seminar in Podgorica in June 2022, the participants made a declaration of solidarity with women in the USA. It was a moment when many women in America were denied the right to have an abortion. The proclamation expressed the firm stance of the participants that every woman has the right to make independent decisions about her body and that this is not an issue that can and should be dealt with by other women or the state. During the work at the seminar in Belgrade in December 2019, the participants made a declaration

for the European Union and asked the officials and European institutions to fight resolutely and to:

- Confirm the prospect of the Western Balkan countries joining, the opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, visa liberalisation for the citizens of Kosovo, and accelerating the integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the EU;
- Support efforts in the fight for women's human rights and gender equality in the Western Balkan countries;
- Support efforts to build a strong regional network of women involved in EU integration.

### **The challenges**

One of the main challenges for the organisation of this programme concerned pragmatic aspects, such as the existence of a visa regime among certain countries in the region (e.g. Kosovo and Albania) which acted as a disincentive for those interested in registering.

It is also worth underlining that two seminars of an educational nature were not enough to fully accomplish the idea of networking and long-term regional cooperation of the participants. Gender equality requires time and patience, building step by step. It is not possible to achieve tangible results with isolated or few actions.

### **The obstacles**

One of the obstacles encountered in the organisation of the activities was the language barrier in a rich and diverse region. In an effort to make it accessible to women from diverse backgrounds – including women of different ages and educational backgrounds who often have a hard time expressing themselves in English – the Academy made BHS its primary language and provided interpretation services in Albanian and Macedonian. Despite these accommodations, there were still occasional misunderstandings and it proved difficult to ensure that all the material was comprehensively covered with the interpretation services available.



### **The impact of the programme**

The Academy has received widespread regional acclaim and garnered popularity among politicians and activists alike. This is clearly demonstrated by the overwhelming number of applications received, which far exceed the available programme spots. After attending the programme, a significant number of participants took high positions in their organisations, were on candidate lists, and won a mandate in parliament. For example, both current vice presidents of the Democratic Party in Serbia are women. The participants of the Academy used products and experiences in their work after the programme. This especially applies to the gender-sensitive practical policy proposals made.

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE BEST PRACTICES IN NETWORKS AND ACADEMIES?

### STRONG POINTS

- 1.** Networking is a powerful tool. It can create links and bridges between many different actors, whether they have influential profiles or weak representatives, or whether they are from different countries and different backgrounds. It can have a strong and large impact.
- 2.** Networking can cover and involve many different actions and initiatives of different natures over a long period. It is an ideal working method for projects involving many actors, big or small, or women in politics or from another background. It is a form of project where everybody can find a role and a place.
- 3.** Networks are great tools for multiplying and spreading the effects of an action, information, or for expanding results or policies across countries and beyond territorial borders. Networking is adapted to respond to women's needs as it creates alliances and reinforces the power of women. It is reassuring for those who feel weaker and need help from a stronger sister.

### NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

- 1.** Networks cannot work by themselves. Networking works with activities and instruments. You cannot create a network and think that it will develop by itself. The network will die if you do not plan activities within it and do not have the required instruments. Networking is not just putting people together or a database. It requires content.
- 2.** Networking needs a facilitator. It needs somebody who will facilitate its life, its activities, its information, someone who encourages contact between members, builds bridges, feeds community life and coordinates participation. A network does not work and cannot last without a facilitator.

**3.** Funding is crucial for the life of the network. A network can cover many activities and large geographical spaces. For this reason, it can often require a large budget which also demands good coordination and monitoring. The issue of language must also be taken into account. Interpretation is often important because otherwise people will not understand each other. This requires resources to pay for it. Consequently, networking cannot be effective without human resources and financial support.

## SUGGESTIONS

**1.** Take the step. Networking is easy and can start with a small initiative. Because of its expanding nature, it is easy to organise and let it grow. It can bring great results and be great for women in supporting their activities, providing them with information and facilitating the exchange of experiences and good practices.

**2.** Fix the rules. Networking cannot work in an anarchic system. Beyond coordination and facilitation, it needs fixed rules, planned activities, objectives and a settled scene for the project. Regular monitoring and evaluation of the activities is recommended in order to best identify the needs and the gaps to fill.

**3.** Training can be an important activity in a network supporting women's participation in political life. It can be easily implemented with the possibility of having multiple effects and bringing the members closer together, thus creating a true community.



## CASE STUDY III

### RAISING AWARENESS: HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO EMPOWERMENT

**R**aising awareness aims to increase the focus on the general topic of gender-related issues that are self-standing but could ultimately lead to a step-by-step and holistic societal change that increases the awareness on women's inclusion in all aspects of society.

It is common when working with political parties and civil society organisations that their main focus is on awareness-raising activities that are linked to the overall importance of gender equality as well as relevant subtopics such as:

- gender-based discrimination
- violence against women
- women in the public sphere, e.g. in media, politics, art, sports, government
- gender-responsive language and budgeting

Political foundations usually approach these types of activities based on an evaluation and analysis of a social context. If an issue is predominant in a country, foundations work with organisations on the ground to address it with the final goal to potentially influence policies and regulations that control the issue in the country. In this context, awareness-raising actions contribute to reinforced cooperation with other stakeholders like civil society or local governments. This is a core aspect of development cooperation and the involvement of all layers of society in the work on gender equality.

Gender equality cannot be achieved without involving men. It is crucial to involve men in the debate, to make them allies in the promotion of women's rights and the added value of women's participation in political life. More women in politics also means fewer men. Political parties have a crucial role to play in this, and they need to find a solution or a compromise to find the correct balance. This is why gender equality between women and men cannot be achieved without the participation of men in this reflection and process. Experience shows that this takes time and effort at any level of decision-making. If we want to change the rules of women's participation in politics, women and men will need to work together. Political parties have a central role in this process and they need to consider gender equality as a priority in their agendas.

### **Activities for gender equality**

#### **by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom**

For the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF)<sup>28</sup>, the promotion of gender equality is part of a broader inclusivity agenda. Only through intersectional and multipolar approaches is it possible to fully understand the complexity of the challenges that society is dealing with. The gender dimension is an important part of this process, but for sustainable progress it is important that it is placed in a broader picture. The Alliance of Her<sup>29</sup> is a joint programme run by the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party, the European Liberal Forum and the FNF. Over the past years, this programme has empowered more than 130 women with the skills, network and confidence necessary to break gender barriers, occupy the space and be heard in politics. For the FNF, it is crucial to engage in this important discussion and enrich it with the liberal movement's input. According to the FNF, our societies are diverse in their gender, age, socio-economic status, background and lived experience. Political parties and elected officials need to keep this in mind when proposing legislation and setting up budgets and services. That is why the representation of women and minorities is so important. They add their unique points of views and experiences to the democratic discourse of safer societies. For example, promoting female participation in the design and implementation of foreign and security policies through parliamentary decision-making, peace negotiations and treaties

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28 [www.freiheit.org](http://www.freiheit.org)

29 [www.aldeparty.eu](http://www.aldeparty.eu)

can lead to more sustainable peace. The reason behind this is that women not only make up half of the population who are affected by such policies, but as such they are able to advocate for the rights of women, children, minorities and vulnerable groups that traditionally tend to be overlooked in law-making. Additionally, in reconciliation and reconstruction processes, women in conflict areas often take up specific and important roles in their community, and this must not be underestimated<sup>30</sup>.

In 2014, Sweden was the first country to implement a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP). This concept of foreign policy centres around human security, women's rights and equal representation, is based on the benefits of promoting gender equality for societies at large, and is focused on three aspects:

- i. Rights: the promotion of women's or girls' human rights and the eradication of all forms of violence and discrimination against them;
- ii. Representation: the inclusion of women in decision-making processes at all levels, beyond politics and also including civil society;
- iii. Resources: the allocation of resources to the promotion of equal opportunities and the equality of women and girls, with targeted measures depending on target groups.

In 2018, France released its International Strategy for Gender Equality, focusing on the victimisation of women and girls in a fragile or warlike context. In 2021, Spain and Germany followed suit with respective plans and outlines. Other countries like Norway and Belgium do not employ the term FFP, but they build their national action plans on women, peace and security around combating gender-related violence (Belgium) or women in peace and negotiation talks (Norway). Finally, in 2021 the European Parliament passed a resolution on 'Gender equality in EU's foreign and security policy'.

The role of women in foreign policy, security and peace is an issue which was put on the table of the global agenda at the beginning of this century. In particular, this was done with the adoption in 2000 of the UN's Security Council Resolution 1325, which links gender equality to the maintenance of international peace and security. Although this has become one of the main thematic pillars of the Security Council's work, there is much to do on this topic. In this regard, the FNF organised

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30 [www.freiheit.org](http://www.freiheit.org)

a conference named ‘Towards a truly inclusive foreign and security policy for Europe’ in Brussels in November 2022. During the conference it was underlined that gender equality is an important tool for better foreign and security policy. Consequently, not only is there a need for a bigger and better representation of women, but female perspectives also help to make policies more sustainable, effective and fair. There is a need for a more inclusive approach to foreign and security policy-making at all levels. At the conference, there was a lively discussion among the speakers on existing initiatives to promote gender equality in foreign and security policy. From the different interpretations of feminist foreign policy to the Women, Peace and Security agenda, there is a wide range of policy options available for international policy-makers to incorporate into their work. However, questions remain about which elements of these policies are the most effective in addressing the gender issues at hand. Through analysing best (and bad) practices, we can get a better insight into what works (and what does not), and help with the next steps to shape a truly inclusive foreign and security policy for Europe.

‘Female Forward’ is another programme of the FNF, which has launched a reflection on the issue of Mediterranean women in the technological and scientific sectors. According to data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)<sup>31</sup>, only 30% of researchers and scientists worldwide are women. The percentage of women entering careers in science, technology and mathematics is much lower than the percentage of men entering those same careers. In 2018 in Spain, the percentage of female graduates in natural sciences, mathematics and statistics was 2.6% compared to 4.1% in the European Union, this being in regards to the total number of graduates. Meanwhile, the percentage of female graduates in information and communications technology is below 1%. There are big differences if we compare the university branches and there is no doubt that it is essential to be able to compare the different countries. If we also analyse the state of the technological and scientific markets, the figures reveal that Spain continues to be below the European average and further behind the Baltic countries where women dominate the sector, especially Latvia which had a representation of 59% in 2020.

The relevance of women in the technological and scientific sectors has a long way to go. A collective effort is required from public entities, universities, educational

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31 <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/women-science>

centres, large companies, SMEs, citizens and families to promote the real empowerment of women. In this respect, the European Parliament has established that women should occupy 40% of management positions in companies by July 2026. In other words, the law will oblige large listed companies in the European Union to take measures to increase the presence of women in management positions.

In this context, FNF Madrid launched the ‘Euthenia Community’ which aims to build a community of women in the Mediterranean and West Africa working in senior executive roles in the technology and business sectors. In December 2022, the FNF Madrid office and the Alicante City Council collaborated to bring together over 30 female executives from Spain, North Africa and West Africa for a conference titled ‘Euthenia: The Mediterranean Executive Women Conference’. As one of the first of its kind, the conference aimed to connect female professionals and facilitate the exchange of talent with over 150 participants discussing a wide range of issues. These included hostile work environments that women often encounter, and education as a means to close the gender gap in STEM (science, technology, engineering or mathematics) studies. Experts with extensive experience in the technology and digitalisation sectors provided contributions. The goal was to establish a platform that could become a community to support prosperous and sustainable innovation, and promote gender equality by increasing the representation of women in the technological and scientific fields. Additionally, it can connect the different profiles of female professionals from around the Mediterranean, establish contacts and foster the exchange of talent. The community meets throughout the year to strategize on areas of action and to plan for the next conference, which is set to take place before the end of the year.

### **The Asian Women Parliamentary Caucus** **by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)**

The Asian Women Parliamentary Caucus (AWPC) is an initiative for women’s leadership, supported by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). For KAS, democratic development cannot take place without the equal participation of women in all spheres of life, and especially in politics. In the context of its international conference activities and in view of the need to promote female political leadership training and empowerment in Asia, KAS has been organising regional conferences for female parliamentarians from Asia.



With the support of KAS, a network of 40 Asian women parliamentarians have met annually since 2011 to promote, strengthen and develop female political leadership in their respective countries through policy discussions and capacity-building programmes. The project started with meetings between European and Asian women, and KAS realised that there were no women caucuses in Asia and that it would be worth helping to build them. Today the network includes women from all over the Asian continent except Central Asia which for the moment is not involved. However, the group is in contact with an Afghan leader who has remained in her country and needs support for example.

The AWPC has been built on a series of events organised around different themes. These events are good demonstrations of awareness-raising actions and how raising awareness is a first step for networking and capacity-building actions.

In 2011, KAS Berlin, KAS Multinational Development Policy Dialogue Brussels and the KAS regional office in Singapore organised the inaugural dialogue programme entitled 'Strengthening the role of women in politics in Asia' with women in politics, kickstarting what was to become a series of annual conferences within this focus group.

In 2013, the KAS regional office in Singapore organised an International Women Parliamentarian Conference in Naypyidaw, Myanmar, which was inaugurated by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and attended by female politicians from both Asia and Europe.

Similarly in 2014, the KAS regional office in Singapore partnered with the Singapore Committee for UN Women in organising a regional conference in Singapore which was attended by delegates from 18 different Asian countries. This conference concluded with the formalisation of a regional caucus for female parliamentarians in Asia: the AWPC.

In 2015, the AWPC network met once in Asia and once in Europe. The first meeting was held at the end of June in Taipei, Taiwan, where the discussion was centred on best practices in women's empowerment – in the case of Taiwan – alongside the crucial discussion on the post-MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) agenda. The second meeting in Brussels, Belgium took place in mid-November with the cooperation of KAS Multinational Development Policy Dialogue Brussels, where the focus was on 'Women's Empowerment in Asia and Europe' and involved site visits to EU institutions and NATO, as well as meetings with stakeholders involved in democracy building in Asia.

In 2016, the members met in Copenhagen, Denmark to continue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda discussion at the fourth international Women Deliver Conference. Partnering with the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPFPD), AWPC parliamentarians also engaged in daily parliamentary forums where policy advancements across the globe in women's and children's health as well as gender equality were shared and discussed.

In 2017, the AWPC convened again in Singapore to discuss 'The World in 2030: Women, Development and Policy' with a focus on addressing 'The Future of Human Trafficking in Asia' with resource experts from the United Nations Development Programme's Global Centre for Public Service Excellence (UNDP GCPSE) and the region. Invited members also presented 'Arising Issues on Women, Development and Policy in Asia Pacific' at a panel discussion hosted by the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP). Finally, the discussion on the SDGs continued with a follow-up meeting in July 2018.

In 2018, AWPC members met in Yangon, Myanmar to discuss 'Women, Education and Economic Empowerment – Turning Actions into Progress'. During this two-day event, AWPC members met heads of business networks, women's organisations and other representatives to discuss the economic empowerment of women in the region. AWPC members learned about the work of other stakeholders in the region and discussed how they could work together to reinforce synergies and increase impact in the region.

In 2019, the AWPC meeting focus was on 'Engaging Civil Society Organisations – Advocating Women's Rights and Participation', looking at the confluence of SDG 16<sup>32</sup> and how CSOs and women parliamentarians can engage together to increase the rights and participation of women. Parliamentarians engaged with 35 civil society groups to discuss issues ranging from migration and labour rights to peace, security and justice. With the slogan of the conference – 'We don't wait for change, we make the change' – the AWPC meeting in Hong Kong became a platform where two major stakeholders of society got a unique opportunity to have a dialogue on empowering women in the region.

In 2020, the AWPC network members held a series of internal online meetings due to the pandemic. AWPC members were invited to participate in an AWPC

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32 Sustainable Development Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>

video series on ‘Crisis, Pandemics and Gender Equality’. Through these series the network’s members raised awareness, reflected upon women’s needs, promoted women’s leadership and gave policy recommendations that could link equality, health and the economy.

In 2021, AWPC parliamentarians in cooperation with the Brussels office participated in an advocacy campaign on ‘Women’s Political Participation – The State of Play in Asia’ which raised awareness about the situation of women parliamentarians in Asia. The network’s members provided their perspectives explaining how they assess the state of gender equality in their country’s politics, what the main obstacles to equal representation are, and what foreign actors such as the EU could do to support greater inclusion.

In 2022, continuing the discussion on the SDGs, the AWPC met to discuss the findings of the ‘Substantive Representation of Women in Asian Parliaments: A Comparative Study’ publication. Delegates from 14 countries came together to learn about the latest findings of the publication. The authors presented their research and engaged in a dialogue with the AWPC members regarding their experience on substantive representation in their respective parliaments. Finally, how SDG 5<sup>33</sup> can be achieved throughout Asia was also discussed.

KAS has since continued supporting annual meetings and other activities to promote, strengthen and develop female political leadership in the region – through policy discussions and capacity-building workshops. Its aims are to highlight challenges faced by women parliamentarians, especially with regards to working on issues that women in general are more vulnerable to. Overall, the caucus aims to support and build the capacities of female parliamentarians to overcome leadership challenges faced by women in Asia.

The Asian Women Parliamentary Caucus has the following objectives:

- i. Promote more robust engagements in policy issues by encouraging regional discussions on policies impacting women’s leadership in Asia;
- ii. Strengthen capacities of individual parliamentarians through networking, plenary sessions and skill-upgrading workshops;

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33 Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

- iii. Identify leadership challenges faced by female parliamentarians in Asia and provide adequate support through leadership training and policy workshops.
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The meetings in the form of dialogue programmes and/or study trips have also strategically addressed thematic policy concerns such as:

- migration and human trafficking
- anti-corruption
- gender mainstreaming in policy-making
- the SDGs
- women's political participation in parliaments

### **The results**

Thanks to these different meetings and initiatives, KAS has succeeded in putting together a mix of experienced women and newcomers from different cultural backgrounds – from Japan to Bangladesh or Sri Lanka. What is impressive is that their challenges are similar. The AWPC is the place for them to meet, to exchange opinions, ideas and experiences, and their links go beyond the meetings themselves. Indeed, this is a platform whose aim is that these women support each other when they need it – before or after the annual meeting which is organised by KAS. For example, it is useful to inform and encourage parliamentarians to use and benefit from the laws passed in their respective countries for stronger enforcement. A recent experience was reported according to which the support of the AWPC was essential for women parliamentarians from Sri Lanka to pass a law establishing a quota of 25% of women at local government level, as well as to draft gender equality policy at national level and a bill on gender equality in the Sri Lankan Parliament.

Another notable result of this project by KAS has been the setting up of the Asian University for Women (AUW). As the first of its kind, the AUW is an independent regional institution dedicated to excellence, women's education and the development of leadership. It is global in its outlook, but rooted in the contexts and aspirations of the people of Asia. Located in Chittagong, Bangladesh, the AUW exists to educate and empower a rising network of women leaders through the transformative power of an American-style liberal arts and sciences education.

Open to women from all walks of life, the AUW particularly encourages women who are the first in their family to get a university education.

The AWPC has taken an initiative to strengthen the dialogue with civil society on the ground, with CSOs playing an important role in the local development and empowerment of women. The involvement of men is another issue on which KAS had already started to work in 2019. Unfortunately, the pandemic broke this initiative but the AWPC wants to start working on that again.

The AWPC is a great example of intersectionality between the different working methods that are presented in this compilation. It is a network and a capacity-building initiative, and this network has been built on raising awareness by meeting to discuss different topics. Raising awareness was the starting point for everything.

The project managers used this image of a continuous journey that they are currently making within the AWPC. It is a changing and growing experience in which members try to answer the challenges of the moment or of a specific country, such as the case of Afghanistan at the moment. Discussions are raised and fed by concrete questions like the impact and results of the quota system.

According to KAS, regional networks help to build on existing strategic knowledge and solidarity systems. This is especially true for countries that lack adequate or any representation of women in politics. Women's caucuses help to unite women across party lines, offer opportunities to mainstream gender issues through legislation, and provide oversight of government action in the work of parliament.

### **The challenges**

These efforts leading to positive results were possible thanks to KAS dedicating resources to them, considering that the organisation of an annual meeting of women from all the countries of the continent involves a significant budget. KAS works with EU delegations in some fields but not on this issue. It will be crucial for the future and sustainability of these actions that a dialogue is established with the EU and its delegations in the relevant countries. The impact of the AWPC is tangible. In some countries women feel alone, and especially those in politics. This group is a unique source for women to get information, ideas and support.

## **‘Violence Against Women in European Politics’ study**

### **by the International Educational Center, European Liberal Forum and partners**

‘Violence Against Women in European Politics’ is the title of a study by the European Liberal Forum<sup>34</sup>, supported by the International Educational Center<sup>35</sup>, the Boris Divković Foundation, D66 International/Stichting IDI, VVD International/Haya van Somerenstichting, the Indítsuk Be Magyarországot Foundation, and implemented in partnership with the National Democratic Institute (NDI)<sup>36</sup>. It was decided to lead this European project on the basis of a global initiative led by the NDI. The results of the study were published in 2021<sup>37</sup> with the aim of exploring and addressing the nature of violence against politically engaged women in Europe, their perception of societal and institutional protection against such violence, and potential tools for raising awareness and tackling the issue.

The research component of the project was accompanied by an awareness-raising campaign consisting of two high-level events in Sarajevo and Brussels gathering more than 200 female political practitioners.

Larger representation of women in politics revealed gender-based violence as a major challenge they have to face. The ‘Women in politics in the EU: State of play’ briefing<sup>38</sup> published in March 2021 by the European Parliamentary Research Service clearly identifies the growing concern for gender-based violence and abuse being a contributing factor in creating a toxic environment for women

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34 The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party.

35 The International Educational Centre (IEC) is a liberal foundation (NGO) that provides political education and training opportunities to citizens and organisations. The IEC is a member organisation of the European Liberal Forum and the European Network of Political Foundations.

36 NDI is a non-profit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organisation that has supported democratic institutions and practices in every region of the world for more than two decades.

37 Title: ‘Violence Against Women In European Politics – A Study By The European Liberal Forum’, by Jasmina Mršo.

38 Shreeves, R., Prpic, M. and Claros, E., ‘Briefing: Women in Politics in the EU: State of Play’, European Parliamentary Research Service, 2021, available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/689345/EPRS\\_BRI\(2021\)689345\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/689345/EPRS_BRI(2021)689345_EN.pdf)

in politics, as they are most likely to be targeted based on their gender<sup>39</sup>. An important aspect to consider when it comes to the European framework on violence against women in politics is the societal diversity among individual European countries.

Violence against women in politics is a critical issue. It is crucial that political parties create a mechanism to help women to raise their voice. Political females are afraid to hurt political parties and it is difficult for them to speak about. Women need a safe space to raise their voice and a safe context in which to act. Women in politics can experience different kinds of violence which can impact their public lives, private lives, families and children. For this reason, there is a need to intervene at different levels and raising awareness is the first fundamental step.

The methodology adopted in the publication was based on:

- the exploration of relevant research on the topic of violence against women in politics;
- a Europe-wide survey of political activists on their perception of the issue;
- voluntary one-on-one interviews with female political activists, who shared their own experiences and those of other women in their political surroundings.

The survey was sent out to political parties all over Europe, across the political spectrum and 77 responses were collected from political activists – most of them from liberal and progressive political organisations. Respondents came from 25 European countries, namely Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The publication stresses that there is a disparity in gender-related policies, as well as a large discrepancy in women's representation in political decision-making

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39 O'Connell, S. and Ramshaw, G., 'Violence against Women in Politics: Global Perspectives of a Global Issue', Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2018, available at: <https://www.wfd.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/violence-against-women-in-politics-global-perspectives-of-a-global-issue.pdf>

among member states of the European Union and other European countries<sup>40</sup>. This disparity is present even in the legal terminology and legal definition of gender-based violence in various EU member states. The murder of British Member of Parliament Jo Cox in 2016, which shook all of Europe and the rest of the world<sup>41</sup>, revealed serious shortcomings in the existing prevention mechanisms and a low level of awareness.

Regarding the main findings of the survey, out of 77 respondents from 25 different European countries who were asked if they experienced violence against women in politics, the majority (64.9%) of respondents gave an affirmative answer, 19.5% responded negatively and 15.6% were not sure<sup>42</sup>. The following forms of violence were identified:

- physical violence
- emotional violence (including verbal violence)
- psychological violence (including threats, intimidation and/or ‘mind games’)
- sexual violence (including sexual harassment and/or rape culture)
- online and digital violence (including cyberbullying, non-consensual sexting and/or doxing)
- economic violence (including income- or job-related blackmail and/or threats)

Most of the participants experienced emotional (79.2%), online (71.4%) and psychological violence (64.9%). 32.5% of participants experienced some kind of sexual violence, 22.1% experienced economic violence, and 14.3% experienced forms of physical violence. Only two participants claimed to have never experienced any type of violence against them<sup>43</sup>.

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40 IPU and UN Women, *Women in Politics: 2019 map*, available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/Women-in-politics-2019-map-en.pdf>

41 Jones, H., ‘More in common: the domestication of misogynist white supremacy and the assassination of Jo Cox’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42(14), 2019, pp. 2431–2449.

42 For more details, see chapter ‘Presentation of research results’ of the publication.

43 For more details, see figure 5 of the chapter ‘Presentation of research results’ of the publication.



The respondents considered online campaigns – local counterparts to the #MeToo movement – the most helpful for raising awareness about violence against women in the public sphere. Some also mentioned human resources training implemented according to local, regional or national regulations as a useful mechanism for achieving gradual improvement. However, the general consensus was that more work is still necessary<sup>44</sup>. While talking about protective mechanisms within their political parties, the majority of interviewees said that no such mechanisms existed, or they were unaware of them. Those that were aware, in most cases, mentioned ethics committees and codes of conduct. Some felt that they were sufficient, while others found that their implementation was not.

For some respondents, the main issue was the lack of proper support for victims. The issue of the lack of qualified staff to deal with this issue was raised. One respondent said she was unaware of any party that has a psychologist who could help in such cases. Some of the participants also raised the issue of violence during informal gatherings (e.g. team-building activities and drinks after seminars) and that the role of alcohol in such cases is unexplored.

Most participants replied that they would find tools for raising awareness useful for prevention. Based on this, the publication presents recommendations such as:

- i. awareness-raising campaigns
- ii. legal tools without awareness-raising are unhelpful
- iii. do not reinforce gender roles and stereotypes in politics
- iv. PR briefings and cheat sheets for preventing sexist excesses in public statements
- v. training and open dialogue

Of particular interest is the toolbox in appendix 1 which presents the following sections:

- Tool 1: Self-check your behaviour
- Tool 2: Self-check your experiences
- Tool 3: Painting a clear picture – scenario examples

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44 For more details, see the section of the publication presenting the results of the interviews.

- Tool 4: Let's talk about consent
- Tool 5: Reporting violence against women (with a list of helplines from each European country)
- Tool 6: Your glossary on violence against women

The manager of the project stated that the aim of this study is to make it practical and to help the resilience of women in politics. Unfortunately, the financial means are lacking at European level. It is important to have the opportunity to share the information and findings with the hope that resources will be available in the future to continue this project, especially at European level.

Violence against women in politics is a major challenge for women who want to enter politics. It is an increasing problem today particularly because of online and digital violence. The issue needs to be tackled from different points of views, whether it be at legislative level, at environment level, within the organisation or the political parties, and at personal level.

Political parties have a major role to play for the place they have in promoting and supporting women's participation in politics. However, the rules of financial support for projects are very specific for political parties, and they are not civil society organisations. Nevertheless, it is certainly important that this kind of initiative finds support from the European Union.

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE BEST PRACTICES IN RAISING AWARENESS?

### STRONG POINTS

- 1.** Raising awareness is crucial for building alliances on the importance of gender equality. Gender equality is a prerequisite for a democratic society founded on equality and justice. The more people are involved in awareness-raising activities, the larger the impact will be. It needs to involve as many people as possible from amongst the key stakeholders, the population, a geographical area, and a country.
- 2.** Raising awareness is the first step of any activity. You cannot organise a capacity-building session, work with a network, or start a project without people being aware of why gender equality is important. For this reason, it is important to remember to start any activity by raising awareness. This means explaining and discussing the fundamental principles, goals and background of gender equality.
- 3.** Raising awareness gives visibility. The organisation of conferences, campaigns and events is a typical method to raise awareness. This ensures the visibility of the organisers and the subject. Awareness-raising initiatives are certainly a compelling mechanism – they are not difficult to organise, and commitment is the basic element.

### NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

- 1.** Social media play a central role in raising awareness. They are a great opportunity to organise campaigns and transmit the message to any actor and society. Iranian women have shown the world the path. Social media are a powerful and incredible tool, because they can move beyond any barrier and any border. Gender equality actors need to be aware of that and take actions accordingly.

**2.** Communication and technical skills are essential for organising awareness-raising initiatives and social media actions. Among these technical skills are writing and editing, web design, audience analysis, content development, marketing and promotion, and data analysis. As with any subject, preparing a project on gender equality requires communication. Working on raising awareness is the first step when it comes to gender equality.

**3.** Working with men is crucial for gender equality. There will never be gender equality if men are not aware of its importance and its added value, and if they are not associated to the process. This is particularly true for women's empowerment and their participation in decision-making. Our society is built on men's decisions and patriarchal views. Women need to work with men to identify new rules and ways of living together. They need to find a compromise together. Inviting men to discuss the topic will help to engage a debate between women and men and possibly a dialogue. Political parties have a central role in this process, as they set the electoral rules for women candidates and give them the possibilities to be elected. For these reasons, political parties need to engage in a debate on gender equality and encourage women and men to work together.

## SUGGESTIONS

**1.** It seems that the best way to start any project is by studying and assessing the needs of the project, and identifying the most adapted tools to achieve the project. It can be a conference, campaign or website depending on the area that needs to be covered and the extent of the expected results.

**2.** Designing a strategy is essential to have a clear vision of the means and the objectives. This process needs to take into account the needs and requests of the targeted women but also needs to involve them in the preparation. It is a good way to get them on board in the project. The strategy needs to take into account the voices of the women on the ground.

**3.** Creativity should be encouraged. Any action and any initiative can help to raise awareness on gender equality, therefore being creative to reach people and have a successful impact is certainly important.

## LEADER PROFILE I

### ELIZABETH KAILEMIA



**T**he Honourable Elizabeth Karambu Kailemia is the current County Woman Representative for Meru County in the National Assembly of Kenya. She is a member of the Regional Integration and Tourism & Wildlife Committees. She is a prominent Kenyan politician, businesswoman and community leader who has dedicated her life to serving her country and her people. She is a member of the Government Party, United Democratic Alliance (UDA).

Born to the late Honourable Nteere Mbogori, a renowned Meru politician and businessman, Ms Kailemia has followed in her father's footsteps by becoming a leader in her own right. She is multilingual and is fluent in Kimeru, Kiswahili, English and French. She has been married to Dr Iruki Kailemia of Madawa Pharmaceuticals since 1982. Ms Kailemia is a devoted wife and mother of five children. Despite her busy career in politics and business, she has always placed her family first and has worked tirelessly to provide them with a good life and a solid foundation for the future.

Ms Kailemia has had a successful career, starting as a shorthand typist/telex operator at the New Stanley Hotel and eventually becoming the General Manager at Madawa Pharmaceuticals. She has received various awards, including a trophy for being one of the top ten insurance agents. Ms Kailemia holds a Higher Diploma

in Community Development from the Premise Africa Development Institute and is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Community Development at the African Nazarene University.

Ms Kailemia's political career began in 2013 when she tried to get a political seat. She did not succeed until the year 2022, when she was elected as the County Woman Representative. She has served the people of Meru through various projects which include helping the needy and the poor, educating girls and boys, holding and fighting campaigns against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) which is on the rise in the county of Meru. Ms Kailemia is a trailblazer, a role model, a mentor and a leader who has dedicated her life to serving others. Her unwavering commitment to excellence, lifelong learning, and community development has earned her the respect and admiration of people from all walks of life thus gaining her the name Mama Safi which means a woman with a clean heart.

We asked Ms Kailemia several questions concerning her political career, as well as the obstacles she faced and how she managed to overcome them. She told us the following about her story and about women's situation in Kenya:

Political women in Kenya face a range of challenges that can hinder their progress in politics. For example, gender-based discrimination can lead to limited opportunities and unequal treatment in politics. Limited access to resources such as financial resources and networks can prevent them from campaigning and winning elections. Cultural- and social-barrier beliefs and practices can limit the participation of women in politics as well as social norms that focus on domestic relationships. These challenges make it difficult for women to participate in politics in Kenya and achieve positions of leadership. However, efforts have been made to address these and promote gender equality in politics.

The following priorities need to be taken into account in the international agenda in order to support women empowerment:

- i. Access to education: Education is key to empowering women and enabling them to fully participate in society. It is important to prioritise efforts to increase access to education for women and girls, especially in developing countries.

- ii. Economic empowerment: Women often face economic barriers that prevent them from achieving financial independence and stability. Efforts to increase access to finance, training and mentorship, and other resources that can support women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment are critical.
- iii. Gender-based violence prevention and response: GBV is a major barrier to women's empowerment and well-being. International efforts should prioritise the prevention of gender-based violence through education, awareness-raising, and policy initiatives. Additionally, support for survivors of gender-based violence is critical including access to healthcare, legal services, and other support services.

Based on her experience, Ms Kailemia said that as a woman politician in Kenya, what is important to her is addressing gender-based violence, promoting women's participation in politics, improving access to education and healthcare for women and girls, and supporting women entrepreneurs and small business owners. She also wants to see the prioritisation of issues such as poverty reduction, infrastructure development, job creation, environmental conservation and mental health based on the needs of the people of Meru county and Kenya as a whole.

Participating in the EWIP project allowed her to learn more about the art of politics, she says. Manoeuvring in a political space which is dominated by men needs strategies that identify your agents and barriers of change. She says she learnt how to transform cultural barriers of change in a patriarchal society into advocacy, showing what this could bring to the community for the better. She adds that manoeuvring into politics as a woman needs support from both men and women – it is not a women's affair but a societal affair. It is crucial for women politicians to create strong networks of supporters and allies. They can do this by attending political events and conferences, engaging with their constituents, and collaborating with other politicians and organisations that share their values. Mentorship is also crucial, and women politicians can benefit from having mentors who can guide them through the challenges of politics. They can look for mentors within their party or seek external mentors who have experience in politics.

Before concluding her statement, Ms Kailemia underlines that, as a Kenyan woman politician, one of the key priorities of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is to work towards achieving the objectives outlined in Goal 5, namely achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls in all aspects of life, including education, economic empowerment, politics and health.

## LEADER PROFILE II

### EVA DIAZ

**E**va Diaz is the founder of Shaping New Humans, FNF Madrid's #FemaleForward Campaign ambassador, and coordinator of the Euthenia initiative.

Eva is a mechanical engineer. Since 2019, she has been the CEO of Appogeo Digital, where she has been responsible for creating, launching and consolidating her new company, focusing on translating complex technologies into intuitive solutions for clients. Previously, she had held important managerial positions in several big companies, such as KPMG Spain, Deloitte Spain, and Accenture.



We have chosen to share an interview with Eva that shows how women face intersectional challenges. The interview also provides a true experience of how women and men tackle leadership and power differently.

This is the transcription of the interview that we are publishing with the permission of FNF Madrid and Eva:

'I am Eva Diaz. I was born 57 years ago. My father told me I was a boy. Everybody told me "you are a boy, a nice boy." But I felt something different. It was very



difficult in Spain in the 70s and 80s to make a gender transition, it was very complicated.’

‘I would like to say that I took the decision to continue to live like a man. In fact there were no options. I continued my life as a man, I got married, I am the father of my children. I started to work and reached top positions in Accenture, Deloitte and KPMG. According to the criteria of society and of my family, I was a successful man. Under my criteria, I was very unhappy. Taking the decision to become a woman – for a man in the professional, familiar, social background – is very complicated. But finally in 2015, I took the final decision and I did my gender transition. To live like a woman when you are 52 years old is not easy. But finally today I am the CEO of a digital company. My social environment is nearly the same. I would even say that it is much richer than in the past. I have been able to build up the woman I was dreaming of in the past. I would even say I am more successful than I had thought in the past.’

‘I was educated like a very typical man in Spain. I was educated to be successful. Successful means that you have to earn a lot of money, you have to get a very high position in a company – which company is not important – in order to generate safety for the family. This is the main difference: the boys are educated to protect the family based on those elements: economics, risks. The woman is educated to take care of the family. This is one of the main issues I had to face when I started to live like a woman.’

‘The day after my gender transition obviously I was the same person. I had the same experience, the same knowledge, the same intelligence, but suddenly I was different for the other ones. Obviously I was not Henry, I was Eva. I was not a man, I was a woman. I had to adapt myself to a new life. And tried to understand what this new life was. I tried to manage the new life.’

‘There were three main changes.’

‘The first concerned appearance. When I was a man my physical appearance was not important. My suit sent a message of power, of position in my company. As a woman it is different. Your appearance sends a message about you. The others create an idea about you based on your appearance, but not on your position in the company. They create a message about you, how you are. So I had to learn how to use my appearance depending on who is in front of me.’

‘The second one concerns decision-making. As a man, I was associated to positions so finally in the meeting if there were different opinions in the end

I said: “these are your opinions, this is my opinion, the decision is taken, the meeting is finished.” No problem. As a woman, I had to learn how to manage the situation because my interest was not the same as a man’s. In order to generate a commitment, I tried to understand and explain a lot of times what my position was and especially get the respect, not based on my position but on my opinion. It has been very positive, because I have learnt a new way to lead the company.’

‘The third one is about emotions and feelings. I tried to forget a lot of learnings from my past as a man in order to learn my emotions and my feelings as a woman and I can express my feelings, my emotions. This is the most important. Now I am able to say I am happy, I am sad, etc. I can get a link with the person. I have been able to create relations with my team where emotions are important, on communication in working together for better in a professional world.’

‘Men are very oriented towards targets. You have to act very quickly. Women have to adapt to those criteria if they want to be successful. In the past the only option for women to be successful was to act like a man. It was surviving. Today the environment, the philosophy of the company is changing. What I find is that we are going to put a lot of pressure on equality. You have had to accept violence, submission. You have the same rights, you are equal. We have to make a step forward, going from equality to empowerment. We have to convince our girls that they are able to do what they want: they can be astronomers, engineers, mathematicians, politicians, etc. There is no difference. They can. The main actors are the women who are today in a position of success. They have role models and they need to explain to girls that they can change the world, they can do something for the world. Our concept of success is not for money. Our concept of success is doing something for others.’

## LEADER PROFILE III

### SABINA ĆUDIĆ



**S**abina Ćudić is currently a Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to which she was elected in the last general elections in 2022. Within the Assembly, she is a member of several parliamentary commissions, including the Commission for Achieving Gender Equality, the Commission for Foreign Affairs and the Commission for Oversight of the Intelligence and Security Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. She is also a representative in the Parliamentary Assembly of the

Council of Europe (PACE) as part of the Bosnian delegation and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party's political group.

She is also one of the people who initiated the Population Fund in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This initiative contributes to gender equality and ensures equal opportunities and the quality of education in the country. She is one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's most popular and best known politicians worldwide. She was vice president of Naša Stranka until 2019 and then she started chairing the party's main board that deals with all major political decisions.

Born in 1982 in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, she finished her primary and secondary education in her hometown. She was 10 years old when

the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina began, so she finished part of her primary education in besieged Sarajevo. The siege was the longest in the history of modern warfare. She continued her education in the United States, obtaining her Political Science and International Studies degree at Towson University, Maryland, where she was awarded a full International Debate Scholarship. She has a dual master's degree in Human Rights and Democracy in Southeast Europe from the University of Sarajevo and the University of Bologna.

Sabina received international acclaim and numerous awards in the fields of debate and public speaking, in which she is a renowned international trainer. She was the first non-US citizen to be selected for the American National Debate Team. She represented the USA on the International Debate Tour of Europe, hosted by the English-Speaking Union, London. She won the best speech award at the Oxford Union's debate with Members of Parliament in 2003. Since 2012, she has been teaching at the Department for Political Science and International Relations at the Sarajevo School of Science and Technology.

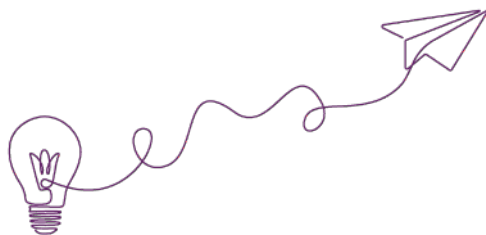
In 2012, shortly after she joined the Bosnian social-liberal party Naša Stranka, she ran for municipal mayor of the Novo Sarajevo municipality in the country's capital. Although she did not win this election, the race put her on the local political scene. In 2014, she was elected to the Assembly of Canton Sarajevo and became involved in the regional political scene of the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the 2018 general election, she was elected to the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since October 2022, Sabina has been a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as a representative in PACE since 2023.

When the Initiative 50% project was launched in 2016, Sabina became its participant, mentor and spokesperson. She firmly believes the best way to empower women in politics is to give them the necessary tools but also truly equal opportunities and their own supporter base – a 'girls' club', so to speak. She is one of the major advocates that 50% is more than a pledge or a quota; to her it means equal access to opportunities and resources. Within her party, she always advocated that 50% of campaign funds, media coverage and functions should go to female candidates and politicians. She believes that women can join politics if certain factors are met: a will to become politically active, a support base and a culture of gender equality within the party, and equal access to any resources that women need to get elected or appointed. In her opinion, this is what makes

the Initiative 50% project different from other similar projects and why it always achieves good results.

As for the main challenges, Sabina believes that the main challenge for women in politics is to endure the different forms of pressure they become exposed to. The external ones for women, in addition to the usual pressure that politicians endure, are also often gender-based. The violence against women and their public portrayal, as well as expectations, are also different since the current meritocratic criteria for politicians have a patriarchal heritage. She once said ‘I think the two main challenges for me are to inspire people and to secure more chairs in the room for women – this is what I always say. I need more women in the room! I need to see on the horizon who will come after me or together with me. This is such a small country which has so many issues. Negative aspects of BiH are seen daily, with very little to hope for. Creating this inspiration is a daily challenge. And in many ways, there is much sense of responsibility. I do feel an incredible amount of pressure... Not from the outside – I am resistant to outside pressure – but there is much inner pressure. The type of pressure women are particularly keen to feel.’

One of her main goals for the future in Bosnian politics is, as she says, to make women angrier about their position within society. She wants to raise awareness about how much the current status of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina is lacking compared to other European countries. This way, she hopes, she will create an uprising and motivate more and more women to get politically engaged and realise that, within Naša Stranka and the Initiative 50% community, they can find a place to express themselves politically. In 2021, she received the “Women in Politics – Champion of the Year” award in Brussels, which was awarded to her by the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party’s ‘The Alliance Of Her’ platform. She dedicated this award to the girls of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Europe who, despite obstacles, stubbornly and diligently refuse to give up.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. This publication should be distributed on a large scale and particularly among ENoP members. This would raise awareness about the central place of gender equality in decision-making and the crucial role of political parties and foundations in increasing the number of women candidates and women elected in the medium term, as well as achieving parity of women and men in decision-making in the long term.

Examples, best practices, good information and complete data are fundamental to build an appropriate discourse on gender equality and find the path for action for every actor. This publication aims to support ENoP members in engaging for gender equality, creating alliances, identifying precise objectives and building appropriate strategies.

2. It is crucial for ENoP to make the necessary effort to drive gender equality on the agenda of the network and its members in Europe and across the world, and to launch a debate on why and how adapted policies and tools for gender equality are necessary.

The best practices in this compilation show a real interest and need for political parties and foundations to work on gender equality. As the European Network of Political Foundations, it has the duty and unique role to start and launch the debate on women's empowerment in politics, particularly in political parties.

3. A working group on gender equality should be created by ENoP, made up of the most active members in this field with the aim to drive the effort and engagement for gender equality and bring it to the top of ENoP's and its members' political agenda. It is also recommended that ENoP builds a European network of political parties and foundations promoting gender equality.

This compilation has identified interesting actions of ENoP members who are active players for gender equality. These experiences were brought about by single members, counting on their resources and the support of their national governments. It is the role and value of ENoP to offer these initiatives in a European context, to bring together the different actors in order to create synergies and a larger space for exchange and debate to ultimately construct a message to the European institutions.

**4.** ENoP needs to design a strategy for gender equality within the organisation for the short, medium and long terms which will indicate the guidelines of a gender equality policy. This strategy could be discussed within the ad hoc working group on gender equality before being adopted by the governing bodies of the organisation.

Building a strategy on gender equality is the way for ENoP to ensure the coherent involvement of the members, with a follow-up on the topic. It is also important to take into account the members' backgrounds as well as the European political framework, which is where the ENoP needs to bring its voice, and the voice of political parties and foundations.

**5.** Implementing the mainstreaming of gender equality within the working programme and the political bodies of ENoP and of its members will put forward a coherent effort, multiply the initiatives and ensure the impact within the European network and among the members in the various countries, in all policies and at all levels.

Mainstreaming is the working method which ensures that gender equality is respected and implemented at all levels, within all working structures and governing bodies of the organisations and its members. This is a long process and to be successful it needs to be accompanied by positive actions on gender equality which will underline and feed the content and work of the organisation. Mainstreaming also requires continuous assessment and good coordination with specifically allocated resources.

**6.** ENoP is recommended to organise a European conference or event gathering all its active members who are interested in gender equality, and invite EU decision-makers and representatives of the EU institutions. The objective of this conference or event should be to underline and discuss the role of political parties and foundations in achieving gender equality. Such an active advocacy action should also promote the effective best practices and necessary tools, and outline the necessary support and financial instruments to achieve gender equality in Europe and the rest of the world.

Gender equality is an essential component of a more inclusive and progressive Europe, based on a social and political engagement that the pandemic and present crisis are indicating as urgent. Gender equality is one of the 17 objectives of the UN Agenda 2030 to build a sustainable world for all, where ENoP and its members are called on to play a substantial role. The examples in this compilation show a lack of financial support. The EU needs to take this into account for the future, providing the necessary funds for political foundations taking initiatives for gender equality, with adapted instruments and programmes.

**7.** As underlined by some ENoP members, it is crucial that the EU addresses the issue of targeting young female politicians, and explicitly works for the empowerment of female politicians. Together with strengthening women's positions in general, this would lead to more women in relevant political positions and more gender responsiveness of political parties in the long term.

The EU also needs to support the building of regional networks of women leaders and politicians, as well as mentoring networks for female politicians to share experiences and good practices. With this in perspective, the EU needs to engage and work with political parties on empowering their women's wings through peer-to-peer and multiparty approaches.

**8.** A database concerning gender equality in political parties in Europe should be set up. Specifically, this should concern the percentage of women in the governing bodies of political parties, the percentage of women candidates at national, regional and local levels, the number of women elected at the same level, and the instruments available in the different countries on this subject (e.g. the quotas implemented at different levels, be they legislative, constitutional or electoral).



Measuring and assessing the participation of women in politics and particularly within political parties is fundamental to identify the gaps and the needs in the different continents, and foresee the necessary answers to find within the political and electoral systems. This is a unique initiative to take within the context of the action of political parties.

**9.** ENoP is recommended to establish synergies and reinforce cooperation with civil society organisations and other stakeholders such as local governments, women's organisations or national parliaments, with the aim to underline the role and the place of political parties and foundations in achieving gender equality in politics.

Working with actors on the ground is of central importance to reinforce women's participation in political life, as shown by the different examples in this compilation. The EU needs to fine-tune and adapt its narrative of EU gender-related policies and frameworks to the socio-cultural context of the partner countries and find appropriate entry points for discussing gender equality issues. Actors on the ground need to build alliances to work with the EU in this perspective.

**10.** This publication should represent a new step for ENoP's real commitment and work in favour of women's empowerment and gender equality in political parties. ENoP needs to bring the voice of women and political parties to the European level in specific policies, initiatives and programmes with adapted projects on the ground. From this perspective, ENoP needs to work with the relevant stakeholders and organisations at national and European levels, and create collaboration and synergies which will strengthen women's positions (e.g. local and regional authorities, trade unions, women's associations, NGOs).

Men's involvement is crucial to achieve gender equality. It is even more crucial when it comes to the participation of women in politics, as this will not happen without establishing a dialogue with men and putting in place instruments and policies ensuring the equal participation of women and men in political life and political parties. This is a core question for gender equality that ENoP needs to take into account while engaging in its work for gender equality.

## CONCLUSION

**G**ender equality is high up in today's international political agenda, and certainly holds a central place in the political agendas of many members of ENoP. This publication has demonstrated a wide perspective of projects carried out by members of ENoP on gender equality in various countries. However, these are only a few of the many projects implemented by numerous international organisations and political foundations throughout the world. This publication proves the need for support for women and gender equality everywhere, independently from the backgrounds and political contexts. There is still no country in the world where gender equality has been achieved, and there is still a lot of work to be done.

There is a wide spectrum of activities and these activities are always implemented by great women and men who are motivated by strong convictions and commitment. This is clear proof that women's empowerment is a transversal issue and can be tackled from different angles – be it from a human rights, political, social, or economic point of view. The publication's perspective is logically linked to the objectives and nature of ENoP's members – who are political foundations – and thus to the pivotal role that political parties can play in women's empowerment.

The best practices selected in this compilation have demonstrated and proven the progress of gender equality in some countries of the world. In analysing these best practices, it is clear that the role of political parties is indeed huge for the equality of women and men regarding access to power and therefore the statement of democracy. The EU is called on by its Treaties to support gender equality through its policies and programmes. This role has been honoured by the advancements in women's rights that the European institutions have always been promoting and supporting. However, there are still many efforts to be made.

This is outlined in the last Report on Gender Equality<sup>45</sup> of the EU, especially in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on women's lives.

Legislation, both generally and on the equal rights of representation for women, has been at the origin of significant changes in several countries and at all levels of decision-making. However, parity democracy clearly faces major obstacles and challenges. It is ENoP's task to bring to European level the message concerning the role and means that political parties possess in order to bring the voice of women into the political debate and change the rules for their empowerment, for example through the use of quotas for the less represented sex.

This compilation aims at being a concrete advocacy tool for ENoP members in favour of women's empowerment and thus in influencing EU policies and programmes in this direction. In showing the broad range of projects implemented by ENoP members in various European, African and Asian countries, there was a risk of classifying them into three thematic chapters. Indeed, this categorisation is not very distinct. Capacity building, networking and raising awareness are just some of the different working methods selected to help women's empowerment. However, they cannot be split. They can be combined, interconnected and mixed according to the environment, the means available and the final aim. There is not a model to follow. There are different models to liaise and consider in a holistic way, taking into account the final aim of gender equality and women's participation in politics, and considering the specificity of each model, its implementation possibilities and actions to be put in place.

This compilation was designed to be an inspiration for future work and not just a demonstration of the activities conducted by political foundations and organisations in different parts of the world. It will be up to each actor to analyse the background of actions, women's needs and conditions before deciding which model of action is best suited to determined circumstances, and designing the initiative to be undertaken.

Women's empowerment is not a closed and pre-determined field of action. Substantial gaps in equality between women and men exist in every domain. Although gender equality is a human right which does not leave any room for indecision and contestation, women of the world still face widespread discrimination which calls for different ways of attempting to work for their empowerment.

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45 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) publications plan 2023. <https://eige.europa.eu/eige-publications-plan-2023>

The approach based on intersectionality gives the opportunity to scrutinise the double source of discrimination that women often suffer when they are not only women but also handicapped, migrant, lesbian, black, old, poor, unemployed, etc. In this case, a double lens and effort are needed to analyse their difficulties and identify the most adapted working methodology.

Political parties have the duty to amplify the voices of those women by working to improve their lives. Ensuring that they have equal representation in political life is the most prominent tool and way of respecting citizens' full rights. By providing good examples of actions, this compilation will hopefully help our members to act in this sense and engage in gender equality. In addition to the best practices, some suggestions, problems to avoid and strong points to follow in the choice of activities to put in place have also been outlined.

Recommendations have also been made for ENoP's future action in the inner activities of the network and in the action towards the EU. It must be stressed again how important it is for ENoP to reinforce its advocacy action for gender equality towards the European institutions and in the framework of the EU's development policy. This is not only crucial to bring our added value to European level, but also to contribute to the realisation of goal 5 of the UN Agenda 2030 which states that women and men must have the same rights. As Graça Machel<sup>46</sup> once said: 'Gender equality is the goal that will help to abolish poverty, that will create more equal economies, fairer societies and happier men, women and children.'

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46 Graça Machel is a Mozambican politician and humanitarian who is also the widow of former President of South Africa Nelson Mandela.

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## ABOUT

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Sandra Ceciarini** is an international consultant specialising in local governments and gender issues. Born in a Tuscan rural family, she earned a Diploma in Interpreter and Translator in French and English from Florence. She studied at Sciences Po in Paris, graduating in International Relations in 1991. After completing a traineeship at the European Parliament, she worked for 22 years at the Council of European Municipalities and Regions ([www.ccre.org](http://www.ccre.org)) as Director of Citizenship and International Cooperation. Since 2014, she has been focusing on her personal projects, collaborating with various organisations and publishing different works, with a current emphasis on the rights of women and child migrants.

### ABOUT THE EDITOR

**Jasmina Mršo** is the publications coordinator and policy officer at the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP). She has a background in local politics and is an expert in working with political foundations and political parties. She is also a skilled capacity-building trainer and moderator and has organised many local and international events. Policy areas that interest her are gender equality and women's participation in political parties, development cooperation, EU's foreign policy initiatives, especially concerning EU enlargement.

### ABOUT ENoP

The **European Network of Political Foundations - ENoP** serves as an umbrella network and information hub for political foundations on topics related to democracy and development cooperation. ENoP brings together 46 political foundations from 19 European countries, active in Europe and with over 130 local offices in partner countries. Although independent in nature, ENoP is a cross-party network, and its broad spectrum of affiliation corresponds to the political representation in the European Parliament. As such, the Network reflects the political diversity of the European democratic landscape and gives ENoP a unique approach.

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This publication is a comprehensive collection of best-practice examples showcasing the remarkable work undertaken by European political foundations in gender equality and women's political participation across the globe. It aims to offer a roadmap for progress — a testament to the transformative potential of European political foundations in driving change at the intersection of gender, politics and civil society. The compilation showcases innovative and proven strategies and approaches, thriving initiatives, and lessons learned, while emphasising the adaptability and transferability of these approaches across diverse organisational, cultural, social and political contexts.



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