Democratic Governance and Gender Equality in Europe and Central Asia

What are the challenges?

Legislative and electoral reforms introduced during the transition process in Europe and Central Asia have made societies more inclusive. Legal and policy frameworks promote and protect the civil, political and social rights of women and men.

Despite the progress achieved, challenges remain. The integration of gender perspectives in policy formulation processes remains insufficient and ineffective. In all countries across the region, women are underrepresented at all levels of decision making and they face a number of challenges that prevent their effective participation in government. These include:

- Cultural stereotypes and perceptions that politics is a hostile environment unsuitable for women undermine women’s interest in political participation and governance. They also create barriers to women’s career advancement and their appointment to high-level decision-making positions.
- Male dominant and patterns in society limit women’s opportunities in political participation and leadership.
- Caring responsibilities, limited time and family demands discourage mothers from entering politics or make them postpone that decision until their children are grown.
- Economic dependence and restricted access to resources and to business networks make it harder for women to raise funds to campaign for political office.
- The structure and organization of political parties often enable the unequal treatment of women, especially when determining candidate lists ahead of elections.
- Gender-based violence, including physical, economic and psychological violence, is a significant impediment to women’s political participation at all levels.

MATTERS OF FACT

In the ECA region, the proportion of seats held by women in lower and upper houses of parliaments stands at **19.6 percent**, which is well below the critical mass of 30 percent considered necessary for women to contribute meaningfully to politics. This figure masks wide regional variations ranging from **9.4 percent** in Ukraine to **34.1 percent** in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Women are also **underrepresented** as heads of states, in government ministries, courts, political parties and local government bodies. Women face **discriminatory practices at all levels**. Less than **35 percent** of women ministers are given responsibility for the economy, infrastructure, foreign or internal affairs, which are considered ‘men’s issues’.

Women in Causeni in Moldova discuss their policy concerns with the Women’s Caucus in the Parliament. (Photo: UNDP Moldova)
UNDP Responses

In response to these challenges, UNDP works with national partners to:

- Support legal and institutional frameworks that promote the participation and leadership of women in decision-making across in government.
- Promote initiatives that make parliaments more sensitive to the needs of women and men. These include analysing how proposed budgets and laws will address and respond to the specific needs of women and men.
- Invest in applied policy research to identify and promote best practices that ensure inclusive policy-making processes.
- Promote the rule of law, justice, security and human rights by improving access to justice and justice services, and promoting women’s rights.
- Support women parliamentarians, gender caucuses and political parties.
- Strengthen advocacy and partnerships by supporting civil society and women’s networks.

UNDP in Action

- At the regional level, UNDP has published a report on the impact of women’s parliamentary networks in Europe and Central Asia.¹

- In Armenia, UNDP led a joint initiative by multiple UN agencies to support the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in assessing the results of the Gender Policy Strategic Action Plan for 2011-2015. This paved the way for a new five-year National Framework and Action Plan on gender equality, aligned with Armenia's international commitments.

- In Moldova, UNDP support to women leaders and voter education campaigns was among the factors that led to 20 more women being elected as mayors compared to previous elections and to the historic election of two Roma women as local councillors. Gender-sensitive trainings for election administrators also resulted in a 10 percent increase in the number of women in leadership positions in district councils.

- In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNDP partnered with UN Women and women’s rights organizations to amend the electoral law and increase gender quotas in parliament to 40 percent.

- In Kyrgyzstan, UNDP developed a Gender Rating Analysis of Political Parties in the October 2015 parliamentary elections to promote gender mainstreaming in the activities and campaigns of the political parties and to offer a gender-screening tool for MPs. Gender-related parliamentary initiatives were also implemented through the project Women as Peaceful Voters and Women as Candidates, supported by the UN Peacebuilding Support Office. After the elections, UNDP mobilized women MPs elected to serve as mentors to the new generation of women politicians at the local level and in rural areas.

- In Albania, 26 newly established municipalities were supported by UNDP to integrate gender concerns in the development of local operational plans through the collection of sex-disaggregated data, gender analysis, gender responsive priority setting, and specific interventions geared towards achieving greater gender equality. Moreover, women's participation was promoted and ensured in working groups on priorities and town hall meetings.


Women and representatives of the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Communal Services discuss results of the energy audit and energy management systems in Turkmenistan. (Photo: UNDP Turkmenistan)