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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

The role of parliaments in achieving parity in decision-making and ensuring gender-responsive access to justice for women and girls

A parliamentary event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN-Women
at the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Wednesday, 11 March 2026, UN Headquarters, ECOSOC chamber, New York

CONCEPT NOTE AND PROVISIONAL AGENDA

Introduction

Access to decision-making remains one of the most persistent and structural barriers to the full realization of women's and girls' rights worldwide. Globally, women make up less than one-third of members of parliament (MPs), less than a quarter of cabinet ministers and lead fewer than 30 countries. At the same time, more than 2.5 billion women and girls are affected by unequal laws or a lack of legal protection, denying them access to justice.¹ Women enjoy, on average, less than two-thirds of the legal rights of men, and no country has yet achieved full legal equality.² Even where gender-equal laws exist, implementation remains a challenge: globally, countries have established less than two-fifths of the supportive frameworks needed to implement and enforce those laws.³ This combination of legal gaps, implementation challenges and underrepresentation of women in decision-making spheres undermines the representative role of legislatures and rule of law, and erodes trust in justice institutions and systems.

Women's and girls' access to rights is persistently undermined by structural and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and gender inequalities that shape laws, institutions and agency. Decision-making institutions and justice systems are affected by gender stereotyping, discriminatory laws and procedural practices, and unequal power relations, as well as by a failure to systematically ensure that judicial mechanisms are physically, economically, socially and culturally accessible. These factors create persistent obstacles for women and girls in claiming and exercising their rights. Such barriers undermine the justiciability, accessibility and quality of justice, and limit women's access to timely, effective and gender-responsive remedies, including protection, reparations and accountability. As a result, women frequently encounter delays, impunity, ineffective enforcement and inadequate redress, perpetuating discrimination and inequality.⁴

These challenges are not experienced uniformly. Women and girls face intersecting and compounded forms of discrimination based on factors such as socioeconomic status, poverty, ethnicity, indigenous or minority status, disability, age, migration status or displacement, sexual orientation, geographic location and exposure to crisis or conflict. These intersecting inequalities are further reinforced by stigmatization, lack of information, economic dependence and fear of retaliation, which disproportionately restrict access to decision-making and justice. Even where legal protections exist, gender stereotypes, stigma, harmful patriarchal norms and the risk of gender-based violence deter many women from running for office, seeking justice or exercising their rights, particularly where justice processes may expose them to further harm or marginalization. Discriminatory legal remedies that favour perpetrators, such as provisions allowing a rapist to avoid criminal prosecution by

¹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *Equality in law for women and girls by 2030: A multistakeholder strategy for accelerated action* (UN-Women, 2019).

² World Bank, *Executive Summary: Women, Business and the Law 2024* (World Bank, 2024), xvii–xxi.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), *General Recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice* (CEDAW Committee, 2015).



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marrying the survivor, codify discrimination in law by systematically denying women's bodily autonomy, normalizing impunity and entrenching harmful gender norms, fundamentally undermining women's rights.

In conflict-affected settings, the breakdown of institutions and essential service delivery exacerbates pre-existing gender inequalities and deepens gender gaps in decision-making and access to justice and protection. Beyond conflict situations, climate change constitutes a profound challenge, acting as a multiplier that exacerbates structural inequalities, fuels displacement and insecurity, and undermines women's ability to exercise their rights, access essential services and participate in decision-making.⁵ It is estimated that around 80% of people displaced by climate change are women.⁶ As a result, women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change, which heightens their exposure to multiple risks and amplifies underlying inequalities that can constrain their access to justice and protection.

Ensuring equal access to decision-making and justice for women and men, therefore, requires comprehensive, intersectional and systemic responses that seek to advance legislative frameworks, address both discriminatory laws and practices as well as the structural barriers that prevent their effective implementation, including within plural and informal justice systems. Parliaments play a central role in this effort. They are uniquely positioned to align national laws with international human rights standards and repeal discriminatory legislation, while ensuring that legal measures address the intersectional, gendered factors that limit access to decision-making and justice.

Parliamentary action is also critical in closing the persistent gap between legal commitments and lived realities. By strengthening oversight of justice institutions and ensuring that justice systems are well-resourced, accessible and accountable, parliaments can help ensure that laws deliver tangible outcomes.

Equally important is the framework in which these laws and processes are shaped. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has consistently underlined that gender-sensitive parliaments, grounded in gender parity in representation and influence, are essential to effective, inclusive and representative governance. Gender-sensitive parliaments founded on a commitment to parity are better equipped to identify and address structural inequalities, challenge discriminatory norms embedded in law and practice, and ensure that intersectional discrimination is not overlooked in legislative and policy processes. Parliaments that are founded on inclusion are more likely to advance justice reforms that respond to the lived realities of women and girls in all their diversity and strengthen equality before the law.

Objective

The Parliamentary Meeting on *The role of parliaments in achieving parity in decision-making and ensuring gender-responsive access to justice for women and girls* will provide an opportunity to bring a parliamentary perspective into the discussions on the [priority and review themes](#) of the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70). Members of parliament from around the world, both women and men, will share perspectives and practices on legislative, oversight and budgetary actions to achieve parity in decision-making, eliminate discriminatory laws, address gaps between legal frameworks and their implementation, combat impunity for violence against women, and strengthen accountability and enforcement across justice systems. The meeting will also underscore the importance of intersectional approaches and of gender-sensitive, parity parliaments in ensuring that justice reforms respond to the lived realities of women and girls in all their diversity and contribute to building justice systems that are resilient, accessible and rights-based.

⁵ UN-Women, "[Explainer: how gender inequality and climate change are interconnected](#)" (27 February 2022).

⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "[Climate change exacerbates violence against women and girls](#)" (12 July 2022).



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Date and time

The parliamentary meeting will be held in person in the ECOSOC Chamber at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 10:00 to 17:30 on Wednesday, 11 March 2026.

Interpretation will be provided in English, French, Arabic and Spanish.

Chair: President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians

Provisional agenda

09:45–10:00 **Arrival of delegates**

10:00–10:20 **Opening remarks and official launch of the map *Women in Politics: 2026***

- Welcome remarks by the Chair
- IPU representative
- UN Women representative

10:20–12:45 **Session 1: Advancing access to justice for all women and girls – intersectional approaches and parliamentary action**

This session will focus on how parliaments can strengthen access to justice for all women and girls by addressing discriminatory laws and practices, closing gaps between law and implementation, and responding to intersecting and compounded forms of discrimination founded on harmful social norms and stereotypes. It will examine justice systems broadly, including formal, informal and plural mechanisms, and consider how parliamentary and multistakeholder action can, *inter alia*, advance legal equality, combat impunity for violence against women and remove structural barriers that limit access to remedies, protection and accountability. Access to justice in the context of political instability, displacement, climate-related disasters, post-conflict settings, and other forms of crisis will also be examined. The session will also provide the opportunity to take stock of the *Equality in law for women and girls by 2030* multistakeholder strategy, through a presentation of key findings and progress achieved to date, the remaining legal and implementation gaps and the priority areas for accelerated action to ensure legal equality for women and girls.

Following introductory presentations, a moderated debate will invite participants to respond to the following guiding questions:

- *What steps can parliaments take to identify and repeal discriminatory laws and legal provisions, and ensure alignment with international human rights standards?*
- *What are the key structural and intersectional barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing justice, even where rights-affirming legal frameworks exist?*
- *What legislative, oversight and budgetary tools can parliaments use to strengthen enforcement, accountability and effective access to justice by all women and girls?*
- *What are the good practices from parliaments in reversing discriminatory laws and practices that deprive women and girls of legal equality and the full enjoyment of their rights?*
- *How can parliaments ensure that justice mechanisms respond to the lived realities of women and girls in all their diversity, including in contexts of violence, crisis, climate change and conflict?*



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12:45–15:00

Lunch break

15:00–17:00

Session 2: Gender-sensitive, parity parliaments as institutions of change: Reflections on the CSW70 Review Theme (CSW65 Agreed Conclusions)

Gender parity in parliament is a precondition for advancing gender equality outcomes and closing persistent gaps in women's political participation. To complement discussions about the CSW70 Review Theme, following the presentation of the forthcoming IPU *Women in Parliament: 2026* report, the session will explore strategies for achieving gender parity in parliamentary composition, leadership and influence to shape legislative priorities, oversight and resource allocation, ensuring women's equal political participation and impact in decision-making. The session will examine how parliaments can advance policies and institutional reforms that ensure equal access for women and men to leadership positions, rights and justice.

Following introductory presentations, a moderated debate will invite participants to discuss the following guiding questions:

- *What are the good practices from parliaments in prioritizing gender-responsive reforms and action in reaching parity?*
- *How can parliaments ensure that women's political participation is safe, equal and meaningful, including by preventing and addressing violence, harassment and intimidation against women in politics?*
- *What capacities and resources are parliaments missing to be able to deliver more gender-responsive legislation and policies?*
- *What partnerships have been proven helpful for parliaments on their path to reaching parity?*

17:00–17:30

Wrap up and concluding remarks