



WP4: The Alliance as an Engine for Human Capital

D4.6 Gendered Innovation Training and Mentoring Programme

MODULE 4
GENDER INEQUALITY in the context
of POLITICS

Script

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PART 1

Introduction

[SLIDE 2]

The underrepresentation of women in politics presents a significant democratic deficit that undermines the ideals of democracy and principles of equity. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) underscores that women should be ensured "*on equal terms with men, the right to... participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government.*"

[SLIDE 3]

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), widely considered the most comprehensive global agenda for advancing women's rights, states that women's equal participation in political life "*is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account.*"

[SLIDE 4]

In contemporary democratic societies committed to respect for human rights and provision of equal opportunities to all, so-called parity democracy aims to ensure equal representation of both genders in decision-making positions.

[SLIDE 5]

In September 2015, the 70th General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 goals to be accomplished by 2030. The fifth goal targets gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. Today, the UN estimates that it will take about 130 years to achieve full equality in decision-making positions. The COVID-19 pandemic, increasing economic and political instability, and the energy crisis, among other factors, have significantly set back plans for equality.

Even in countries where women's participation in parliaments, boards, and councils has increased, women still face discriminatory behaviour and sexism from their colleagues, the media, and citizens.

Gender, political rights, and women's suffrage

[SLIDE 8]

Women's participation in social, economic, and political life was never self-evident.

[SLIDE 9]

For centuries, women have been excluded from the public domain, which was traditionally reserved for men. The constructed hierarchy between the private and public spheres historically contributed to the formation of gendered power relations, leading to gender inequalities, including the denial of rights to women.

[SLIDE 10]

Citizenship encompasses civil, social, and political rights, all constitutionally guaranteed. Although political citizenship evolved during the 19th century and expanded towards universal suffrage including lower classes, women were excluded. Carole Pateman (*The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory*, Stanford University Press, 1989) confirms that the term "citizen" in 19th-century legal texts refers to men. She argues that the "social contract" of the modern bourgeois state is closely related to a "sexual contract" associated with women's oppression.

[SLIDE 11]

Do you know what suffrage is? Take a minute to think

[SLIDE 12]

Suffrage is women's right to vote.

[SLIDE 13]

The demand for women's political rights was first heard during the French Revolution and the European Revolutions of 1848. After 1869, certain provinces held by the British and Russian empires (e.g., New Zealand, Australia, and Finland) and some states in the USA (e.g., Wyoming and Utah) granted women the right to vote (suffrage). However, in most countries, women were not granted limited or full right to vote until the 20th century. Nevertheless, in some cases, women were selectively given and then stripped of this right. For example, in Sweden, conditional women's suffrage was in effect for a limited time during the Age of Liberty (1719–1772).

[SLIDE 14]

Differences between countries reflects differences in feminist actions, campaigns by women and their supporters, social changes, the will and electoral calculations of political parties, and other factors.

In Europe, Norway was the first country to grant women's suffrage in 1913, while in most European countries, this occurred in the interwar period (e.g., in 1918 in Germany and in 1919 in Austria and the Netherlands). In other cases, women had to wait even longer. For example, in France, women could not vote until 1944 and in Greece voting rights were extended to all women in 1952 although a law had given educated women in Greece the right to vote in local elections since 1930.

[SLIDE 15]

In 1948, the UN adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to Article 21, "everyone has the right to take part in the government of [their] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives".

[SLIDE 16]

The Convention on the Political Rights of Women adopted by the UN General Assembly went into force in 1954, enshrining the rights of women to vote, hold office, and access public services on equal terms with men.

[SLIDE 17]

The last European country to grant women's suffrage was Liechtenstein in 1984. In many countries worldwide, women of colour and indigenous women didn't win political rights until decades after white women, although the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 identified women's suffrage as a basic right.

PART 2

Women in politics

[SLIDE 3]

Do you know these women? Take a few minutes to think

[SLIDE 4]

Nefertiti was a queen of the 18th Dynasty of ancient Egypt, the wife of Pharaoh Akhenaten, but also one of his most important advisors. Some scholars believe that Nefertiti ruled briefly after her husband's death and before the ascension of Tutankhamun.

[SLIDE 5]

Theodora, although from humble origins, became the wife of Byzantine emperor Justinian. She was one of his chief advisors. She assisted her husband in decisions, plans, and political strategies, and she participated in state councils, sharing Justinian's vision of the Great Byzantine Empire.

[SLIDE 6]

Wu Zetian was the first and only female empress of China from 665 to 705 A.C., founder of the Wu Zhou Dynasty. She shaped a more efficient and less corrupt government, revitalized China's economy and culture and expanded China by conquering new lands in Korea and Central Asia.

[SLIDE 7]

Maria Theresa was the ruler of the Habsburg dominions from 1740 until her death in 1780, and the only woman to hold the position in her own right. Her 40-year reign was considered very successful. Her reforms transformed the empire into a modern state with a significant international standing.

[SLIDE 8]

In past societies, female rulers were few compared to men. History has long ignored these women, and when it did refer to them, it often focused mainly on their relationship with male relatives and on their appearance, ignoring their contributions. When history finally included more substantial information on women, it emphasised the "history of women" as if it were separate from global, national, and local history.

[SLIDE 9]

Similarly, political science delayed addressing the relationship between gender and politics. When women became active members in political life, their characteristics, political predisposition, and electoral behaviour were studied in comparison to men, legitimising gender as a factor of difference. Specific characteristics such as lack of political ambition or political interest, alienation from the political system, and low levels of political communication were attributed to women, ignoring that these are not exclusively female and that structural and societal factors during the process of political socialisation (e.g., class, ethnic background, religion, disabilities, sexuality, education, and place of residence) shape political interest, perceptions, and behaviours and often differently depending on gender.

[SLIDE 10]

The Gender Equality Index, developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality, shows that, although 'power' is the area where most progress has been made in the past 10 years in Europe, the political power gender gap remains largest in terms of full equality considering areas including health, money, work, time, and knowledge. With a score of 100 indicating gender balance, Sweden and France score over 80 on the 'political power' indicator, which is based on the share of women ministers, members of parliament (MPs) or members of regional assemblies. These countries are followed closely by the Netherlands (77.9) and Denmark (77.8). Within the previous decade, some EU Member States such as Austria, Belgium, France, and Spain made additional progress from existing high starting points. Others such as Portugal, Italy, and Lithuania have made significant progress despite their lower starting points.

[SLIDE 12]

Regarding women members of the European Parliament, they were only 15.9% of all members in the first directly elected European Parliament in 1979. This has risen steadily after each election, with four in 10 MPs being women as of February 2024. However, there are differences between Member States. A growing number of them have nearly equal representation by men and women in the European Parliament. However, fewer than a fourth of the European Parliament members from Romania, Cyprus and Greece are women, with Romania having the lowest representation at 15.2%. In Bulgaria, the share of women rose to 29.4% from 17.6% in the previous term of the European Parliament term.

[SLIDE 13]

Ursula von der Leyen is the first female President of the European Commission, elected in 2019. Having set a goal for a gender-balanced College of Commissioners, today 13 of 27 Commissioners are women (48.1%).

In all Member States national parliaments, the number of men surpasses that of women. The situation is similar at regional and local levels, underscoring that progress is slow.

[SLIDE 15]

The European Parliament does not have adequate data about the political representation of women from ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ women, or women with disabilities. However, evidence suggests that these groups are highly under-represented.

Regarding prime ministers and heads of states globally, the number of women is still very low. According to UN Women, in January 2023, the countries with the highest percentage of women cabinet ministers were Albania (66.7%), Finland (64.3%) and Spain (63.6%), while the countries with the lowest were Hungary (9.1%) and Czechia (7.1%). Significant gender differences are seen in ministers' portfolios. Men are more often assigned high profile portfolios such as foreign and internal affairs, defence and justice, and finance and industry, while women are more likely to be given socio-cultural portfolios such as health, education or social affairs.

Sexism and hate speech

[SLIDE 18]

Although female representation has increased steadily over the last quarter of the 20th century, parliaments remain dominated by men and often constitute an unsafe place for women. In October 2019, the proceedings of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament noted an alarming level of systematic sexism, sexual harassment, and gender-based violence against women in national parliaments, noting that these acts are not a new phenomenon.

Moreover, a study jointly conducted in 2018 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Inter-Parliamentary Union showed that, based on interviews with 123 female MPs and parliamentary staff in Council of Europe Member States:

- 85.2% had suffered psychological violence during their term of office,
- 67.9% had been the target of comments relating to their physical appearance or based on gender stereotypes,
- 58.2% had been the target of online sexist attacks on social networks,

- 46.9% had received death threats or threats of rape or beating,
- 24.7% had suffered sexual violence,
- 14.8% had suffered physical violence,
- those under the age of 40 were more frequently subject to psychological and sexual harassment,
- those actively fighting against gender inequality and violence were often singled out for attack, and
- the perpetrators of harassment and violence were not only political opponents but also colleagues from the women's own parties as well as ordinary citizens.

The study also revealed the low level of reporting of these incidents to the police, the parliament's security department, or other departments.

[SLIDE 19]

Women in politics also face sexist and discriminatory treatment by the media. Journal reports often emphasise women's "traditional" roles, focus on their appearance, and perpetuate stereotypes of women politicians as weak, indecisive, and emotional. These stereotypes are fuelled by the dominant view of politics as a domain of "experts" (presuming that women are not) and a men's realm. The stereotypes affect women's self-evaluation of their abilities, often resulting in a feeling of lesser political competence or knowledge compared to men. This, along with factors such as the perceived costs and risks of running for office, family responsibilities, lack of political networks, and sexism that women face affects their choices and discourages women from engaging in politics. Moreover, women's misrepresentation in media or sexist media reports can discourage political parties from selecting women as candidates and affect the way voters see female candidates.

A woman's CV, when presented by the media, is often filled with unnecessary information, such as her personal or family status, preferences, and hobbies. Two recent examples are that of Kamala Harris and Sanna Marin. Harris is the first black woman, of Asian origin, serving as USA Vice President. Her appearance in a photoshoot for American Vogue has been a topic of great interest to journalists. In the case of Finnish Prime Minister Marin, a photo of her with a bare décolleté under her jacket was widely criticised in the media. Criticism is also directed at women regarding their policies. For example, Margaret Thatcher became known as the "Iron Lady", a term often used in a derogatory manner in reference to her whereas a similar nickname for a man suggests strength.

Policies and practices for promoting gender balance in politics

[SLIDE 22]

There are many arguments that support increasing women's political participation. These are typically related to the following:

- a) women account for half of the population and therefore have the right to be represented equally;
- b) women's experiences and interests differ from men's and, consequently, women should be represented to articulate women's interests, and their voices should be considered in policy making and implementation (this argument is problematic in that it considers men and women as separately homogeneous groups and also implies that women's advancement of issues important to women takes precedence over their party affiliation or party loyalty); and
- c) equal representation of women and men is expected to enhance democratisation of governance.

[SLIDE 23]

Western countries promote gender equality and equity with legal regulations, affirmative measures, and the establishment of institutions that focus specifically on these issues.

[SLIDE 24]

Two types of representation can be achieved through gender equality in politics: descriptive and substantive. The first refers to achieving the requisite numbers of women in political leadership to represent the characteristics and experiences of women, while the second to the effects that can be achieved regarding the interests of all people through greater representation of women.

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However, it is often questionable whether legislation and measures taken significantly combat gender inequality or if they are merely a modernisation of it.

[SLIDE 26]

The gender equality policies of the European Union (EU) have been articulated along three main axes; legal guarantee of equality; promotion of equality through affirmative actions and programs for equal opportunities; and the integration of gender mainstreaming into all EU policies.

Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome (1957) focusing on equal payment for equal work is considered the foundation for European action regarding gender equality. In the early

1990s, the EU's approach to gender equality was still focused on ensuring equal treatment of women and men in employment.

The Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 was a breakthrough in the EU's approach to gender issues, introducing gender mainstreaming for the first time in the text of a treaty. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy to improve the quality of public policies, ensuring a more efficient allocation of resources resulting in improved well-being for both women and men, and the creation of a more socially just and sustainable society. In this context, the Treaty emphasised equal opportunities throughout society and women's participation in economic, social, and political decision-making.

In the years following, a debate ensued regarding whether this policy should be complementary or alternative to measures that specifically aim at increasing women's participation in politics (affirmative measures).

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The European Institute for Gender Equality, European Women's Lobby and Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly have identified good practices that legislators, governments, parliaments, political parties, and civil society can implement to improve gender balance in political representation. These include both "hard" or specific measures that are integrated into the concept of restorative equality (e.g., changing electoral systems and legislating gender quotas) and "soft" or general measures taken to enhance women's status (e.g., ensuring better access to education and the labour market; introducing voluntary party quotas; and providing training, mentoring, funding, and other support for women candidates, particularly those having restricted access to key resources and to women from underrepresented minorities).

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Gender quotas are numerical targets in legislatures specifying the number of women that must be included in candidate lists or the number of seats in national parliaments or international political bodies to be allocated to women. Quotas set the threshold for gender participation rates and are temporary. Their advocates support that they are an effective way of getting more women candidates and more women elected, creating a more democratic political system. However, quotas have troubled the feminist movement regarding their limited duration and the possibility that they could legally reinforce inequality since women's increased participation results from some kind of negotiation.

In the EU, there are two types of gender quotas: a) legislated, which are implemented through electoral law reforms and require all parties to nominate a certain proportion of women candidates on their electoral lists, and b) voluntary, which refer to political parties' commitments to include a certain percentage of women party members

among candidates. EU countries vary regarding which they implement with some implementing both. Within both legislative and voluntary quotas, the zipper system, known as "vertical parity," is a type of gender quota that requires 50% of the candidates on party lists in proportional representation electoral systems to be women. Regarding the 2024 European elections, the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 focuses on actions that promote women's participation as voters and candidates through funding and exchange of best practices.

Conclusion

[SLIDE 31]

Doubtless, women's increased political participation is positive for women as individuals and as politicians, as well as for political parties. More importantly, it has positive impact on society. Women tend to work collaboratively across party lines even on highly charged issues, prioritising topics that are good for everyone including: equal access to quality education, health and housing; parental leave and childcare; electoral reform; conflict resolution; and issues of gender equality such as the elimination of gender-based violence.

[SLIDE 32]

Civil society, state organisations, and media must eliminate gender stereotypes regarding women's participation in politics to achieve equal participation in political life. Moreover, provision of mentoring to women as well as targeted support and training to run for office, including equal access to campaign funding, are essential. For example, France and Portugal link the amount of public funding of parties to the degree to which they strengthen women's roles within them. Political parties are also urged to adopt a statement on gender equality in their founding documents and put it into practice, giving women candidates a clear positive message. Parliaments must also take actions to ensure a 'woman-friendly' environment by changing male-centric working practices and combating harassment and sexual abuse.