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**Women in leadership and their full and equal participation
in decision-making in the Economic Commission for Europe region**

Women Rising: Leadership and Decision-Making in the Economic Commission for Europe Region

**Note by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the
Empowerment of Women (UN Women)**

Summary

Women's equal representation, voice, and influence in leadership and decision-making is not only a matter of human rights but is crucial to the full development of a country, people's well-being, and peace in the ECE region and beyond. This thematic paper aims to provide a regional overview of women's participation in leadership and decision-making systems in the 56 countries of the ECE region, to the extent possible¹, in the period from 2019 to 2024, focusing on women's equal and inclusive representation and influence in decision-making in political and public life, and the economic and private sector. Progress towards gender parity in leadership and decision-making in the ECE region has been slow, and is still far from substantive equality, influence and power in leadership and decision-making processes. Trends in the last five years are stagnating and even regressing in some ECE countries. Even when progress is recorded, glass ceilings persist, women remain significantly under-represented in the highest echelons of power across sectors, in political and public life as well as in security, judicial, economic, and other sectors.

¹ This paper is technical in nature as it reviews existing data and should not be seen as an exhaustive study report on all the countries in the ECE region.



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I. Introduction

1. Women rising to leadership and decision-making positions is an essential goal within the Beijing+30 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Almost three decades ago, the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action identified “women in power and decision-making” as one of its twelve priority areas of concern, emphasizing that “women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women (...), a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account.”² The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also call for “women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life,” ensuring “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making,” as well as the social, economic and political inclusion of all.³ The 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2021 “encourage(d) the implementation of measures and mechanisms, including appropriate mechanisms to track progress, to achieve the goal of 50/50 gender balance at all levels of elected positions.”⁴

2. In 2025, the world will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and ten years of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. States are called upon to undertake comprehensive national reviews of progress made and challenges remaining, to jointly benefit from their experience and expertise in identifying concrete actions towards implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

3. This thematic paper aims to provide a regional review of women’s participation in leadership and decision-making processes in the 56 countries of the ECE region, focusing on women’s equal and inclusive representation and influence in decision-making in political and public life, and the economic and private sectors. The paper, a contribution to the global 2025 review, outlines key trends, progress, and achievements since the last review in 2019; highlights persistent gaps and challenges over the last five years; and identifies priority actions to be taken to redress inequalities going forward.

4. Women’s equal representation, voice, and influence in leadership and decision-making is not only a matter of human rights, but also it is crucial to participatory decision-making, inclusive economic growth, sustainable development, and peace. Higher levels of women’s political participation deliver more transparent and gender-responsive governance, and lower the risk of civil war and political violence, for the benefit of all.⁵ Increased women’s political participation results in greater investments in education.⁶ Women’s empowerment and representation drive technological change and economic growth through the introduction of new and more efficient ideas in the economy.⁷ Women’s economic equality is good for business, companies benefit from increasing employment and leadership opportunities for women, shown to increase organizational effectiveness and growth.⁸ Finally, closing gender employment gaps will also boost economic growth, with the expectation that the GDP per capita would be almost 20 per cent higher in the long-run if women’s employment were exogenously increased to be the same as men’s.⁹

² Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), para 181.

³ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, targets 5.5, 10.2 and 16.7.

⁴ United Nations. Commission on the Status of Women (2021), Sixty-fifth session, [Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Agreed Conclusions. 15–26 March 2021.](#)

⁵ World Economic Forum (2023), [“Women’s political participation is essential for building a more just and peaceful world. Here’s why.”](#)

⁶ Women Deliver (2018), [“Strengthening women’s political participation and decision-making power”](#)..

⁷ Dahlum, S., Knutsen, C.H. and Mechkova, V. (2022), [“Women’s political empowerment and economic growth”](#), Science Direct, World Development, Volume 156.

⁸ UN Women (2016), *“Progress of the World’s Women 2015-2016.”* Chapter 2, p. 69.

⁹ World bank (2022), Pennings, S. M. [“A Gender Employment Gap Index \(GEGI\): A Simple Measure of the Economic Gains from Closing Gender Employment Gaps, with an Application to the Pacific Islands.”](#)

5. Women have a right to be equally represented and consulted in decision-making. Equal and inclusive representation in decision-making processes is understood to refer to a 50/50¹⁰ parity between women and men in all their diversity. Women and men's diverse backgrounds and lived experiences impact their differential access to leadership and decision-making positions. Gender equality in the region can only be achieved when women rise to decision-making in all sectors, including political, public, economic, and civic, as well as in the private sphere.

6. Equal and inclusive representation can ensure gender parity at all levels of political and public life, looking beyond numeric representation, to foster substantive voice, agency, and influence of women. Here, the participation of women in civil society and in women's rights organisations is critical to integrating a gender perspective in decision-making processes and contributing to the development of gender-responsive laws and policies. More inclusive forms of governance are needed, where women human rights defenders and women's organisations have more participatory, safe and inclusive spaces at domestic and international level, supported to advance their women's rights work as well as to contribute a gender perspective to all fields of decision-making.

II. Key trends, progress, and achievements

7. Progress towards gender parity in leadership and decision-making in the ECE region has been slow, while trends in the last five years are stagnant and even regressing in some ECE countries. Improving legislative frameworks, introducing and strengthening temporary special measures such as legislative gender quotas, working on gender-sensitive rules, practices, and cultures within political and public institutions, and supporting networks of women's leaders and their capacities to influence politics have delivered a slight uptick in women's numeric representation, though still far from substantive equality, influence and power in politics and decision-making.

A. Women's participation and influence in political life

8. Inclusive leadership and representation are key to good governance and democracy. While both women and men are responsible for achieving gender equality, higher numbers of women in office can influence gender-responsive public policies and institutional practices.¹¹ Having women in politics delivers not only numeric representation or role models for future generations of women and girls, but results in better representation of women's needs and interests, based on shared identity and life experiences, and influences outcomes related to policy and citizen attitudes.¹² Gender quotas impact the number of women in politics, but have also been shown to improve the overall quality of politics and politicians, causing changes in legislator behaviour, preferences, and competence, and increasing women's ability to collectively influence legislative decisions.¹³ At last, women legislators coming together to form cross-party women's caucuses have driven change towards gender equality, women's rights, and improved socio-economic policies for women and men, and their communities.¹⁴

9. The 'glass ceiling' in political spheres is still very present in many countries of the ECE region, with women being underrepresented in the highest echelons of political power with minimal progress observed since the last regional Beijing review in 2019. As of 1 July 2024, women serve as Heads of State in only 8 out of 56 ECE countries, namely in Georgia, Greece, Malta, Republic of Moldova, North Macedonia, San Marino, Slovenia and Switzerland as well

¹⁰ UN (2021), [Commission on the Status of Women, Sixty-Fifth Session, Agreed Conclusions](#).

¹¹ United Nations. Commission on the Status of Women, sixty-fifth session, [Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls](#). Report of the Secretary-General, 21 December 2020.

¹² Hinojosa, M. (2021). ["The Descriptive Representation of Women in Politics,"](#) Oxford University Press.

¹³ Harvard International Review (2021), ["Equal Representation? The Debate Over Gender Quotas \(Part 1\)"](#)

¹⁴ OSCE/ODIHR (2013), [A Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region](#).

as in Kosovo¹⁵.¹⁶ Women currently serve as Heads of Government in 8 ECE countries, namely in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, San Marino, and Switzerland.¹⁷ In total, women currently serve as Heads of States and/or Government in 14 ECE countries, this figure remaining the same as in the previous review of August 2019.¹⁸

10. Progress is observed in terms of women rising to ministerial posts. As at 1 January 2024, there is an average of 28.8 per cent women serving as Cabinet ministers in the 56 ECE countries. This figure is on the rise, though still well below parity.¹⁹ As at 1 January 2024, 10 ECE countries have reached gender parity with 50 or more per cent women as Cabinet ministers, and 7 ECE countries have gender-balanced cabinets with 40 to 49 per cent women ministers.²⁰ There is a large variation in representation across the ECE region, ranging from as many as 63.2 and 60 per cent women Cabinet ministers in Finland and Liechtenstein respectively to zero per cent in Hungary and Azerbaijan, as at 1 January 2024.²¹ At subregional level, the proportion of women ministers remains the lowest in Central Asia, where women make up only 10.4 per cent of Cabinet ministers.²²

11. Globally, there remains a significant gendered allocation of ministerial portfolios, women mainly appointed to lead traditionally perceived women's issues of human rights, gender equality, and social affairs, and indigenous and minority affairs. Policy domains, such as defence, justice, and home affairs, continue to be dominated by men.²³

12. Women's representation in parliaments of the ECE region, as per SDG indicator 5.5.1.a, is continuously increasing, though the rate of progress is slowing down. Today, women make up an average of 31.6 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses of 56 ECE countries, in comparison to 27.8 per cent at the last review in 2019 and 11 per cent in 1995.²⁴ The increase of 3.8 percentage points over the last five years, between 2019 and 2024, is slightly smaller than the previous increase of 4 percentage points observed between 2013 and 2019, demonstrating that the rate of progress is stagnating, if not regressing, at the regional level. Women's representation in parliaments of ECE countries presents a large variation today, from 14.3 and 14.6 per cent women parliamentarians in Cyprus and Hungary respectively to 50 per cent in Andorra, 47.6 per cent in Iceland, and 46.7 per cent in Sweden.²⁵

¹⁵ All references to Kosovo shall be understood in the context of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

¹⁶ [Women Heads of Government and Heads of State](#), as at 1 July 2024. Data compiled by UN Women based on information provided by Permanent Missions to the United Nations and UN Women research. Countries with monarchy-based systems are excluded from the count of Heads of State. In San Marino, a woman is one of the two Captains Regent (dual Head of State). In Switzerland, a woman holds both positions of Head of State and Head of Government. All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Bosnia and Herzegovina has a [woman member](#) of the tripartite Presidency of BiH, the collective head of state. She served as a Chair of the Presidency until 16 July 2023 and continues to be a member of the Presidency.

¹⁸ United Nations, Economic and Social Council (2019), [Economic Commission for Europe, Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting, ECE/AC.28/2019/12](#).

¹⁹ UN Women (2024), ["Women political leaders"](#), and [UN ECE/AC.28/2019/12 \(2019\)](#).

²⁰ Data compiled by [UN Women](#) from Permanent Missions to the United Nations, official government websites and publicly available information. Countries with gender-equal cabinets, namely with between 40 and 60 per cent of women cabinet members, include Liechtenstein, Belgium, Andorra, Portugal, Norway, Albania, Iceland, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Spain, Sweden, France, Germany, Canada, Switzerland, Monaco, and Serbia, from higher to lower representation.

²¹ UN Women (2024), ["Women political leaders"](#).

²² *Ibid.* Central Asian countries include Kazakhstan (14.3 per cent women ministers), Tajikistan (14.3 per cent), Kyrgyzstan (12.5 per cent), Turkmenistan (5.9 per cent), and Uzbekistan (4.8 per cent).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU, [Data on Women in Parliaments](#), available data as of 1 April 2024 and data from August 2019; and UN Women (2024), [Facts and figures: Women's Leadership and political participation](#).

²⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU (2024), [Data on Women in Parliaments](#), available data as of 1 April 2024.

13. All five Nordic countries remain steady over the last five years with some of the highest proportions of women's representation in parliament, all with more than 40 per cent women parliamentarians. Eight ECE countries recorded significant progress of more than 10 percentage points since the last review, including Uzbekistan, Liechtenstein, the Republic of Moldova, Slovenia, Croatia, Malta, Monaco, and Armenia. Uzbekistan made significant progress towards increasing its women's representation since the last review, by implementing temporary special measures which resulted in an increase of more than 18 percentage points to achieve 34.6 per cent women members of parliament.²⁶ Similarly, building on a 40 per cent gender quota included in its Electoral Code, the Republic of Moldova increased its women's representation in parliament by 15.1 percentage points, to achieve 40.8 per cent women parliamentarians in the 2021 elections, along with electing a woman Head of State the year before.

14. A number of countries remain stagnant with levels of women's representation in parliament below 20 per cent since the previous Beijing +25 review period, including Cyprus, Hungary, the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye.²⁷ Significant regression was observed in 12 ECE countries, with the highest decrease in women's representation in parliament observed in Kazakhstan (7.7 per cent), followed by Cyprus (3.6 per cent), Italy (3.4 per cent), Spain (3.1 per cent), France (2.4 per cent), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2.3 per cent), Portugal (2.2 per cent), Romania (1.5 per cent), Belarus (1 per cent), Finland (1 per cent), Sweden (0.6 per cent), and Bulgaria (0.4 per cent). While only 15 women preside over one of the Houses of the 56 parliaments of ECE countries (26.8 per cent), this does represent an increase as compared to 11 women speakers of parliaments in 2019, and is above the current global average of 21.1 per cent women speakers.²⁸

15. Women's representation in local government, as per SDG indicator 5.5.1.b, is rising. While the past decades have focused on parliaments as highest legislative bodies with most power to craft and change national laws and budgets, local governance must be emphasised as crucial in facilitating a more direct participation of diverse population groups in local politics and ensuring their needs, interests, and priorities are included in local decision-making, for the benefit of all. Research indicates that women in local decision-making positions influence local policies to be more inclusive, prioritize family-friendly policies, and, in some cases, contribute to, increased gender equality in income, employment and parental leave.²⁹

16. In the ECE region as well as globally, women's representation in deliberative bodies of local government is higher than in parliament, but still not on equal terms with men.³⁰ In terms of proportion of elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government (SDG indicator 5.5.1.b) in the ECE region, women hold an average of 34.1 per cent seats as of 2023, in comparison to 28.7 per cent in 2019.³¹ As per data for 2023, there is a wide variation in representation levels, from 51.3 per cent in Iceland to as low as 17.1 per cent in Israel.³² Women's representation in leadership posts of local government is dramatically lower. As mayors, available data indicates that women make up only 17.3 per cent of mayors in 37 European countries in 2023, as compared to 15.1 per cent in 2019.³³

17. The use of Temporary Special Measures (TSMs), including legislative gender quotas, is enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as a key tool to address women's under-representation in legislatures. Generally enacted through electoral provisions in the legal framework, quotas can take many forms. In the ECE region, they vary according to the election system, but commonly prescribe that all political parties nominate a certain percentage of women candidates on their party lists or less commonly within the broader group of single-mandate districts. For gender quotas to be

²⁶ Data for Uzbekistan refers to elections held in December 2019, which did not fall under the previous review published in August 2019.

²⁷ All the listed countries, except Cyprus, recorded a few points of progress since 2019 in terms of women's representation in parliaments, though remained at below 20 per cent.

²⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU (2024), [Data on Women Speakers of National Parliaments](#), available data as of 1 June 2024 and 1 August 2019.

²⁹ UN Women (2021), [Women's representation in local government: a global analysis](#).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ UN Women (2023), [Women in Local Government](#). As per available data from 15 ECE countries that reported in 2023: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Czechia, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Montenegro, Netherlands, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Data for 2019 was reported by 20 countries.

³² Ibid.

³³ EIGE, [Gender Statistics Database](#). Local/municipal councils: mayors or other leaders and members.

introduced, a number of ECE countries have amended their constitutions, for example Georgia's Constitution (as amended to 2020), specifies that "the State shall take special measures to ensure the essential equality of men and women and to eliminate inequality."³⁴ Similarly, the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic of 2021 states that "the special measures established by law and aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for different social groups in accordance with international obligations do not constitute discrimination, (while) men and women have equal rights and freedoms and equal opportunities to exercise them (Art. 24)".³⁵

18. Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) in the form of legislative gender quotas have been introduced in 26 ECE countries and in 94 countries globally, as of 1 January 2024.³⁶ Gender quotas for national parliaments are designed to fast-track women's candidacy to elected office. Quotas are effective in securing women's access to parliaments. ECE countries with quotas currently have an average of 32.2 per cent women parliamentarians, in comparison to the average of 31 per cent in the ECE countries without legislated gender quotas. However, quotas are only as effective as their formulation, with research evidencing that quotas deliver best results when aiming for higher targets, specifying placement rules so women do not end up in unwinnable positions on electoral candidate lists, prescribing strong sanctions for non-compliance, and ensuring oversight of quota implementation by an independent body.

19. Among these 26 ECE countries, 2 countries prescribe a 50 per cent quota target, 15 prescribe a 40 per cent quota target, and 9 countries prescribe a quota between 21 and 35 per cent.³⁷ In terms of placement rules for gender quotas, 15 out of 26 ECE countries with gender quotas prescribe placement rules, with Belgium and Italy prescribing that candidates shall alternate by sex on the list, and remaining countries mainly prescribing one in three or four candidates on the list to be of the under-represented sex.

20. In terms of sanctions, most ECE countries with legislated gender quotas prescribe non-registration of electoral lists in case of non-compliance with gender quota provisions and about one third of countries prescribe financial penalties or incentives. A few ECE countries lack adequate mechanisms to ensure effective quota implementation, for example, the 30 per cent quota in Kyrgyzstan is applied to the proportional race via open party lists, but not for the single mandate districts (SMD). Here, quota impact is further reduced due to withdrawals, as the law allows the withdrawal of candidates after the lists are registered up to three days before election day, but does not require the quota target to be sustained.³⁸

21. Recognizing the importance of inclusive decision-making on local level, 23 of the 56 ECE countries have also introduced gender quotas for local legislatures, quota targets varying between 30 and 50 per cent, with Belgium and France prescribing that candidates for local deliberative body elections must be placed in an order alternating by sex.³⁹ Legislated gender quotas, along with electoral systems based on proportional representation and mixed systems, have a positive impact on women's representation at the local level and the ability to disrupt serious gender imbalance in political leadership.⁴⁰

22. Women's caucuses are pioneering legislative initiatives to advance women's rights and gender equality, and mainstreaming gender aspects in parliamentary activities and practices. Often serving as the only cross-party platform, they are empowering women in parliaments and

³⁴ UN Women, [Global Gender Equality Constitutional Database](#), Georgia.

³⁵ UN Women, [Global Gender Equality Constitutional Database](#), Kyrgyzstan.

³⁶ [UN Gender Quota Portal \(2024\)](#) January 2024 ranking: 26 ECE countries with legislative gender quotas include Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France, Georgia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. On 4 April 2024, the Parliament of Georgia abolished the legislated gender quotas in an accelerated manner, by initiating legislative changes to the Election Code. and [Civil Georgia \(2024\), "Parliament Abolishes Quotas for Women MPs,"](#)

³⁷ *Ibid.* [Quota targets](#): Belgium and France = 50 per cent; Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, North Macedonia, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Ukraine, Uzbekistan = 40 per cent; Poland, Slovenia = 35 per cent; San Marino = 33 per cent; Albania, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro = 30 per cent; Georgia = 25 per cent; and Kazakhstan = 21 per cent.

³⁸ OSCE/ODIHR (2021), [Election Observation Mission, Kyrgyz Republic](#), Parliamentary Elections November 2021.

³⁹ UN Women (2023). [Legislated gender quotas for local governments](#), 1 January 2023.

⁴⁰ UN Women (2022), "[Women's representation in local government: A global analysis](#)".

beyond, and promoting dialogue across political parties and sectors. Women’s caucuses also face challenges to their work, including human and financial limitations as well as difficulties to ensure cross-party buy-in among members. In turn, considerations around organisational aspects, careful planning of activities, and joint decision-making and partnerships are key to caucus’ long-term sustainability and impact.

23. While gender parity has not yet been achieved in political life, women do manage to have a significant impact on political landscapes and decision-making, with a host of women caucuses and inter-party alliances existing in parliaments.⁴¹ Parliamentary women’s caucuses continue to play a vital role in advancing women’s rights and gender equality in politics and beyond, by providing a platform for representation and advocacy, support and capacity building, collaboration and cross-party dialogue. As of 2024, 28 ECE countries have established parliamentary women’s caucuses in various formats and levels of legislature, from informal women’s breakfasts in Austria to a highly structured women’s club in Montenegro, for example.⁴² While establishing cross-party women’s caucuses in parliaments may be challenging, maintaining them can also be hard. A few caucuses in the region have faced challenges to remain functional over the last five years due to political tensions, for example, as is the case with the Serbian Women’s Parliamentary Network.

24. Women leaders have also joined forces across ECE countries, for example, by establishing the Central Asian Women Leaders’ Caucus to attain a more prominent political, economic and social role for women in and strengthen their influence in the decision-making process on issues related to peace, stability and sustainable development in the region.⁴³

Box 1. Parliamentary Women’s Caucuses in Western Balkans advocate for women in parliaments and beyond

In the Western Balkans, parliamentary women’s caucuses have served as a strong force for advancing women’s leadership in politics and beyond. Established across the region, including in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation of BiH), Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia as well as in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), these women’s groups keep pursuing legislative and other initiatives to advance women’s role, voice, and agency in politics and in other spheres of life.

Women’s caucuses in Albania, North Macedonia as well as in Kosovo are actively advancing women’s political leadership, having successfully lobbied for the introduction of legislative gender quotas, increasing the quota targets and specifying placement rules, so that women are placed in winnable seats for elections.

As legislators, women members of parliamentary caucuses play a key role in making parliaments more gender-sensitive. With their support and in collaboration with Parliamentary Gender Equality Committees, parliaments in Western Balkans have pioneered internal gender audits and developed Gender Action Plans, including in Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. These action plans serve as strategic documents guiding proactive gender mainstreaming in terms of parliament’s representative, legislative, and oversight functions as well as in terms of their role as a public employer.

As cross-party platforms, parliamentary women’s caucuses also serve as platforms for dialogue, connecting both political parties and women of different sectors and positions. Women’s caucuses in Serbia and Montenegro have pursued a variety of support initiatives to advance women’s social and economic status, for example advocating for increased alimonies for single mothers and better pay for women pharmacists in Montenegro, or helping establish local women’s caucuses in Serbia

⁴¹ UN Women (2020), [Promoting Women’s Participation in Political and Public Life in the OSCE Region](#), Discussion Paper by Ajla van Heel Merdanovic for the Sixty-fifth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 65), Expert Group Meeting, 1 October 2020,

⁴² Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU (2024) Women’s Caucus July 2024 ranking, and OSCE/ODIHR (2013), [“A comparative study of structures for women MPs in the OSCE Region”](#), p. 12.: This includes: Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation of BiH), Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Ireland, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and United States as well as Kosovo (as per UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

⁴³ UNRCCA (2020), [“Launch of the first women leaders’ dialogue in Central Asia”](#).

Women's caucuses are only as effective as they are able to speak as one voice for women's rights in politics and beyond and jointly pursue activities owned by all members. Here, careful organisational planning, innovative resourcing, inclusive decision-making, strong partnerships within parliament and externally, and targeted pursuit of jointly owned activities are key to the caucus' success and sustainability.

B. Women's participation in public life, including public administration, judiciary, and the security sector

25. Women's equal representation in public life, including civil service, is crucial for the effectiveness of public service, in that more inclusive and representative administrations respond better to the diverse needs of their citizens. SDG 16.7 calls for responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels, including in the public service, as per indicator 16.7.1.b. Public service is traditionally well occupied by women, data available from 15 ECE countries in 2020 showing a ratio of women public servants at 1.16 compared to national distribution, whereby the ratio of women senior managers in public service is 0.90 compared to national distribution.⁴⁴ In terms of top tiers of public administration in Europe, data available for 37 European countries evidences that women made up 37.5 per cent of Level 1 Administrators in 2023, rising from 32.03 per cent in 2019.⁴⁵

26. With increasing numbers of ECE countries embracing a feminist foreign policy, such as Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain, and Sweden as of October 2022⁴⁶, the trends in women's representation in foreign service also seem slightly increasing. In 2021, women made up 25.2 per cent of foreign service staff and 24.6 per cent of ambassadors of the 56 ECE countries, as compared to 22.7 per cent women as both staff and ambassadors in 2019.⁴⁷

27. Women's representation in the judiciary demonstrates clear power divisions and a strong glass ceiling effect, with women dominating on the level of judges, yet under-represented in leadership positions at higher courts. In 2021, in the 29 ECE countries, women made up an average of 56.5 per cent of judges, whereby this figure was almost the same in 2019, at 56.1 per cent women judges in 37 ECE countries.⁴⁸ The higher the court, the proportion of women occupying leadership positions is lower, though women are rising to leadership positions in the judiciary. In the administrative courts, women made up 36.8 per cent of court presidents in the 27 EU countries, rising from 26.3 per cent in 2019. In terms of constitutional courts in the EU, women made up only 15 per cent of their presidents in 2023, rising from 10 per cent in 2019.⁴⁹

28. The security sector remains generally male-dominated, though progress is observed in terms of women's representation in the police and the armed forces. The representation of women among police officers is increasing, women making up 26 per cent of the total police force, as reported by 26 ECE countries in 2020, compared to 18.8 per cent in 2017.⁵⁰ In 2020, the NATO member states average of women in armed forces was 13 per cent, an 8.3 per cent increase from 2019, and a dramatic 120.4 per cent increase as compared to the number of women in NATO Nations' Armed Forces since 1998.⁵¹ As of 2020, 27 NATO Nations have implemented a National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security.⁵² In 2024, NATO Heads of State and Government endorsed a revised policy on Women, Peace, and Security,

⁴⁴ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2024), Statistics, [SDG Indicators Database](#), SDG Indicator 16.7.1.b.

⁴⁵ EIGE (2024), EU Gender Statistics Database: National administrations: top two tiers of administrators by function of government.

⁴⁶ UN Women (2022), "[Feminist foreign policies: an Introduction](#)".

⁴⁷ Niklasson, Birgitta and Ann E. Towns (2023), [The GenDip Dataset on Gender and Diplomatic Representation](#), version June23. University of Gothenburg: the GenDip Program: link to dataset.

⁴⁸ ECE Gender Statistics (2022), [Judges by sex](#).

⁴⁹ EIGE (2024), [Gender Statistics Database, National Courts](#).

⁵⁰ UN Statistics Division (2024), [Minimum set of gender indicators](#).

⁵¹ NATO (2020), "[Summary of National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on gender perspectives](#)".

⁵² Ibid.

setting out key strategic objectives to guide NATO's work in this area, focusing on gender-responsive leadership and accountability; participation; prevention; and protection.⁵³

29. Women constitute about 7.3 per cent of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, a 40 per cent increase since the start of the full-scale invasion.⁵⁴ The Ukrainian Ministry of Defence reports more than 67,000 women currently serving in the Armed Forces, including about 45,000 women as military personnel, 4,000 women in combat positions, and the rest in civilian roles.⁵⁵ The last few years have seen significant changes towards gender equality in Ukraine's armed forces, the country has lifted official restrictions on women's access to all positions in the military and has also ensured women's admission to military academies since 2019, facilitating their access to all levels of military profession and education.⁵⁶

Box 2. Ensuring Women's Participation and Representation in Decision-Making and Peace Processes: The Alliance for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Recovery of Ukraine⁵⁷

The Alliance for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Recovery was launched at the Ukraine Recovery Conference on 12 June 2024 in Berlin. Spearheaded by UN Women Ukraine in collaboration with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ) and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the Alliance aims to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are central to Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction efforts. As of its launch, the Alliance has brought together fifteen governments, major IFIs, UN agencies, the EU, numerous partners from civil society and the private sector, including in the Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform (MDCP) for Ukraine and future Ukraine Recovery Conferences.

The alliance aims to support the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women and women's rights organizations in decision-making processes at all levels, as key to ensuring that a gender perspective is integrated into funding and resources for Ukraine. Furthermore, the alliance aims to prioritize women's rights and needs, by facilitating delivery of financial and technical assistance that addresses the specific needs of women and girls, utilizing tools for gender-responsive planning and budgeting

C. Women's economic independence and participation in the private sector

30. Women's economic empowerment and independence are essential to women's rights and leadership. Economically empowered women can equally participate in and benefit from decent work and social protection; access markets and control resources, their own time, lives, and bodies; leading to increased voice, agency, and meaningful participation and leadership in various spheres of decision-making at all levels, from the household to companies, parliaments, and international institutions.⁵⁸

31. Progress in terms of women's participation in the corporate sector is very modest. The proportion of women in managerial positions in the corporate sector stands at 34.7 per cent as of 2022 in 36 reporting countries, having only slightly risen from 33.2 per cent in 2018 for 37 reporting countries.⁵⁹ Women's participation in decision-making of the banking sector in 37 European countries is dramatically low, with only three countries, Spain, Norway, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, having appointed a woman on the post of governor or deputy/vice-governor

⁵³ NATO (2019), "Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations".

⁵⁴ War in Ukraine (2024), "How many women are defending Ukraine".

⁵⁵ Euromaidan Press (2024), "Over 67000 women serve in Ukrainian Army".

⁵⁶ War in Ukraine (2024), "How many women are defending Ukraine".

⁵⁷ UN Women Europe and Central Asia (2024), [Launch of Alliance for gender-responsive and inclusive recovery in Ukraine](#).

⁵⁸ UN Women (2024), "Facts and figures: Economic empowerment".

⁵⁹ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2024), [Statistics, SDG Indicators Database](#), SDG Indicator 5.5.2, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal>.

of the Central Bank in 2024.⁶⁰ In 2019, there were similar figures, with three woman governors, namely in Ireland, North Macedonia, and Serbia.⁶¹ While there are more women in senior positions across central banks and top financial institutions in 2024, the numbers of women in top leadership as governors or CEOs remain discouraging.⁶²

32. Gender gaps in economic empowerment – particularly pay and pension gaps – mean a significant economic loss for society, but also mean women being less able to lead independent lives or dedicate resources to their political or other careers. In the ECE region, the gender pay gap ranges from less than 10 per cent in some Western Balkans countries to over 60 per cent in some countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus.⁶³ The gender wage gap translates into a wider gender pension gap, exceeding 40 per cent on average in the region.⁶⁴ In the European Union, the gender pay gap varies widely, ranging from 0 to 12 per cent among EU member states, compared to a 20 per cent gender pay gap worldwide.⁶⁵

33. Women are overrepresented in lower-paying, part-time, and informal employment. They are also less likely to be in leadership positions or high-paying industries, such as technology and finance. For example, in Germany the share of women in management positions remains low, with women occupying about 15 per cent of executive board seats in major companies. In the United Kingdom, women now hold over 40 per cent of FTSE100 board seats, largely due to targeted government initiatives. Countries like Russia and Türkiye show slower progress, with cultural and structural barriers still impeding women's advancement to top corporate roles.⁶⁶

34. While women often achieve higher educational attainment overall, they may not reap the same economic or political benefits as men, due to gendered expectations and career paths. Overall access to education has improved across the ECE region, with most countries providing universal access to primary and secondary education. However, gender disparities persist, particularly in higher education and vocational training.⁶⁷ Gender stereotypes discourage women from aiming for leadership positions or pursuing careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. This limits their participation in leadership and decision-making positions, high-growth, high-paying industries and perpetuates gender inequality in these critical areas. Women continue to face barriers in translating educational attainments into equal leadership and labour market opportunities. This discrepancy is often due to societal norms and occupational segregation, which channel women into lower-ranking, lower-paying, less prominent fields and positions.

III. Gaps and Challenges

35. While the ECE region is characterized by a high level of de jure equality between women and men, harmful social norms and practices continue to deliver de facto inequality, preventing women's equal access to power⁶⁸. Persistent gender imbalance in political and decision-making roles continues to limit women's access to resources, professional and leadership networks. Lack of opportunity to experience formal politics, and male-dominated political structures all impede women's abilities to enter, stay and lead in political and public

⁶⁰ EIGE (2024), [Gender Statistics Database. The proportion and number of women and men among governors and deputy/vice-governors of the Central Banks of the Member States, and Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) (2024).

⁶¹ EIGE (2024), [Gender Statistics Database: The proportion and number of women and men among governors and deputy/vice-governors of the Central Banks of the Member States](#). Türkiye seems to also have had a woman governor in 2023, though this is not reported in 2024.

⁶² OMFIF (2024), ["Gender Balance Index 2024"](#).

⁶³ ECE SDGs (2024), ["Gender and economy"](#).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ ILO (2022), ["Pay transparency legislation: Implications of employers' and worker's organizations"](#).

⁶⁶ World Economic Forum (2023), ["Global Gender Gap Report 2023"](#), <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>.

⁶⁷ World Bank Group (2024), [Gender Data Portal: Education](#), <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/topics/education>.

⁶⁸ UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation 66/130 (2011) notes, "women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women."

life. These barriers are even more difficult to overcome for women from traditionally under-represented groups and women with diverse identities, including women from different ethnic and social groups, young women, migrant women, or women with disabilities.

36. Women remain under-represented in political and public life, facing significant challenges accessing elected and politically appointed positions. Candidacy for elected office remains non-transparent, procedures for political appointments often as weak as internal democracy of political parties and parliaments. While temporary special measures have delivered progress in getting more women to parliaments in the ECE region, careful formulation and effective implementation of such measures is key to ensuring not only women's access, but also voice, agency, and influence in leadership and decision-making. Persistent gaps demonstrate that temporary special measures, including legislative gender quotas, should be accompanied by effective oversight mechanisms, improved access to resources, and adequate change in social norms and institutional cultures to deliver women's equal participation in leadership and decision-making.

37. Political and public institutions remain gender-imbalanced in the majority of ECE countries, to the detriment of women's leadership and to the detriment of quality of laws, policies and services delivered to citizens, women and men in all their diversity. Parliaments play a key role and bear responsibility in terms of their representative, legislative, and oversight functions, yet their operation, policies and practices, and cultures leave much room for improvement in terms of transparency, accountability, inclusion, gender-sensitivity, and overall impact on the lives of women and men, their families, and communities. In most ECE countries, legislative initiatives generally lack gender impact assessments.⁶⁹ Over the last five years, a number of parliaments have undertaken their own gender audits, for example in North Macedonia and Kyrgyzstan, identifying good practices, but also revealing persistent gaps and challenges in terms of representation, policies, and culture from a gender-perspective. Issues of women's exclusion from leadership posts, preference to appoint men, inadequate work-life balances well as gender-blind legislative and oversight processes persist in parliaments and serve as a key challenge to women's leadership and to gender-sensitive laws and policies.

38. Childcare remains one of the key challenges preventing women from participating actively in politics and decision-making as well as more broadly in various spheres of the labour market.⁷⁰ Inequalities in the hours spent on childcare and other caring responsibilities, division of unpaid care work, gender-based stereotypes, and cultural practices discourage women from active roles in politics. The stereotype that confines women's roles to the family reinforces the perception that the public and polarized nature of political life contradicts traditional family roles assigned to women.

39. Political and public institutions need to provide stronger institutional support that will facilitate women's participation and leadership. Imbalanced working hours in parliaments or political parties and during political campaigns, and unpaid or low-paid roles in local politics or as party volunteers all discourage women from active political participation. Public institutions like parliaments play a key role in adjusting their work policies and practices to be more efficient, for example by simplifying and streamlining procedures, utilising new technologies, and facilitating adequate balance and resources for childcare and caring responsibilities, so that women can adequately participate.

40. Violence against women in politics (VAWP), and in other forms, is one of the most pervasive impediments to women's full, equal and effective participation in political and public life and a threat to peace and security of women and their communities. Violence against women in political and public life targets women specifically because they are women and with the aim to undermine their rightful representation, voice, and agency in politics. Despite legal protections, challenges persist in effectively addressing violence against women in political and public life, largely part of the broader issues of endemic violence against women and fuelled by today's global politics of polarisation and democratic backsliding as well as the gender backlash.⁷¹

⁶⁹ OSCE/ODIHR (2017), [Making Laws Work for Women and Men: A Practical Guide to Gender-Sensitive Legislation](#).

⁷⁰ World Bank Blogs (2022), "[Filling the gaps: childcare laws for women's economic participation](#)" and National Press Foundation (2024), "[Family Obligations Holding Women Candidates Back?](#)".

⁷¹ OSCE/ODIHR (2022), "[Addressing violence against women in politics in the OSCE region](#)".

41. While largely under-researched and under-reported, violence against women in politics remains prevalent across ECE region, offline and online, and worse for women with intersecting identities.⁷² An Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) study on violence against women in parliaments of 45 European countries indicates that 85.2 per cent of women MPs interviewed suffered psychological violence in the course of their office, 46.9 per cent had received death threats or threats of rape or beating, and 58.2 per cent had been the target of sexist attacks online, whereby women MPs under the age of 40 and those fighting for gender equality were more often targeted.⁷³ A study of Westminster Foundation for Democracy conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina found that 60.2 per cent of 80 women politicians surveyed experienced some form of violence during their engagement in politics,⁷⁴ while a similar 2024 study conducted in Montenegro confirms women's reluctance to participate in political life, due to fear of harassment and psychological violence.⁷⁵ Challenges in addressing violence against women in political and public life include underreporting due to stigma and fear of retaliation, inadequate reporting and support services for victims, and the need for stronger enforcement of existing laws and policies.

Box 3. Evidencing prevalence of violence against women in politics

To measure the prevalence of violence against women in politics, towards creating evidence for policy making, UN Women has undertaken prevalence surveys in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan and qualitative research in Türkiye.⁷⁶ Findings from Kyrgyzstan show that 77 per cent of women candidates in the 2021 Parliamentary elections and 48.6 per cent of women candidates running for city council in Kyrgyzstan's 2021 local elections reported facing violence. In Georgia, 48 per cent of women office holders at the local level reported experiencing violence or harassment.⁷⁷ In Türkiye, the results of the qualitative research show that women elected officials report experiencing forms of psychological violence, including threats and insults, sexual violence, including being sent obscene and explicit videos, and physical violence from various perpetrators during candidacy, elections, and during the post-election period. Moreover, women in politics generally do not speak out about the issue of violence against women in politics, and do not seek remedy through institutional reporting mechanisms, even where they exist.

42. With the rise of digital media and social platforms, violence against women in political and public life has extended into online spaces. Women politicians, journalists, activists, and other public figures often face threats, harassment, and cyberbullying. Efforts to address violence against women in the media within the ECE region include advocacy for ethical reporting standards, media literacy programs, and legal frameworks that protect individuals from online abuse and harassment. In Europe for example, the 2022 EU Digital Services Act regulates online intermediaries and platforms to increase safety, and prevent illegal and harmful activities online and the spread of disinformation.⁷⁸ The 2023 UK's Online Safety Act puts a range of new duties on social media companies and search services, making them more responsible for their users' safety on their platforms.⁷⁹ Additionally, Resolution 2274 (2019) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) focuses on promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment. In 2020, the Congress of Regional and Local Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 459 on Fighting sexist violence against

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU (2018), [Sexism, Harassment, and Violence against Women in Parliaments in Europe](#).

⁷⁴ Westminster Foundation for Democracy, WFD (2019), [Violence against women in politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#).

⁷⁵ Westminster Foundation for Democracy, WFD (2024), [Violence against women in Montenegrin politics](#).

⁷⁶ UN Women Europe and Central Asia (2023), [Violence against women in politics in Türkiye](#).

⁷⁷ UN Women (2023), [Violence against women in politics in Georgia](#).

⁷⁸ European Commission (2019), [The Digital Services Act](#).

⁷⁹ UK Government (2024), [Online Safety Act: Explainer](#).

women in politics at local and regional level. Continued and innovative efforts are needed across ECE region to address online violence against women in politics and broadly.

43. While the ECE region has generally made progress on gender equality and women's and girls' rights, this progress is being increasingly challenged by persistent discriminatory social norms and an increasing pushback to women's political participation, leadership, and activism. A 2023 regional analysis on gender equality pushback in Eastern Europe and Central Asia analyses quantitative and qualitative indicators, including empowerment and social norms, and evidences that "the space for gains based on current strategies may be eroding (...) and progress towards equality will be far harder in the foreseeable future."⁸⁰

44. This gender equality pushback has taken the form of narratives, which are in opposition to gender equality and women's rights, further questioning women's role, ability, and contribution and leadership in various spheres of public life. Women leaders in the ECE region are frequently depicted in the media in ways that perpetuate gender inequality, normalise violence, and question their place in politics, as demonstrated in a 2024 Study on Violence against women in Montenegrin politics.⁸¹ This can be linked with a push to change social and gender norms under the 're-traditionalization' of some societies, and has resulted in tangible regress, discouragement and deterrence of women from participating in leadership and decision-making roles. Stereotypes about women's leadership abilities result in underrepresentation in decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors. Here, as a result of discriminatory social norms, women face higher barriers to reaching senior roles, which perpetuates male-dominated leadership structures.

45. The pushback on women's rights and leadership in the ECE region is observed not only in vocal or public opposition, but also in concrete actions to reverse progress, for example by blocking gender equality legislation⁸² and withdrawing from established international legal norms such as the Istanbul Convention, as observed in the case of Hungary and Turkey in 2020 and 2021, respectively.⁸³ Democratic backsliding in some ECE countries has been observed to also lead to backsliding on gender equality policies as well as attacks on women leaders, human rights defenders, journalists, and women's organisations, as evidenced in Croatia, Hungary, and Poland, though the 2023 parliamentary elections in Poland promise to reverse the course and demonstrate that there is emerging political space for feminist responses to this backsliding.⁸⁴ Legal initiatives to back-roll on temporary special measures for advancing women's political participation have also been observed, as for example evidenced with the April 2024 initiative in Georgian parliament to abolish an existing gender quota for party lists.⁸⁵ This pushback has led to the reversal and underfunding of policies, and spearheaded a turn towards gender discriminatory practices and norms, including in Central Asia⁸⁶, with concrete effects in women's access to and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including their political rights.

⁸⁰ Rosenberg, D. (2023), "Regional Analysis on Gender Equality Pushback in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Draft Report."

⁸¹ Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) (2024), [Violence against women in Montenegrin politics](#).

⁸² Observatory on the Universality of Rights (2021), "Rights at Risk Report" - Anumo & Abelenda, "Corporate Capture: Untamed Corporate Power is Putting Rights at Risk"; Usanova, O. (2020), "Russia's "Traditional Values" and Domestic Violence" Kennan Cable, No. 53, Wilson Centre and the Kennan Institute.

⁸³ Cseby, R. (2023), "[The situation of women's rights in contemporary Hungary: The examination of the current state of women's rights under the FIDESZ government](#)." Global Human Rights Defence. UN Türkiye (2021), [UN Joint statement in response Turkey's withdrawal from Istanbul Convention](#).

⁸⁴ UN Women (2020), Roggeband, C., Krizsán, A., "[Democratic backsliding and the backlash against women's rights: Understanding the current challenges for feminist politics](#)". Human Rights Watch (2021), "[Poland: Escalating Threats to Women Activists](#)".

⁸⁵ Civil Georgia (2024), "[Parliament Abolishes Quotas for Women MPs](#)".

⁸⁶ Beyer, J. & Finke, P. 2019. Practices of traditionalization in Central Asia. *Central Asian Survey* ISSN:, Vol. 38 No. 3, Taylor & Francis, pp. 310–328; Kudaibergenova, D. 2018. Project Kelin. Marriage, Women, and Re-Traditionalization in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan. *Women of Asia Globalization, Development, and Gender Equity Cite*; Werner, C. 2009. Bride abduction in post-Soviet Central Asia: marking a shift towards patriarchy through local discourses of shame and tradition. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 15, pp. 314–331.

46. The growing spread of disinformation globally has negatively impacted women's political participation, and civic space is shrinking in the ECE region, with increased legal and political restrictions on the activities of women's organisations, and repression of women politicians, journalists, and human rights defenders. Increasingly, the value of gender equality is being questioned, with states and others promoting patriarchal family models and opposition to gender equality rights, and particularly to the rights of people with diverse sexual orientation or gender identity.⁸⁷

47. Women human rights defenders in the ECE region are increasingly vulnerable to gender-based violence and discrimination, including physical attacks, sexual violence, threats, harassment, defamation campaigns, and arbitrary detention because of entrenched gender stereotypes.⁸⁸ This rise in Europe has a negative impact on the work of women human rights defenders. Targeted hate campaigns online have been reported by several feminist activists who denounce patriarchal systems and culture. Additionally, sexual orientation and gender identity appear to increase the prevalence of violence, with women from diverse and underrepresented groups being more likely targets.⁸⁹

48. In Azerbaijan, Amnesty International reported that "women human rights defenders have faced threats, coercion, violations of their right to privacy and smear campaigns that are gender specific and target them as women."⁹⁰ The Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus reported in 2021 that some women human rights defenders became "victims of enforced disappearances, torture, ill-treatment, and other forms of physical and psychological pressure, including the threat of seizure of their children" by agencies supposed to be offering social protection, and "others have been forced into exile for fear of repression and retaliation."⁹¹

49. In 2024, women and girls in the region are disproportionately affected by armed conflicts, economic crises, disinformation and polarisation, all of which hinder their leadership opportunities and access to decision-making. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has had a multifaceted impact on Ukrainian women, influencing their lives in several ways, including through displacement, economic hardship, increased risk of gender-based violence, and shifts in roles and responsibilities. Nearly one third of Ukraine's population has been forced to flee their homes – 60 per cent of the 7.7 million internally displaced adults are women, while 90 per cent of the 5.6 million refugees who fled Ukraine are women and children.⁹² With many men engaged in the war, many women bear the brunt of caregiving responsibilities for children, the elderly, and other dependents, limiting their opportunities for economic or other forms of participation. Conversely, women have stepped into leadership roles within their communities, organising aid, and support networks, and advocating for peace and human rights, as well as voluntarily joining the Ukrainian Armed forces. However, women's groups remain largely underfunded and excluded from formal decision-making processes related to humanitarian assistance.⁹³

50. Given the ongoing war against Ukraine, amid other conflicts and tensions in the region since the last review, women's leadership and participation in decision-making is a crucial element necessary for creating sustainable peace and recovery. In turn, conflict amplifies and re-masculinizes perceptions of social norms in political leadership and peace processes, to the detriment of women. Research data suggests that women are a key driver for peace and women's participation increases the probability of a lasting peace agreement by 35 per cent if women can exercise influence over a negotiation process. Nevertheless, women remain largely

⁸⁷ UN Women (2020), "[Democratic backsliding and the backlash against women's rights: Understanding the current challenges for feminist politics](#)".

⁸⁸ UN (2019), A/HRC/40/60, [Situation of women human rights defenders, report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#).

⁸⁹ UN (2023), A/78/131, [Situation of human rights defenders. Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, "Pathways to peace: women human rights defenders in conflict, post-conflict and crisis-affected settings"](#).

⁹⁰ Amnesty International (2021), "[Azerbaijan: Gender-based reprisals against women must stop](#)".

⁹¹ UN (2021), "[Situation of Human Rights in Belarus: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Anaïs Marin](#)".

⁹² UN Women Europe and Central Asia (2023), "[Ukraine crisis is gendered, so is our response](#)".

⁹³ UN Women Europe and Central Asia (2022), "[Rapid assessment: Impact of the war in Ukraine on Women's civil society organizations](#)".

excluded from peace-building efforts,⁹⁴ and many actors involved in mediation and conflict resolution remain resistant to including women.

51. Gender equality and the leadership and participation of women and girls are also critical for the various recovery and reconstruction plans in the region that have been formulated by donor governments and international organizations.⁹⁵ The full, equal, meaningful, safe and direct participation of diverse women and girls in all decision-making processes, in line with Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans, is key to formulating and delivering a recovery agenda that is equitable, inclusive and gender responsive.⁹⁶ The launch of the "Alliance for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Recovery" at the Ukraine Recovery Conference on 12 June 2024 in Berlin represents a promising step in this regard.⁹⁷

IV. Priority actions

A. Effective legal and policy frameworks, including temporary special measures to achieve parity

- Amend constitutions and relevant legal frameworks to guarantee parity between women and men in political, public, and economic decision-making.
- Adopt electoral and quota laws that set a 50 per cent target, and ensure their implementation with placement rules and sanctions for non-compliance.
- Appoint women to executive positions to achieve gender parity in local and national governments.
- Provide childcare, financial, and other institutional support to women candidates for national and/or local elections, as well as access to media advertising time, to ensure an equal level playing field for women and men candidates during political campaigns.
- Devise dedicated national action plans with concrete targets for equal and inclusive representation of women and men in political, public, and economic decision-making by 2030, to be implemented at national and local levels.
- Monitor progress through official statistics on women in decision-making in all sectors, policy areas, and levels, collected and published on a regular basis and included in regular reporting to the Committee.
- Adopt legislation to prevent and sanction gender-based violence, intimidation, and reprisals against women in political and public life.
- Adopt and effectively implement a range of regulations and temporary special measures for the public and private sectors to accelerate equal participation of women in decision-making and leadership, emphasizing the need for transformative actions to achieve parity.
- Set bold measures and targets for women's meaningful participation in all peace processes and ensure their enforcement, facilitating consultation and meaningful engagement with women from diverse backgrounds when addressing the crises and pursuing justice and accountability.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ UN Women (2015), "[Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325](#)".

⁹⁵ Ukraine's National Recovery Plan (National Recovery Council), Ukraine relief and reconstruction (European Commission), A Blueprint for the Reconstruction of Ukraine (CEPR), Designing Ukraine's Recovery in the Spirit of the Marshall Plan (German Marshall Fund), Relief, Recovery and Resilient Reconstruction (World Bank).

⁹⁶ Reliefweb (2023), "[Ukraine Recovery Conference: Gender Equality and Women's Leadership and Participation in the Recovery Process Must be Prioritized](#)".

⁹⁷ UN Women Europe and Central Asia (2024), "[Launch of Alliance for gender-responsive and inclusive recovery in Ukraine](#)".

⁹⁸ "[Alliance for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Recovery in Ukraine launches with strong support of governments, UN agencies, private sector and civil society](#)", 12 June 2024.

- Implement feminist foreign policy by prioritizing gender equality and women’s empowerment as a focus of government policy abroad. This includes enhancing women’s roles in conflict prevention, peace building, and countering violent extremism, promoting economic rights and empowerment for women, and ensuring protection of women’s sexual and reproductive health rights.

B. Building gender-sensitive institutions

- Parliaments should ensure that legislation addresses the needs and realities of both women and men, in all their diversity, and that parliamentary processes consider gender responsiveness. Here, the capabilities of parliaments, governments, and civil society organisations to integrate gender equality into all laws, policies, plans, and budgets should be strengthened, emphasizing the need for institutional change.
- Parliaments and government offices should commission or undertake gender audits of their institutions to assess gender-responsiveness. Achieving gender-sensitive institutions requires prioritising gender equality as a social, political and economic objective and transforming work and outputs, policies, processes, and practices, as well as the division of responsibilities and institutional cultures towards gender equality.⁹⁹
- Incentivise voluntary commitment of political and public institutions, including political parties, to advance women’s leadership, by, for example introducing internal voluntary quotas, codes of conduct or ethics, and by introducing zero tolerance to gender-based violence policies.
- Member States should implement Women, Peace, and Security commitments by promoting cross-sector coordination, and aiding in the creation of policies, programmes, and national action plans.
- Ensure that women and girls actively participate in and wield greater influence in fostering sustainable peace and resilience and have equal opportunities to participate in the security sector, peace building, recovery, and donor co-ordination processes.¹⁰⁰
- Empower women and women’s networks in political and public institutions as well as in the economic and private sector, by providing capacity building and skill development, facilitating networking opportunities and mentorship, securing access to financial and other resources, and developing inclusive and gender-sensitive institutional cultures.¹⁰¹
- Provide regular capacity building on gender equality to the judiciary and security sectors.
- Create an enabling environment and a regulatory framework for the free establishment and operation of women’s non-governmental organizations and maintain political, financial, and other support for women’s movements and activists, in all their diversity.¹⁰²
- Establish inclusive and innovative modalities for consulting with women’s civil society organizations, for example through online consultation or open invitations to testify at parliamentary committee hearings.
- Collect and monitor data on the percentage of women in the foreign service, as well as their levels of seniority, including in government delegations to international conferences;

⁹⁹ EIGE (2024), “Gender equality in the European Parliament and in national parliaments in the European Union: 2023 state of play”.

¹⁰⁰ UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025 describes their obligations in this regard, promoting cross-sector coordination, and aiding in the creation of exemplary policies, programs, and national action plans and UN Women and UN Women, Peace, Security and Resilience Annual Report 2022.

¹⁰¹ UN Women (2024), *Women’s Empowerment Strategy*.

¹⁰² UN Women (2023), *Building Power in Feminist and Women’s Movements to End Violence against Women and Girls: Learning from Civil Society Organizations Funded by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women*.

- Increase transparency in nomination and selection processes for positions of political, public, economic and other leadership, for example through public calls for applications, clear and comprehensive job descriptions, and merit-based selection procedures.
- Establish collective channels for women’s influence in political, public, and economic decision-making bodies, for example by supporting the establishment of gender equality caucuses, sections, and committees.

C. Addressing violence against women in politics and public life (VAWP)

- Recognize VAWP as a distinct form of gender-based violence.
- Implement legal frameworks on VAWP including technology-facilitated VAWP, online harassment and cyberbullying, and gender disinformation with digital manipulation.
- Provide redress to women victims of VAWP. Establish comprehensive support systems for women politicians and civil rights defenders who experience violence, including legal aid, counselling services, and protective measures.
- Introduce codes of conduct in parliament and government to set rules of appropriate behaviour to eliminate gender-based violence, intimidation, and harassment.
- Provide training on sexual harassment and VAWP to parliamentarians, ministers, and other government officials, as well as members of their staff, to ensure safe and gender-responsive working conditions in parliament and government.
- Act with due diligence to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish all forms of VAWP.
- Create and/or strengthen independent and confidential complaint mechanisms for VAWP, providing these mechanisms with sufficient independence and budgetary resources to reduce impunity for these acts.
- Adequately fund and conduct awareness-raising campaigns to change public discourse and promote understanding of the criminal nature of VAWP.
- Encourage social media companies to launch community guidelines tailored to protecting women in decision-making, with effective protection tools and hold them liable for unlawful user-generated content constituting gender-based violence against women in decision-making.
- Protect women’s civil society organizations, women human rights defenders, and other women activists from all forms of reprisals and ensure they have an enabling environment to carry out their work.

D. Changing social norms, addressing patriarchy and engaging men and other partners

- Conduct awareness-raising to enhance the understanding that full participation of women in political, public, economic, and private decision-making, on an equal basis with men, is essential for enjoyment of their human rights and benefits entire communities.
- Create an enabling environment for women’s political participation in political and public life by addressing the unpaid care burden faced by women.
- Enhance the capacity of media professionals to combat discriminatory gender stereotypes of women in political and public life and ensure that women and men standing for election and serving as decision-makers receive equal media visibility.¹⁰³
- Increase the availability of mentoring programmes for women wishing to enter decision-making roles.

¹⁰³ UN Women Media Compact (2016).

- Raise awareness of women and men role models in political, public, and economic decision-making, also facilitating access to leadership for diverse groups of women and girls.
 - Introduce targeted or specific policies to advance equal and inclusive decision-making that takes into account the distinct needs of diverse under-represented groups.
 - Engage men and youth, and other non-traditional partners, as allies and foster constructive discussion,¹⁰⁴ collaboration, and partnerships towards women rising to leadership and decision-making.¹⁰⁵
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¹⁰⁴ UN Women (2018), [HeForShe Emerging Solutions for Gender Equality](#).

¹⁰⁵ UN Women (2022), [Strategy for Public Partnerships and Resource Mobilization 2023-2025](#).