



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women

## ***The role of parliaments in advancing gender equality through technology***

A parliamentary event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women at the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women

**7 March 2023**

**(UN Headquarters, ECOSOC Chamber, New York)**

## **Meeting report**

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## Overview

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the leading international policymaking body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and the advancement of women. Each year, CSW sessions assess progress and setbacks, identify remaining priorities and formulate new policies around specific themes related to gender equality.

The priority theme of the 67th session of CSW (CSW67) held in 2023 was “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”.

The annual IPU-UN Women Parliamentary Meeting at CSW, held for over ten years, is the forum for parliamentarians to contribute to the Commission’s work, ensuring that the issues the latter considers each year include a parliamentary perspective. The theme of the 2023 Parliamentary Meeting was “The role of parliaments in advancing gender equality through technology”.

Technology is a potentially powerful tool for advancing and achieving gender equality. The digital transformation of societies worldwide has provided new gateways for people to access information and services, and to participate in all spheres of life. Nevertheless, gender gaps persist in the global access to, affordability and knowledge of technology. In addition, the pace of digital transformation is uneven across the world and it is especially women and girls who are being left behind in a number of ways. They are also less likely to be connected online safely and affordably. While men significantly dominate innovation ecosystems, women are very rarely seen as technology creators, designers, promoters, or decision makers. Gender bias is equally embedded in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. All these factors combined tend to exclude women and girls from online spaces even further, and enable and aggravate gender-based violence online.

In the context of rapid technological change, parliaments are called upon to foster informed public debates and adopt policies to harness the potential of technology while ensuring it respects human rights, harms no one, and leaves no one behind. Presently, there is a critical window to mainstream a gender perspective and promote the participation of women and girls in the conceptualization, development and implementation of digital technologies.

For parliaments, digital transformation was accelerated with the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly with remote and hybrid working meetings in plenary and committee sessions, among other innovations. Parliaments are considering to what extent hybrid working has made them more modern, gender-sensitive and family-friendly workplaces.

These questions and other priorities were discussed at the annual IPU-UN Women Parliamentary Meeting at CSW67, which gave members of parliament (MPs) an opportunity to:

- Bring a parliamentary perspective to CSW67 discussions on using technology to advance gender equality.

- Share promising practices on empowering women and girls through technology, on removing structural obstacles that hinder their access to technology, and on addressing technology-facilitated violence against women and girls.
- Explore technology's potential for making parliamentary working modalities more inclusive and gender-sensitive.
- Have an exchange with peers and experts on deepening work in the said areas.

Meeting participants included **75** parliamentarians (**69** women and **6** men) from **25** countries and **40** observers (parliamentary staff, government officials, and representatives of international organizations and civil society). The two sessions and moderated discussions featured diverse parliamentarians from around the world.

**CSW67 Parliamentary Meeting: “The role of parliaments in advancing gender equality through technology”**

**Meeting Chairs:** Ms. Véronique Riotton (France), Member of Parliament and Member of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians; and Ms. Lia Quartapelle (Italy), Member of Parliament and Member of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians.

**Opening remarks:** Ms. Véronique Riotton (France), Member of Parliament and Member of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians; Mr. Duarte Pacheco, IPU President; Ms. Sarah Hendriks, Director, Policy, Programme & Intergovernmental Division, UN Women.

**Meeting Moderator:** Ms. Anne-Marie Goetz, Professor, New York University and Commissioner for New York City's Commission on Gender Equality.

**Session I panellists:** Ms. Nicole Ameline, Member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee); Ms. Caitlin Kraft Buchmann, CEO/Founder of Women at the Table; Mr. Bojan Glavašević (Croatia), Member of Parliament; Ms. María José Pizarro Rodríguez (Colombia), Senator; Mr. Andy Williamson, Senior Researcher, Centre for Innovation in Parliament (CIP), IPU.

**Session II panellists:** Ms. Reem Alsalem, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (video message); Ms. Kathleen Sherwin, Chief Strategy and Engagement Officer, Plan International; Ms. Rebecca Kuperberg, Independent Researcher; Ms. Neema Lugangira (United Republic of Tanzania), Member of Parliament; Ms. Frances Fitzgerald, Member of the European Parliament (MEP).

**New data and tools briefing presenters:** Ms. Patricia Ann Torsney (Head of the Office of the Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations in New York); Ms. Lana Ackar (Policy Specialist on Political Participation, UN Women); Ms. Caitlin Kraft Buchmann, CEO/Founder of Women at the Table.

## Meeting report

### Opening remarks

**Ms. V. Riotton** (MP, France) emphasized that UN Women and the IPU shared the view that progress on gender equality required gender-sensitive parliaments and engaged MPs. The annual Parliamentary Meeting was a chance to create momentum for parliaments to take more decisive actions toward gender equality. Members of parliament must protect people's rights online and offline while considering the challenges presented by technological progress. There were a number of gender gaps in technology access as well as online gender-based violence. Parliaments should use the IPU's 2012 [Plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments](#)<sup>1</sup> and the Kigali Declaration [Gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world](#) adopted at the 145th IPU Assembly to guide them in transforming into gender-sensitive institutions that lead by example.

**Mr. D. Pacheco** (IPU President) praised women MPs for their courage in defending women's human rights, despite the dangers they faced through the threat of violence. Parliaments must hold governments accountable for gender equality, including in technology-related policies. Technology

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*"More men in parliament must promote women's political rights and representation, noting that democracy is only possible when all people feel their parliaments represent them."*

*- Mr. D. Pacheco, IPU President*

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had helped parliaments work more efficiently during the pandemic and engage with constituents. However, social media had also increased the risks of gender-based violence and harassment against women MPs. He called on MPs to address that issue transparently, and hold perpetrators and social media companies accountable.

**Ms. S. Hendriks** (Director of Policy, Programme & Intergovernmental Division, UN Women) emphasized the importance of the CSW67 priority theme for establishing a global normative framework for gender equality, technology and innovation. MPs have a crucial role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by recognizing how technology and digitalization disproportionately affected women and girls. She highlighted four key areas from the UN Secretary-General's CSW67 priority theme report for MPs to consider: (1) ensuring digital access and competence are equal for all; (2) the creation of millions of decent jobs equally for women and men in tech design, development and deployment; (3) the promotion of gender-responsive data; and (4) ending technology-facilitated gender-based violence. MPs must act on agreements reached during the meeting and ensure that future parliamentary debates address those issues.

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<sup>1</sup> The plan of action is a policy document that outlines the IPU's and its Members' vision on and political commitment to gender-sensitive parliaments.

## Session 1: Empowering women and girls through technology, including in decision-making processes<sup>2</sup>

### Overview of the session

The session discussed using technology to promote gender equality in various areas, including education, the economy, and political decision-making. National experiences were shared on equal access to technology, increasing education in science technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) for women and girls, and facilitating women's access to the labour market. Technology's role in promoting gender equality within parliaments and strengthening outreach was also examined.

**Ms. N. Ameline** (CEDAW Committee member) pointed out that outdated gender biases impacted new technological systems. She called for integrated policies that would link gender equality and modern technologies to close the digital gender gaps. A new “value chain” should be created that would systematically integrate social inclusion, parity, and equality into AI and other technologies. France’s [Orange Group](#) 2020 charter on inclusive AI was an example. MPs could strengthen technological governance through transformative lawmaking and by providing training on human rights frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Convention). Parliaments should undertake a comprehensive “digital mapping” with a view to advancing women’s economic role while safeguarding against setbacks in women’s access to land or credit. MPs must prioritize accelerating progress by engaging in a global movement and highlight the future General Recommendation on Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Systems (GR 40).

**Ms. C. Kraft Buchman** (CEO/Founder of Women at the Table) emphasized the need for lawmakers and decision makers to reconsider public systems to place social inclusion at their core. MPs could use technology to allocate benefits more fairly, such as in pension systems and

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*“Tech is too important to be left to technologists alone: teams must be composed of different people, experiences, and ways of thinking, such as social scientists, anthropologists, scientists, and technologists.”*

*- Ms. C. Kraft Buchman, Women at the Table*

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university placement. Public procurement policies could jump-start women-led technology industries and promote multidisciplinary team diversity. Lawmakers must also help shape an education system that created problem-solvers and systems’ thinkers. Granting access to technology alone was insufficient for closing gender and digital gaps. MPs could push for hate speech regulation to increase the accountability of anyone who made or used algorithms.

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<sup>2</sup> Recording available here: <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1p/k1pv5bcopr>.

**Mr. B. Glavašević** (MP, Croatia)

emphasized that parliaments must regulate tech companies because what happened online coexisted with and influenced “offline realities”. Many parliaments lacked tech knowledge and there was a need for gender-responsive

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*“Reconciling protecting privacy and human rights should not conflict...businesses work[ing] on profit-based principles, but governing a society is about creating a framework that works for everyone and adds value.”*

*- Mr. B. Glavašević, MP, Croatia*

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corporate governance of tech and social media companies through legislation. Companies’ proprietary algorithms and budgets must be transparent. AI or machine learning, which could lead to unintended discrimination, must be regulated. Additionally, data protection laws and penal codes must be strengthened to protect the rights of women and girls, given the backlash against sexual and reproductive health rights and revenge porn. He proposed a global alliance of MPs to push for open-source algorithms and reminded lawmakers that privacy and human rights should not conflict. When the two principles did not align, MPs must intervene and create a framework that worked for everyone.

**Mr. A. Williamson** (Senior Researcher, CIP, IPU) explained that hybrid parliaments, which combined

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*“Hybrid parliaments represent a clarion call for another way of doing democracy, which is more economically efficient, allows more flexible participation, and empowers people to reimagine how parliaments work.”*

*- Mr. A. Williamson, IPU*

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remote and in-person work, helped parliaments to advance gender equality and support MPs’ work. Hybrid parliaments enabled MPs to balance their work and family/caring responsibilities better and allowed for greater participation of legislators with disabilities or from remote constituencies. Hybrid

working environments signalled to underrepresented groups that parliaments could change and work for all, promoting a more flexible and inclusive democracy. Parliamentarians must empower everyone in society to have an equal voice and create safe and inclusive spaces within parliaments to ensure better representation and legislation.

**Ms. M.J. Pizarro Rodríguez** (Senator, Colombia) said that the digital revolution had affected public trust and sharing. Colombia strove to equalize

internet access – currently, only 52% of people in urban areas and 7% in other areas had access. The COVID-19 pandemic had shown that the internet was an essential public service and that access to it was a fundamental right. The Colombian

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*“A vital lesson of the COVID-19 pandemic is that the internet should be an essential public service; therefore, access to it is a fundamental right.”*

*- Ms. M.J. Pizarro Rodríguez, Senator, Colombia*

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Congress had worked virtually during the pandemic, but women MPs living in remote areas had faced difficulties due to limited internet access, shared devices and security concerns. Feminists and women in public life were increasingly facing backlash online, including sexually explicit content. MPs must progress towards equal opportunities for all individuals in political and public life. Colombia was making history by introducing a bill dealing with digital violence against women.

## **Discussion:**

MPs from a number of countries<sup>3</sup> discussed the need for gender equality in STEM fields and the tech industry, and the challenges of overcoming gender-based discrimination and exclusion. Some countries are considering legislation aiming to empower women in technology (e.g. Mexico), while others are promoting science and engineering education through financial and training assistance (e.g. the Republic of Korea). Some countries face challenges in enhancing internet access for all and providing access to technology in schools (e.g. Pakistan).

MPs stressed the importance of strengthening the presence of women in decision-making including in technological decision making, underlining the need to foster political understanding of the complexity of gendered cultural factors, being an important component in influencing needs-based social policies to address digital challenges.

Shared concerns over cyber harassment, violence and online crimes against women and girls were also raised, along with the need for legislation and other provisions to provide safe cyberspace for women and girls and to promote women's access to technology and the internet. The tension between protecting women's rights against violence and protecting privacy was acknowledged, hence the difficulty in passing laws to reduce online prejudice, hate speech and harassment against women. Strong ideological and religious resistance to harness technology for family planning was also a challenge in this regard.

Many participants emphasized that neither the freedom of speech nor the right to privacy should by any means be compromised when legislating on the online sphere.

Others raised questions about the capacity of parliaments in adapting to crisis-generated realities, manifested primarily during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the role of technology in strengthening democratic, open and gender-sensitive parliaments, noting that technology was not a panacea. Participants underlined that the digital transformation of the ways parliaments functioned, such as the widespread institution of remote participation and voting possibilities, presented a substantive potential for women's political empowerment. To foster empowerment, parliamentarians emphasized the need for traditional tools to promote parity in parliament – such as the implementation of strong gender quotas, gender-sensitive budgeting, increased citizens' access to decision-making and women's equal representation at all levels within political parties – to be complemented by the potential of new digital tools (e.g. Uruguay, Germany and Belgium).

### **Lessons learned:**

- Advancing women's representation in STEM education should be a structural policy objective, being a much-needed entry point for women technology leaders, a prerequisite for empowering women in technology and in informing gender-sensitive approaches to technological development.
- Unimpeded access to quality internet is increasingly recognized as a right rather than a privilege. Ensuring a

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<sup>3</sup> In order of intervention: Canada, Italy, Mexico, Republic of Korea, United Kingdom, France, Morocco, Pakistan, Belgium, Germany, Uruguay, Serbia and Malawi.

gender dimension in efforts to ameliorate internet services provision and infrastructure is a key element in empowering women, in particular rural and marginalized women.

- Safety challenges in the cyberspace are highly gendered, affecting women and girls disproportionately in capitalizing their full potential for empowerment.
- Gender biases continue contaminating new technological ecosystems, requiring integrated policies and national plans that link gender equality and modern technologies to help close digital gaps between girls and boys. Closing this gap requires the construction of a new “value chain” that systematically integrates social inclusion, parity, and equality into AI and other current and future technologies.
- New technologies have a strong potential in instituting and enhancing participatory and gender-sensitive parliamentary structures, allowing for more women in politics, including in key leadership positions, given that women are more likely to benefit from such structures.

**Recommendations for MPs and parliaments:**

- Provide training in human rights frameworks to MPs and undertake “digital mapping” to leverage new technologies for women's economic advancement while safeguarding against setbacks.
- Have MPs engage in a global movement that will prioritize accelerating progress towards gender equality and the political representation and inclusion of women, and that will tap into the role of technology in advancing these objectives.
- Promote public procurement policies to jump-start women-led technological industries and foster multidisciplinary team diversity.
- Help shape an education system that creates problem solvers and systems thinkers regardless of what subjects they study to prepare for the future of technology.
- Address hate speech online, and have MPs push to hold anyone who makes or uses an algorithm accountable for what happens with that algorithm.
- Regulate AI or machine learning to prevent discrimination against specific social group members.
- Strengthen data protection laws and penal codes to protect the rights of women and girls, especially in the context of revenge porn and the backlash against sexual and reproductive health rights.
- Push for open-source algorithms and strengthen gender-responsive corporate governance of technology and social media companies.
- Foster hybrid parliaments to increase gender equality by allowing for greater participation of legislators with disabilities, family responsibilities, or from remote constituencies.
- Operate as safe and inclusive spaces for all, and the more diverse the parliament, the better legislation it will produce, including legislation on digital technologies.

## Session 2: Addressing online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including in the public and political spheres<sup>4</sup>

### Overview of the session

The session focused on parliament's role in addressing online gender-based violence and discrimination against women MPs and parliamentary staff through legal reforms and synergies with women's rights organizations and tech companies. Panellists shared their experiences on legislation, engagement with women's organizations, ensuring tech companies' accountability, and in addressing violence against parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. The discussion highlighted models for developing laws and policies on online safety. It emphasized the need for active engagement by parliaments and tech companies to combat violence against women and girls in digital contexts.

**The Chair**, Ms. L. Quartapelle (MP, Italy), opened the session with the tragic stories of two young Italian women – Tiziana Cantone and Carolina Picchio – who had both committed suicide as a result of the effects of vicious sexual violence perpetrated online. In 2019, the Italian Parliament had passed a [law](#) on “revenge porn” in honour of Tiziana, and in 2021 it had passed a [law](#) on the prevention of cyberbullying in honour of Carolina. Those two stories were a reminder to MPs that legislating to protect the rights of women and girls mattered in people's lives. Apart from laws, there had to be policies and public dialogue on how technology and gender-based violence interacted, and on what legislators and politicians could do within their mandates to prevent and punish cases such as those.

**Ms. R. Alsalem** (UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences), in her video message, praised UN Women and the IPU for prioritizing gender equality and addressing gender-based violence against women in politics and digital contexts. She acknowledged the seriousness of tech-facilitated gender-based violence and how it impacted diverse groups of women, noting a 2018 thematic report presented to the Human Rights Council ([A/HRC/38/47](#)) and the [EDVAW Platform](#) report, both of which emphasized the need to treat digital violence against women and girls as a human rights issue. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur was supported by countries such as Australia, Canada, and the Philippines, which had adopted appropriate legislation to tackle digital violence. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur was to encourage parity in all aspects of life, including in political decision-making structures and company boards, and to address digital violence against women and girls. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of ending hate speech and incitement to violence, improving protection mechanisms for survivors and having men politicians express zero

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*“Pursuing gender parity in all aspects of life, including in political decision-making structures or company boards, will help give this issue the seriousness it deserves.”*

*- Ms. R. Alsalem, UN Special Rapporteur*

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<sup>4</sup> Recording available here: <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1f/k1froskdo9>.

tolerance for gender-based violence. The UK's Online Safety Bill<sup>5</sup> was an example of a positive development.

**Ms. K. Sherwin** (Chief Strategy and Engagement Officer, Plan International) said that MPs must work alongside women and girls to develop policies on digital violence. Many girls went online to express opinions and learn but they experienced online gender harassment as early as eight years of age. Therefore, the first step in addressing online gender-based violence was to recognize that girls, especially adolescent girls, were disproportionately affected. MPs were urged to protect girls from violence and promote their right to access information. Supporting organizations and networks of girls and women, including with financial resources, was crucial as was ensuring laws were shaped and informed by meaningful consultations with girls and civil society girls' groups.

**Ms. R. Kuperberg** (Independent Researcher) highlighted the need for greater transparency of tech companies and access to their data to help lawmakers respond to online violence against women. She also stressed the critical importance of protection and support for parliamentary staff, and the need for legislators to pay specific attention to violence against women MPs and women in the public space. Legislation and policies to end violence against women in politics must place principles of intersectionality at the center and consider the financial, psychological, physical and time costs of women in politics. Women and girls were often told to take temporary measures to stop the abuse, but legislators were responsible for making policies to prevent and punish it.

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*"Legislators have been reluctant to legislate on violence against women in politics, preferring to discuss violence against women and girls more broadly. But the issues are not separate: girls are being silenced online and choosing not to participate."*

*- Ms. R. Kuperberg, Independent Researcher*

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Adding the word "digital" to policies was insufficient because gender biases in algorithms were inherent in the systems for which tech companies were responsible. Finally, she emphasized that digital violence was a global issue. A worldwide solution was needed to reach perpetrators across borders.

**Ms. N. Lugangira** (MP, United Republic of Tanzania) said that women MPs were expected to tolerate mistreatment and abuse, including online, but being an MP was no excuse for tolerating such treatment. Abuse was often linked to partisanship. Solidarity among women in politics was essential meaning that they must move beyond party lines. National and international organizations should speak out against violence and support efforts to end it. Legislation and a model law could help regulate the digital sector.

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<sup>5</sup> See: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137> (accessed 15 May 2023).

**Ms. F. Fitzgerald** (Member of the European Parliament) stressed that gender-based violence and discrimination in tech and online, along with increasing online threats to women in politics, endangered democracy as they discouraged women from running for office. Parliaments must have top-down policies with zero tolerance for such behaviour. Committees must ensure MPs and parliamentary staff can safely and quickly report any abuse. The European Union and the European Parliament in particular had adopted several tools for gender equality and women's empowerment. Among those tools were a new

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*“Gender-based violence and discrimination happening in tech, online, and the increasing online threats to women MPs threaten democracy because it means that women will be less inclined to run for office. Parliaments must take this seriously at the policy level.”*

*- Ms. F. Fitzgerald, Member of the European Parliament*

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anti-trafficking directive which included legislation to criminalize cyberstalking, harassment, incitement to violence and hatred, and aiding and abetting various cybercrimes. Parliaments must adopt multifaceted approaches to promote awareness and positive action programmes and bring tech companies in as accountable partners to counteract AI

that reflects and perpetuates societal inequalities.

### **Discussion:**

MPs worldwide shared their countries' experiences on legislation, standards, and violence prevention against women and girls in the digital context.<sup>6</sup> Several common challenges were discussed, including the tension between freedom of expression, the right to privacy and freedom from violence (e.g. Canada), the low reporting of digital violence by women (e.g. Morocco) and the lack of outcomes of investigations of digital sex crimes targeting children and young people (e.g. Republic of Korea). Questions were raised about coordinating and unifying legislative efforts to deal with online violence and violence in all contexts. Overall, MPs called for coordinated and unified legislative efforts to deal with online violence and violence in all contexts as they isolated women from development (e.g. Morocco).

Participants shared their countries' innovative solutions to address online harassment, such as a model law against digital violence (e.g. Mexico), an online grooming act to combat digital sexual exploitation (e.g. the Republic of Korea), and broader legislation and standards to prevent violence against women and girls in the digital context whereby cyberbullying and online harassment were crimes mandating national authorities to investigate and punish cybercrime (e.g. Pakistan).

MPs worldwide shared their experiences with technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women and girls, and women politicians in their countries. Many women felt unsafe expressing themselves online which thus infringed on their freedom of expression and political rights (e.g. Kenya). Specific legal provisions should be introduced to ensure that digital acts of violence were recognized as electoral offences in every country.

The issue of pornography was raised on numerous occasions during the debate, with MPs focusing on the importance of efforts to strengthen age verification for different platforms through legal means (e.g.

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<sup>6</sup> In order of intervention: Kenya, Canada, Pakistan, Morocco, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Italy, France, Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Seychelles, United Kingdom, Guinea, Uganda, Burkina Faso and Portugal.

Canada). Regarding nonconsensual sharing of sexual content in particular, participants shared real-life examples of women who were stigmatized for life or who had committed suicide as a result.

Many parliamentarians pointed to the need to forge broad coalitions of change on matters of safety, security, harassment and cybercrime between social actors, parliaments and tech companies. Guided by the thought that crime was always a step forward on taking advantage of policy gaps, they stressed the need to make legislative and law-enforcement institutions more agile vis-à-vis perpetrators.

#### **Lessons learned:**

- Digitalization and connectivity facilitate violence and cybercrime, with serious effects on a person's wellbeing and with undeniable gendered implications on women's and girls' safety online.
- Pornography incubates crime-generated content, remains largely unchecked with minimal verification of the legality of the sources and the consent of the persons involved. In many cases the online tech industry applies no firewalls to crime-generated content while sexually exploited individuals are often left with no say, are often also completely unaware of their exploitation and can be left stigmatized for life.
- It is difficult to trace back a digital footprint. Ensuring a strong legal framework for the protection against cybercrime, which is highly gendered in nature, should be a primary policy objective. Parliaments and policy debates should not underestimate the danger of what is happening online as, eventually, everything online can become real and words can lead to actions.
- Policy debates and lawmaking should be guided by the thought of constant vigilance vis-à-vis technological advances and cybercrime, enabling a continuous policy dialogue on strengthening the legal framework, always ensuring that the gendered dimension of online violence and cybercrime is addressed.
- Online harassment and violence targeting women in politics should be understood as sophisticated acts of delegitimization that aim to dissuade politically eager and active women. Men politicians have a critical role to play by refraining from attacks against women in politics and misogyny.

#### **Recommendations for MPs and parliaments:**

- ✓ Design policies and promote public dialogue on how technology and gender-based violence interact, and on what legislators and politicians can do within their mandates to prevent and punish cases of digital violence.
- ✓ Protect girls from violence and promote their right to access information. This involves addressing existing legal loopholes, reporting barriers, prosecuting digital offences and learning from other countries' positive developments in combating digital violence against women and girls.
- ✓ Support organizations and networks of girls and women, including, crucially, with financial resources, and ensure laws are shaped and informed by meaningful consultations with women and girls in civil society.
- ✓ Legally require tech companies to demonstrate greater transparency and provide access to data to help lawmakers respond to online violence against women.
- ✓ Ensure women and girls have access to protection mechanisms. MPs should also ensure that the costs of reporting abuse are reduced or eliminated to remove this burden from women.
- ✓ Have parliaments and public institutions in general do more to protect women in politics against acts of

violence by applying strong punitive frameworks and by adopting a no-tolerance stance, starting at the highest political level.

- ✓ To end violence against women in politics, ensure legislation and policies place principles of intersectionality at the center and consider the financial, psychological, physical and time costs of violence against women in politics.

## New data and tools: The state of women's representation in political decision-making

### Overview of the session

This briefing covered recent data and resources on women in politics and gender quotas, such as provided in the IPU report *Women in parliament in 2022: The year in review*, the IPU-UN Women map *Women in Politics: 2023*, the UN Gender Quota Portal and the Gender Gap App, which tracks women's representation and speaking roles in decision-making and events.

**Ms. P.A. Torsney** (Head of the Office of the Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations in New York) presented two recent publications: the IPU report *Women in parliament in 2022: The year in review*, the *Women in politics: 2023* map, created by the IPU and UN Women, that provided new data on women in executive positions and national parliaments as of 1 January 2023. Data show that women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide and that achieving gender parity in political life is far off.

As of 1 January 2023:

- 11.3% of countries have women Heads of State (17 out of 151 countries, monarchy-based systems excluded).
- 9.8% of countries have women Heads of Government (19 out of 193).
- 22.8% of Cabinet Ministers are women.
- 13 countries have at least 50% or more women Cabinet Ministers.
- Women ministers mainly cover gender equality, family, and social affairs portfolios and only 12% of defense and 8% of transportation portfolios.
- 26.5% of national parliamentarians (single/lower chamber) are women.



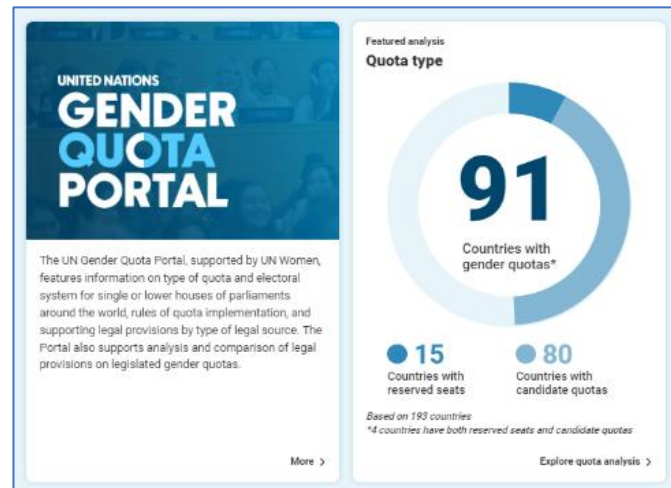
**Download the map:** <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/03/women-in-politics-map-2023>.

**Read the press release and analysis:**  
<https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2023-03/women-in-power-in-2023-new-data-shows-progress-wide-regional-gaps>.

**Review the IPU 2022 Report on women in Parliament:**  
<https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2023-03/new-ipu-report-shows-women-mps-have-never-been-so-diverse>.

- 22.7% of the Speakers of Parliament are women.
- Women chair 65.9% of gender equality committees, and 12.2% of defence committees.
- For the first time, no functioning parliament in the world has zero women, and there is an increase in the number of women from diverse backgrounds in national parliaments.
- However, last year's +0.4 points growth rate was the slowest in six years and it will take another 80 years to achieve parity in parliaments at such a rate.
- Countries with quotas elected almost 30.9% women MPs, while those without quotas elected only 21.2% women MPs.

**Ms. L. Ackar** (Policy Specialist on Political Participation, UN Women) presented the [UN Gender Quota Portal](https://genderquota.org/), the United Nations first global information hub on legislated gender quotas. The portal is a free public resource for legislators, researchers, and practitioners advocating for, designing, and researching quotas for advancing women's political representation. It supports United Nations efforts to advocate for and strengthen the implementation of gender quotas at the country level. It is also a crucial milestone in implementing the UN Secretary-General's Call-to-Action for Human Rights (C2A) and in supporting the targeted objectives articulated in the Secretary-General's [Our Common Agenda](#) report.



Visit the UN Gender Quota Portal: <https://genderquota.org/>

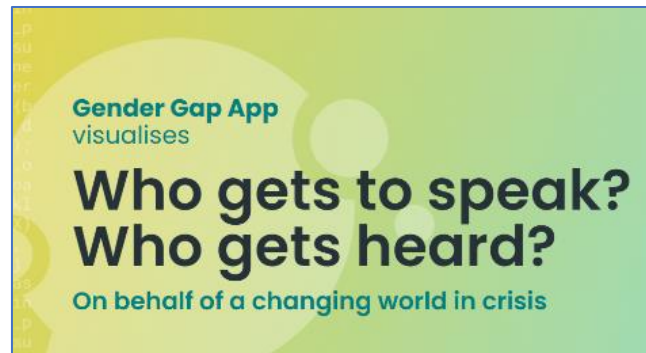
The portal features information on national parliaments across the 93 countries that have legislated quotas in their single or lower houses.<sup>7</sup> It presents data on the types of quotas in force, on electoral systems, quota targets, implementation of quotas – such as ranking/placement rules, sanctions and methods of filling seats, and gives insights into constitutional and legislative provisions on gender quotas, with individual country profiles, quota analysis and country comparisons.

**Ms. C. Kraft Buchmann** (CEO/Founder of Women at the Table) presented the [Gender Gap App](#) (g-app), a tool that focuses on two main questions: who gets to speak and who gets heard on behalf of a changing world in crises. It is an open-source software designed to measure women's and youth representation, participation, and influence at events and in decision-making spaces. It captures and visualizes the proportion of time, topics, capacity and delegated authority of any group in conference settings. It was [co-developed](#) by Women at the Table and several international and Geneva-based organizations.

<sup>7</sup> The portal includes information only of countries with legislated gender quotas as of or after 1 January 2022.

The g-app comprises the processing of two sets of data: a visualization engine and a topic modeling algorithm. The (anonymized) delegate information and transcripts from formal speeches and chamber discussions are processed and matched to topics generated by the algorithm at a conference. The topic-matching component provides oversight of the breadth and specifics of voice and influence rather than just crude time allocation. It also captures speaker and

topic insight to determine, for example, if women are speaking about gender violence but do not have a voice when food poverty, climate change, or finance are on the agenda.



Read more about the g-app: <https://whogetstospeak.org/>

Women at the Table beta tested the g-app at several IPU Assemblies and the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), and piloted it at the Paris Peace Forum. The g-app can also be used by UN organizations at peace talk tables, and tech roundtables, and by parliaments to provide transparency in the democratic process. Initial indicators showed that at decision-making tables while representation was close to parity (40% female-60% male), speaking time reflected an imbalance (20% female-80% male).

## Conclusion

**Following the exchanges between parliamentarians and panellists it was confirmed that technology impacted democracy and gender equality. The silencing and harassment of women online were identified as critical challenges that must be addressed, including the raising of awareness among men on the issue. Measures to protect women's rights online must be implemented. Participants emphasized the need to keep legislative procedures up to date and gender-sensitive so that they were not outpaced by technological advances and that they benefitted all. Also discussed were the practical ways of using technology to advance gender equality without violating women's rights, including the importance of diversity, education reform, regulation of AI and data protection laws. Participants emphasized the need for parliaments to become safe spaces for women both online and offline, the importance of networking and solidarity among women in politics, and the need to track progress on women's representation globally. Quotas were once again recognized as an effective way to increase women's representation in political offices.**

Participants highlighted the three following key areas in which parliaments can engage to ensure that technological progress complies with women's rights and advances gender equality:

- (1) **Parliaments should ensure that technological innovation is led by women and serves to empower them.** As well as incentivizing more women to study science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), there are opportunities to adapt resource allocation and public

procurement in a way that jump-starts industries led by women innovators and technologists. Technology also needs to be led and designed by women if it is to serve everyone equally.

- (2) **Parliaments can do more to address technology-facilitated violence against women and girls.** In the face of the ever-increasing incidence of sexism and violence against women, parliaments have a critical role to play by legislating against all forms of discrimination, harassment and abuse while ensuring that well-designed enforcement mechanisms are in place. Parliaments need to put more effort into addressing all types of gender-based crimes taking place online, including sexual exploitation, sextortion and revenge pornography, which predominantly target women and girls. Online violence against women parliamentarians is a key obstacle to democracy and must be countered by specific measures both in the law and in parliament's own policies. Parliamentarians can help address these challenges by, for example, providing continuous training in human rights frameworks, regulating hate speech and AI, strengthening data protection laws, promoting open-source algorithms and gender-responsive corporate governance, and supporting, empowering and consulting organizations and networks of girls and women. Finally, men politicians must play a critical role by refraining from attacks against women in politics and expressing zero tolerance for gender-based violence in all its forms, including online.
- (3) **Parliaments need to enhance their understanding of and expand the use of technologies in their own work to promote gender equality.** The COVID-19 pandemic revealed many surprising benefits of hybrid working environments for parliaments. Having flexible work and procedural options is a signal to all underrepresented groups that parliaments can change and work for all. Such arrangements have the potential to bring parliaments closer to the people and to allow parliamentarians to reconcile caring responsibilities with their political careers.

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