



Resolution 2111 (2016)¹

Assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly notes that, in spite of political commitments and legal obligations under international equality and non-discrimination standards, women are still vastly underrepresented in politics in most Council of Europe member States. In almost one third of them, the proportion of women among members of parliament does not reach 20%. Such low levels hinder the representative nature of elected bodies. It is time to step up efforts in order to address this issue. Whenever member States review their regulations governing elections, they should adopt measures to promote the participation of women that are able to have both a significant impact and be sustainable in the longer term.
2. Electoral quotas are the most effective means of achieving significant, rapid progress, provided that they are correctly designed and consistently implemented. Quotas should be adapted to the electoral system in force, set ambitious targets and be coupled with stringent sanctions for non-compliance.
3. Accompanying measures are also needed to help women overcome the hurdles they face in accessing and progressing in political life. They include training and awareness-raising activities, media time reserved for women politicians, policies to help reconcile private life and political activities and, last but not least, legislation and other measures in favour of more balanced sharing of family responsibilities between women and men.
4. Political factors determining women's participation in public life include the electoral system; political parties and their statutes; candidate selection criteria; positive measures such as quotas, whether legal or voluntary; regulations; and the work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and associations. The most important factor is the enshrinement in the constitution of the principle of gender equality, subsequently reflected in legislation and in the action of governments and institutions.
5. Relevant social factors are the welfare system, parental leave schemes, the sharing of care and household duties, measures to balance work and family life and pension schemes.
6. Among the economic factors, the gender pay gap and access to professions and careers are particularly relevant, as is the financing of small businesses.
7. Cultural factors determine women's ability to participate in political life and in the economic and social development of a country. Education and training are crucial, as they are a precondition for acquiring the necessary skills and for eradicating the stereotypes which still prevent the achievement of full and real parity. These stereotypes are often related to a limited vision of women as mothers, with the role of homemaker.
8. For women who are active in politics, access to the media, representation and media time allocated during electoral campaigns are crucial elements, as is campaign funding.
9. These elements should not be considered separately, as they are in fact closely intertwined. The right approach to achieving full gender equality in political life is a global, holistic one, encompassing quantitative and qualitative measures with a gender perspective in all areas of society.

1. *Assembly debate* on 21 April 2016 (16th Sitting) (see [Doc. 14011](#), report of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Ms Elena Centemero). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 21 April 2016 (16th Sitting).



10. Progress in the area of women's political representation has been achieved, in particular by means of reforms introducing equal constitutional rights such as the right to vote and to be elected, the right of access to public office and other fundamental rights and freedoms, such as the right to property, inheritance, marriage, citizenship, etc. These constitutional rights are aimed at removing discrimination on grounds of gender or any other discrimination limiting equal citizenship. Provisions on political and civil rights for women in various constitutions are essential because they pave the way for gender equality and for equal citizenship and are the foundation for more specific action for equality.

11. The electoral system has an impact on women's political representation. Even if quotas are not applied, various electoral systems will in themselves work differently when it comes to the representation of women. Systems that are entirely or partially based on proportional representation appear to be more effective in promoting the election of female candidates than plurality/majority systems based entirely on single-member constituencies.

12. The Assembly reiterates that political parties have a crucial role to play in improving women's political representation. As they are in charge of submitting electoral lists and supporting the candidates, political parties are gatekeepers of elected positions and their choices determine to a large extent the final outcome of elections as concerns gender-balanced representation.

13. The media are also key players in determining the visibility of candidates and the general image of women. They should avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes, which are a barrier to the access of women to political life. They should also guarantee fair and proportionate coverage to political candidates based on gender quotas.

14. The Assembly underlines the importance of the gender dimension in election observation missions. It is committed to promoting this dimension with its international partner organisations in the framework of election observation missions both concerning the composition of missions, which should be gender balanced, and the observation reports which should systematically include a specific focus on women's participation in all stages of the electoral process.

15. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as partners for democracy, to spare no effort to increase women's political representation. Recognising the positive effect of the implementation of parity, they should, in particular:

- 15.1. consider introducing the principle of parity into their constitution or into their electoral legislation;
- 15.2. with regard to quotas and other positive measures:
 - 15.2.1. include, if possible, in the legislation on the functioning of political parties regulations on the nomination of candidates aimed at ensuring equal gender representation;
 - 15.2.2. introduce applicable sanctions for non-compliance with positive measures, such as the rejection of lists of candidates; ensure that independent bodies such as electoral courts or commissions supervise the implementation of quotas and other positive measures and apply sanctions; allocate adequate financial and human resources to ensure the proper functioning of relevant bodies;
 - 15.2.3. attempt to introduce electoral legislation based on strict placement mandates or pairs of candidates of the opposite gender;
 - 15.2.4. regularly monitor the impact of the implementation of quotas and other positive measures aimed at increasing the political representation of women and propose relevant recommendations;
 - 15.2.5. encourage political parties to ensure transparency in procedures for the selection of candidates and enhance women's representation through gender-balanced candidate nomination boards and internal decision-making bodies at all levels;
 - 15.2.6. encourage political parties to enhance women's participation, including through women's and men's associations, capacity-building efforts and mechanisms to support women in campaign financing;
- 15.3. with regard to accompanying measures:
 - 15.3.1. encourage parliaments and other elected bodies to adopt measures to reconcile their activities with the private life of members, such as compatible session and voting times, and childcare services;

15.3.2. promote training and awareness-raising activities on gender equality targeting politicians irrespective of their gender; encourage political parties and other organisations to provide training for women politicians;

15.3.3. consider introducing incentives to increase awareness of women in politics among the media, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in order to ensure fair coverage of women in politics in the media;

15.3.4. ensure that part of the public funding of political parties, when applicable, is reserved for activities aimed at promoting women's participation and political representation and guarantee transparency in the use of the funds;

15.4. with regard to electoral management and observation:

15.4.1. ensure that electoral commissions apply provisions on gender equality in the electoral process and involve them in the legislative process when reviewing electoral legislation;

15.4.2. strengthen co-operation with international election observation missions as regards the participation of women in the electoral process and provide them with comprehensive information and gender-disaggregated data;

15.5. with regard to research and data collection:

15.5.1. promote research and data collection on women's participation in political life at national, regional and local levels;

15.5.2. promote the collection of gender-disaggregated statistical data by electoral management bodies and relevant administrations;

15.5.3. regularly assess the impact of national legislation and policies aimed at increasing women's political participation and, when needed, propose the relevant amendments;

15.5.4. collect, by means of surveys and research, data on the way in which men and women vote in order to identify, analyse and assess how men and women support candidates of their own gender;

15.6. with regard to civil society:

15.6.1. recognise the role of civil society and involve NGOs in designing, promoting and monitoring measures to increase women's political representation, particularly as concerns awareness-raising campaigns, training activities and monitoring of the implementation of these measures;

15.6.2. encourage and support NGOs involved in the area of elections to monitor and report on women's participation in the electoral processes.

16. The Assembly supports the principle of gender parity, which represents a further step beyond positive measures and the ultimate goal in political representation. Consistent enforcement of such a principle requires the State to go beyond positive measures and ensure equal representation of women and men in elected bodies and other institutions at all levels.