



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Geneva, 23–27 March 2024

Parity debate

Eliminating discrimination, transforming economic losses into gains

Tuesday, 26 March 2024, 11:30–13:00
Plenary A, level 0, CIGC

The parity debate aims to promote dialogue between women and men at the IPU and encourage them to discuss issues of common interest together. In line with the principle of a parity debate, the composition of the debating panel will be gender balanced. The order of speakers invited to take the floor will also follow a gender-balanced sequence. Having an equal number of men and women speak in the debate will allow the different and complementary views and experiences of both genders to emerge. Delegations are therefore invited to be represented in this debate by male and female participants.

Concept note

The global pace of reform towards the equal treatment of women and men under the law dropped to a 20-year low in 2022. According to data released in 2023, it would take at least 50 years to approach legal gender equality everywhere. Globally, women enjoy on average only two-thirds of the legal rights that men have, and nearly 2.4 billion women of working age live in economies that do not grant them the same rights as men.¹

This comes with a huge cost and is an impediment to economic growth and resilience at a critical time for the global economy. It is estimated that discrimination against women cost the world approximately US\$ 12 trillion in global gross domestic product (GDP).² Furthermore, violence against women is estimated to cost US\$ 1.5 trillion.³ Harmful practices also have a very impactful cost. For example, child marriage is estimated to cost economies at least 1.7% of their GDP,⁴ and ending it would save the world US\$ 4 trillion by 2030.⁵

If women played the same role in the economy as men, as much as US\$ 28 trillion, or 26%, could be added to the global annual GDP by 2025.⁶ US\$ 10 trillion is the estimated annual value of women's unpaid work, 13% of global GDP.⁷ For example, in the EU, improvements in gender equality would lead to an additional 10.5 million jobs in 2050, which would benefit both women and men.⁸

Removing structural barriers and legal impediments to promote women's empowerment requires political will. 189 UN Member States have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), agreeing to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, for women to enjoy all their fundamental rights. The Convention's priority areas of legal reform are related to citizenship, the right to vote, freedom of movement, access to justice, marriage and family relations, access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, and the right to work, among others.⁹

Parliaments and parliamentarians have an important role to play in ensuring gender equality in law and in practice. They must repeal discriminatory laws, enact gender equality legislation and oversee its

¹ World Bank, 2023, [Women, Business and the Law Report](#).

² OECD, 2016, [The economic cost of gender-based discrimination in social institutions](#).

³ UN Women, 2016, [The economic costs of violence against women: Remarks by UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, Lakshmi Puri at the high-level discussion on the "Economic Cost of Violence against Women"](#).

⁴ Berkely Economic Review, 2018, [The economics of child marriage](#).

⁵ Henrietta H. Fore, Natalia Kanem and Mabel van Oranje, 2018, [This is the economic cost of child marriage](#).

⁶ McKinsey Global Institute Report, 2015.

⁷ [Women Deliver, 2024](#).

⁸ [European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017](#).

⁹ Handbook for Parliaments on the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol](#), 2023.

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implementation, as they are elected and vested with both the power to legislate and to influence public opinion through the media and citizen engagement.

Through their law-making function, parliaments and parliamentarians are called upon to remove legal provisions that discriminate against women in areas such as work, family, property and inheritance, as a key step towards women's economic empowerment.

By virtue of their oversight function, parliaments have a responsibility to monitor the proper implementation of legislation and to ensure adequate funding and long-term sustainability of services and programmes required by laws and policies. Parliamentarians can monitor the implementation of laws that promote women's economic empowerment through domestic legislation (constitutional law and civil rights, family, property, labour, and tax-related laws). They can ensure that the government is accountable to the people for national progress in this area, and that domestic and international commitments are respected. Several parliamentary mechanisms, such as committees and caucuses, can be leveraged to make a greater impact.

They are also called upon to mainstream gender perspectives in all financial policies, including policies facilitating and promoting women's rights and opportunities to participate in the labour market. Parliaments and their members are also called upon to promote full inclusion of women in the financial systems of each country, and to promote women's participation in those decision-making processes.

Finally, they have a key role to play in preventing and addressing all forms of violence and harmful practices against women and girls. This includes ensuring that acts of violence are criminalized, victims have access to immediate redress and protection, and perpetrators are prosecuted and punished.

In all this work, parliamentarians are uniquely positioned to make sure that the needs of all segments of society – especially those that are underrepresented and/or are in vulnerable or marginalized situations – are duly taken into account.

Through its resolutions,¹⁰ IPU members have made such commitments to repealing discrimination and promoting gender-responsive policies and legislation. The IPU has provided parliaments with tools and guidance, such as handbooks,¹¹ to reach these objectives.

The findings of the latest Women, Business, and the Law report by the World Bank will be presented. A CEDAW expert will share CEDAW's common concluding observations and recommendations in relation to women's economic empowerment. Parliaments will showcase recent reforms implemented in countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Jordan, Lesotho, Rwanda, Slovenia, Sierra Leone, Suriname and Uzbekistan.

Members of parliament – both women and men – are invited to contribute views and experiences, as well as information on recent developments on the following key questions:

- What actions has your country or parliament taken to promote laws and policies to advance the empowerment of women while boosting the economy?
- Which key data and economic arguments have proved useful in your work to lift the legal and cultural barriers to women's full economic participation and empowerment?
- What actions can individual parliamentarians take to address cultural values, beliefs, and practices that prevent women's economic empowerment and reproduce gender discrimination in all areas of life?
- What are the lessons learned from enforcing laws and policies that promote women's economic empowerment in your country? Who are the key public and private sector partners in this endeavour?

¹⁰ IPU Resolution on the [financial inclusion of women as a driver of development](#), adopted unanimously by the 136th IPU Assembly in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2017. Kigali Declaration on [Gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world](#), endorsed by the 145th IPU Assembly in Kigali, Rwanda, 2022.

¹¹ Handbook for parliamentarians on [Gender-responsive law making](#), 2021. The Handbook for Parliaments on the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol](#), 2023.