

What will it take to reach gender parity in political participation in a post-COVID-19 world?

Commission on the Status of Women

March 18, 2021

This session was organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women. The session provided a platform to take stock of recent developments in women's participation in parliament, explore the impact of COVID-19 on women's access to parliament in 2020, and identify priority parliamentary actions to further progress towards gender parity in political participation.

Opening Remarks - Ms. Susan Kihika, Member of the Kenyan Senate and President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians

In far too many areas of public life, women remain extremely under-represented in decision-making institutions. Women make up only a quarter (24.9%) of members of national parliaments worldwide, and 36.3% of elected officials in local deliberative bodies. Globally, as of 1 January 2020, only 21.3% of ministers are women. In only 30 cabinets worldwide women make up at least 40% of ministers. Women's under-representation as health ministers is especially concerning: while women make up 70% of health sector workers, only 24.7% of the world's health ministers are women, and they hold just 25% of senior roles in health institutions.

Inter Parliamentary Union - Data on Women in Politics - 2021 Highlights of Women in Politics

- Women's share in traditionally male-led ministerial portfolios (such as defence and finance) has slightly increased in 2021.
- Women ministers continue to dominate portfolios covering social affairs, women's affairs and gender equality.
- The share of women ministers in charge of foreign affairs portfolios also saw a significant increase compared with last year, rising from 16.8% to 26%.
- However, women only hold 22.4% of health portfolios.

Current status of women's participation in parliament in 2021 and the impact of COVID-19 - A status report from several countries that participated in the session

Ms. Mergane Kanouté, Member of the National Assembly, Member of the IPU Executive Committee and Bureau of Women Parliamentarians (Senegal)

- In 2010, the Senegalese women's movement, supported by political elites and international norms, managed to push for the adoption of one of the world's most radical gender quota laws to date.
- Signed in 2010 by the former president of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade.
- The law obliges all political parties to place women and men in an alternating matter on candidate lists, aiming at a male-female ratio of 50%.
- In cases of non-compliance, the electoral commission (CENA) has the authority to reject lists, and thus exclude parties from competing in elections.
- The 2012 national election saw an increase of women representatives from 22,7% to 42,7% in the National Assembly, and from 16% to 47% in local legislatures in the 2014 local election.
- The creation of this law required educating religious leaders in Senegal because their belief is that women are secondary to men. Even though women in Senegal are currently protected by this law, they are very active in keeping the law in existence. In 2020, Senegal also passed laws which criminalized rape and pedifilia.

Ms. Heather McPherson, Member of the House of Commons (Canada)

- Current status in Canada: 2020 in a very significant year because it marks the 65th anniversary of the Commission on the Status of Women.
- In Canada women represent 30% of the House of Commons. They are also very close to gender parity in the Senate as well.
- There is an increase in women assuming leadership roles within the government. Kathryn Cholette of the Green Party was the first woman ever to win the leadership of a federal political party, and Audrey McLaughlin of the New Democratic Party was the first woman to win the leadership of a party with seats in the House of Commons. Canada has had one woman Prime Minister, Kim Campbell.
- Although Canada has been growing in parity, this growth does not include minorities.

Italy - Marta Grande, Italian Politician, Chair of the Committee on Foreign and EU Affairs of the Italian Chamber of Deputies

- Italy has been hit very hard by the pandemic, especially women. 99% of those that have lost their job are female. 7 out of 10 women are jobless in Southern Italy. Only 2.6% of children have access to preschool. Domestic violence has increased by 73%.

Turkey

- Turkey has made a very big change to their constitutions, enabling men/women who are 18 years old to be elected to public office. Currently, 44.7 % of Turkey's Covid Commission are run by women. It's very important to listen to women in the recovery from Covid because they have faced most of the challenges.

Morocco

- Morocco is one of the countries that has been very efficient with the covid vaccination. His Royal Highness nominated a female judge very recently. Women are also in all of the legislative branches in Morocco.

Ms. Irma Luz Herrera Rodríguez, Vice-Chair of the Women's Equality Committee (Colombia)

- Colombia has strong laws and institutions to support the rights of girls and women. The country's 1991 Constitution recognises women's equality and outlaws gender-based discrimination. There is also a legal commission focused on equality for women.