



**A COMPARATIVE STUDY  
OF STRUCTURES FOR WOMEN  
MPS IN THE OSCE REGION**

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**Front page photo:** A press conference “For Equality in Policy!” held in May 2007 in front of the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, organized by public associations and an initiative group of citizens.

**Credit:** Eric Gurlan

This study was commissioned by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The opinions and information it contains do not necessarily reflect the policy and position of ODIHR.

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# Executive summary

While the goal of gender parity in parliamentary representation has not yet generally been achieved, women have still managed to make a significant contribution to the political landscape across the OSCE region. Policy and legislative change on gender equality issues, for example, has frequently been the result of concerted, collaborative efforts between women inside and outside parliament.

As a first of its kind in the OSCE region, this study is concerned with the presence and operation of dedicated women's parliamentary bodies (alternatively referred to as parliamentary structures for women members of parliament (MPs)) that promote gender equality and women's representation. Women's parliamentary bodies are a particular form of gender mainstreaming infrastructure commonly initiated by women parliamentarians in order to promote solidarity, enhance parliamentary capacity, and advance women's policy interests.<sup>1</sup> Where they have been established and retained, women's parliamentary bodies have been recognized as important forums for advancing gender equality issues, for facilitating cross-party co-operation and agreement on legislative priorities, and for influencing political agendas from a gender perspective within parliaments.<sup>2</sup>

This study is the result of a research commissioned by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) across parliaments in the OSCE region between June and December 2012 to identify the different types of women's parliamentary bodies in existence. Within the framework of the ODIHR project "Strengthening parliamentary structures for women MPs in the OSCE region", parliaments were surveyed on good practices in establishing and running such structures, as well as on the international and OSCE support provided to them. The project forms part of, and directly feeds into, ODIHR's broader programming on women's political participation and parliamentary strengthening.

The study initially identifies the women's parliamentary bodies that have been established in the OSCE region. In particular the study finds that, among the 36 OSCE participating States

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1 Sonia Palmieri, *Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice*, Reports and Documents No. 65 (Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011).

2 Anna Mahoney, "Politics of Presence: A Study of Women's Legislative Caucuses in the 50 States", State Politics and Policy Conference Dartmouth, Hanover, New Hampshire, 2011.

surveyed, there are 16 structures for women MPs currently functioning.<sup>3</sup> These bodies appear to be structured and organized in a variety of ways across the OSCE region, indicating that there is no one model for success.

But what conditions favour the establishment of these parliamentary bodies in the first place? Are there any enabling factors that can support women MPs in establishing such structures? While the type of parliamentary and political system in place does not appear to affect directly the emergence of a women's parliamentary body, the study finds that the political environment can influence what type of body emerges. Likewise, the existence of legal gender quotas or voluntary measures to support women's election to parliament does not appear to be a direct indicator of the likelihood that a women's parliamentary body will be established. Nonetheless, many women's parliamentary bodies have played a key role in advocating for the introduction of gender quota provisions in electoral laws, in lobbying for amendments to gender quota provisions, and/or in monitoring the implementation of quota provisions.

As regards potential enabling factors, the study recognizes and highlights the important role played by women's movements. Women's movements and organizations often facilitate the establishment of women's parliamentary bodies, providing women MPs with expertise and first-hand knowledge of gender issues, and connecting them to the electorate. Furthermore, women's movements often serve as the institutional memory of past achievements, current realities, and lessons learned in the struggle for women's rights and gender equality.

Having identified women's parliamentary structures in existence in the OSCE region, the study goes on to map their mandates, structures, activities and memberships. The main finding here is the broadly informal nature of these bodies across the OSCE region, with meetings scheduled only as required, and limited dedicated financial and logistical support provided to these bodies. Notwithstanding the informal structure of these bodies, their approach towards leadership and procedure is more commonly observed as formalized. Agendas are typically circulated in advance of a meeting, written rules determine meeting procedure, and leadership terms are often fixed. Membership options differ widely: while some bodies include men, others prefer to restrict their membership to women only. With respect to objectives, it was found that women's parliamentary bodies are overwhelmingly committed to influencing policy and legislation from a gender perspective, and to lobbying on gender equality issues.

On the basis of these findings, the study outlines good practices, and identifies challenges as well as lessons learned in relation to the establishment and operation of women's parliamentary bodies. The study finds that political party *discipline* remains a significant challenge for women who wish to co-operate across party lines, but does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle per se. Where women's parliamentary bodies focus on specific gender issues, they are often able to work within parliamentary environments characterized by strong party discipline. This is particularly evident when they focus on issues where parties themselves do not have conflicting ideological or political stances. By contrast, parliamentary environments characterized by strong political *polarization* are shown to render cross-party communication and co-operation extremely difficult.

The study concludes by presenting an eight-step framework for action and a number of recommendations aimed at strengthening women's parliamentary bodies and the way in which

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3 A similar structure was also surveyed in the Assembly of Kosovo, thus bringing the total number of structures to 17. All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, its institutions, or population, in this text should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.



parliaments work with them. In particular, women's parliamentary bodies are encouraged to work towards building consensus on issues that can be supported across the political spectrum, and to develop and maintain strong relationships both inside and outside the parliament – notably with other organizations that work towards the achievement of gender equality. Parliaments, in turn, are urged to support the work of these parliamentary bodies, for example, by implementing pro-active policies to increase the number of women MPs and promote them to leadership positions within the parliament. At the same time, parliaments should provide adequate resources to these bodies. Where resources are not available, they should facilitate the meetings of women's parliamentary bodies and encourage the establishment of stronger links between these bodies and the more institutionalized organs of the parliament, such as dedicated committees on gender equality, social policy issues or human rights, and/or other institutions of parliamentary leadership.

Overall, the study aims to help women MPs in the OSCE region interested in strengthening their role within their respective parliaments through mechanisms such as women's parliamentary bodies, and to promote a greater understanding of the value and functioning of these bodies. This is intended as a first step towards the implementation of future projects and research on the topic, to further advance women's political participation and their substantive representation within national parliaments.

# Introduction: Institution building for gender equality

In 2013, women held just over 20 per cent of the seats in national parliaments worldwide; in the OSCE region, this figure has currently reached 24.4 per cent in lower houses of parliament.<sup>4</sup> While the march towards gender equality in political life continues, at the very least this figure acknowledges women's now irreversible place in politics. To support this trend, OSCE participating States have agreed, through a series of commitments, to "encourage and promote equal opportunity for full participation by women in all aspects of political and public life, in decision-making processes and in international co-operation in general."<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, scope for even greater change in the way parliamentary institutions themselves are structured and run still remains. A consistent finding in research on women in parliaments is that the onus for continued change – in terms of increasing the number of women elected, eradicating the 'masculine' culture of parliament, and making 'substantive' legislative change in favour of gender equality – is on women.<sup>6</sup> Where parliaments have made steps towards these milestones, more often than not it has been because of the tireless work of women members of parliament (MPs).

As Childs, Lovenduski and Campbell have argued, laying the responsibility for such change at the hands of women alone sets up 'unhealthy expectations' of women parliamentarians.<sup>7</sup> When these expectations are not met, women's contribution to the political sphere is questioned: "why do we need women in parliament?"<sup>8</sup>

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4 Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in national parliaments*, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>, accessed July 2013.

5 Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, 1991, Art. 40.8.

6 Julie Ballington, *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*, Reports and Documents No. 54 (Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2008).

7 Sarah Childs, Joni Lovenduski, and Rosie Campbell, *Women at the Top: 2005 Changing Numbers, Changing Politics?* (London: Hansard Society, 2005).

8 See the 2012 debate on women's participation in parliament initiated by Joshua Foust and Melinda Haring: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/22/who\\_cares\\_how\\_many\\_women\\_are\\_in\\_parliament](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/22/who_cares_how_many_women_are_in_parliament) and the response from Susan Markham, Director of the National Democratic Institute: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/29/the\\_missing\\_50\\_percent](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/29/the_missing_50_percent).

For some researchers, the proportion of women in parliament makes a difference. Based on the work of Kanter, the commonly cited ‘critical mass’ target has presented commentators with the promise of difference (e.g., that women will change the institution, will introduce more gender-sensitive legislation, will be represented in positions of parliamentary and political leadership) once they represent at least 30 per cent of the legislature.<sup>9</sup> The theory has come under pressure, however, considering that women parliamentarians do not act in isolation of the institutions in which they work, and that parliaments are ‘gendered institutions’. That is, parliaments, having been dominated by men since their creation, have historically tended to resist the equal participation of women and have often perpetuated established norms about what is appropriate work for men and women.<sup>10</sup>

A more comprehensive line of inquiry focuses on the role of the parliament itself in addressing gender equality. Not only does this shift the weight of responsibility for change from women to the institution as a whole, but it also provides an opportunity for more systemic and sustainable change. The question is now more about the circumstances under which the institution allows for or facilitates change, rather than how many women are needed to achieve it. Parliamentary institutions and procedures – and their level of gender-sensitivity – can play an important role in supporting MPs in exercising the power entrusted to them by the electorate. One effective way to do so could be through the establishment of mechanisms, or infrastructure, that allow all parliamentarians – men and women – to work towards gender equality. Such infrastructure might come in the form of a women’s caucus, a dedicated committee on gender equality, or an advisory group on gender issues. Accordingly, this study looks in detail at one type of gender mainstreaming infrastructure – parliamentary structures for women MPs – and how these structures can make parliaments more gender-friendly and enhance women’s substantive representation in legislatures.

### ***Women’s parliamentary bodies: Parameters of the research***

The establishment of parliamentary structures for women MPs is not a completely new phenomenon. Indeed, mechanisms for enhancing women’s political influence have been created and prioritized in many parliaments in Africa, Latin America and Asia.<sup>11</sup> With strong support from international actors, the bulk of existing research and good practices emerges from structures established in these regions. These regions are likely to have established cross-party women’s parliamentary bodies in order to affect policy processes and outcomes, specifically by influencing the political agenda and setting priorities, channelling women’s interests in legislative reform processes, and facilitating capacity development for women parliamentar-

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9 Rose Kanter, “Some effects of proportions on group life: Skewed sex ratios and responses to token women”, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82, No. 5, 1977, pp. 965–990.

10 Drude Dahlerup, “From a small to a large minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics”, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 1988, pp. 275–298; Georgia Duerst-Lahti and Rita Mae Kelly (eds.) *Gender Power, Leadership and Governance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Janice Yoder, “Rethinking Tokenism: Looking beyond numbers”, *Gender @ Society*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1991, pp. 178–192. Yoder’s critique of Kanter is premised in the argument that the critical mass thesis confounds four factors: “numeric imbalance, gender status, occupational inappropriateness, and intrusiveness”. That is, “increases in the number of lower-status members threaten dominants, thereby increasing gender discrimination in the forms of harassment, wage inequities and limited opportunities for promotion” (pp. 178–180).

11 Keila Gonzalez and Kristen Sample, *One Size Does Not Fit All: Lessons Learned from Legislative Gender Commissions and Caucuses* (Lima: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and National Democratic Institute (NDI) for International Affairs, 2010); Claire McLoughlin and Seema Khan, “Helpdesk Research Report: Cross-party Caucuses”, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, 2009.

ians. Thus far, however, there has been no systematic assessment of parliamentary structures for women MPs in the OSCE region.<sup>12</sup> There is little comparative information in the OSCE region about the real impact of women's parliamentary bodies in terms of influencing policy outcomes, and still less about correlations between impact on the one hand, and structure, mandate and activities on the other. This study aims at beginning to fill this gap.

This study takes a comparative approach to women's parliamentary bodies. It seeks to identify the range of women's parliamentary bodies that have been created, the circumstances under which they were created, and the extent to which they have become effective mechanisms for promoting gender equality issues and empowering women parliamentarians in the OSCE region. In particular, the following analysis aims to:

- identify parliaments in the OSCE region that currently host such structures, have established or attempted to establish these structures in the past, or plan to create them in the future;
- map the mandate, structure, membership and activities of these structures;
- analyse the data collected in order to outline good practices, success stories, challenges and lessons learned; and
- offer an eight-step framework for action to support the establishment or re-vitalization of a women's parliamentary body, and present a number of tailored recommendations to women's parliamentary bodies as well as to parliaments more broadly.

This study is based on data collected from specially designed questionnaires sent to 55 parliaments<sup>13</sup> within the OSCE region, with the support of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA), its Special Representative on Gender Issues, Dr. Hedy Fry, and its secretaries of delegations, between June and November 2012. Responses were received from 36 parliaments<sup>14</sup> plus one response from the Assembly of Kosovo (producing a response rate of 66 per cent).<sup>15</sup>

As the study will demonstrate, a wide variety of women's parliamentary structures have been established in the OSCE region. Among all the respondents to the survey, 16 OSCE participating States acknowledged the existence of a body that 'brings women together'.<sup>16</sup>

Keeping in mind that 11 of the 16 women's parliamentary bodies surveyed among OSCE participating States have been established since 2008, the present study can only begin to examine the impact that such structures may have and to assess the influence of the political environment on their functioning. Accordingly, the study does not aim to derive correlations or causal linkages between women's parliamentary bodies on the one hand, and the broader political and parliamentary context on the other. Nor does it attempt to draw conclusions regarding regional trends in the emergence of such structures, or predict the best environment in which these bodies will flourish. Further research will be necessary, in order to better understand political complexities, patterns and regional trends.

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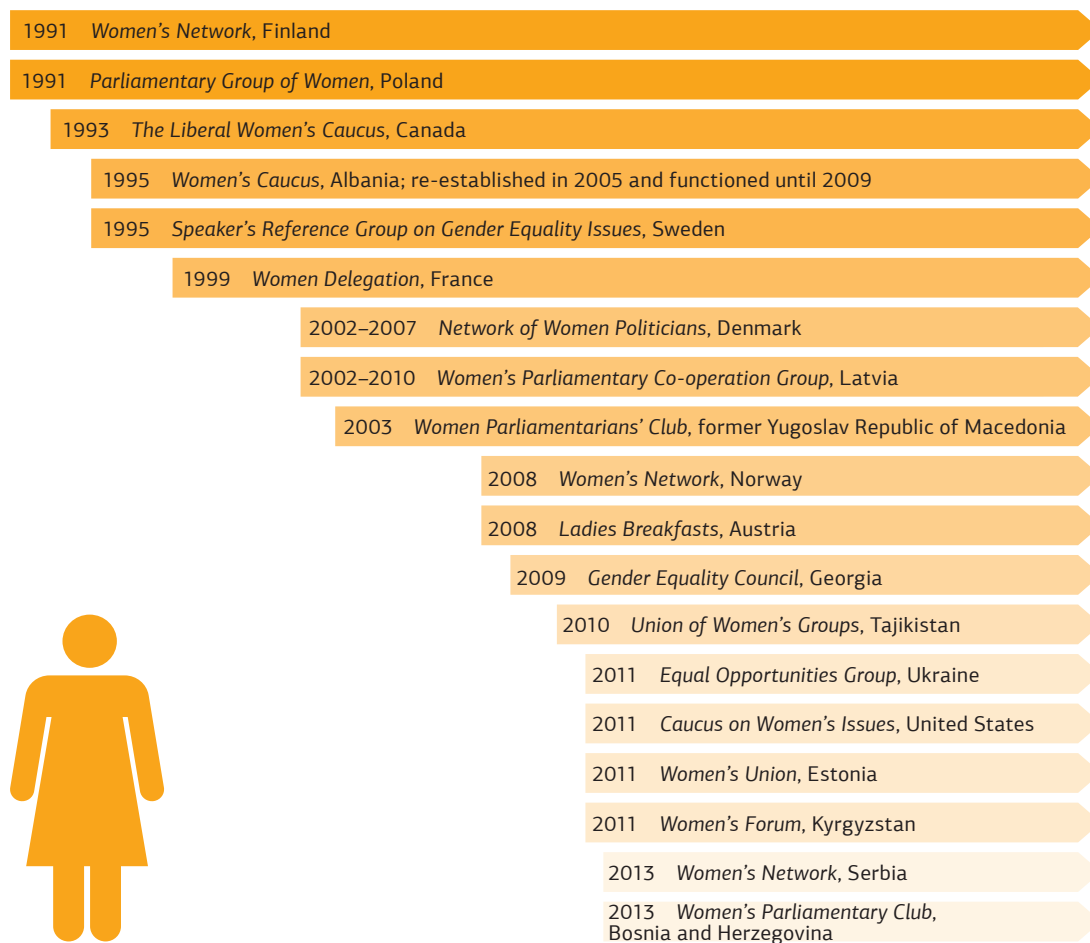
12 The 57 States of the OSCE include countries from Europe, Central Asia and North America, and comprise the world's largest regional security organization. As Mongolia officially joined the OSCE in November 2012, its parliament was not surveyed as part of this project.

13 Questionnaires were disseminated to all OSCE participating States with the exception of the Holy See and Mongolia. In addition, a questionnaire was sent to the Assembly of Kosovo.

14 Kyrgyzstan and Armenia sent in two responses each.

15 See Appendix 2 for the complete list of respondents.

16 The existence of a similar body was also surveyed in the Assembly of Kosovo, thus bringing the total number of structures to 17.

**Figure 1.1 Chronological overview of the ‘bodies that bring women together’ surveyed in the OSCE region**

Importantly, this study embraces the idea that ‘one size does not fit all’. The functioning of women’s parliamentary bodies is influenced by different external factors; indeed, women’s parliamentary bodies are shaped by unique political and parliamentary contexts at the national level, the presence of women’s movements or other civil society groups, as well as the influence of international organizations.<sup>17</sup> In this vein, the study does not attempt to advocate for one type of structure to be established over another. Women parliamentarians and their supporters are the best judges of the political and parliamentary context in which they are operating, and the type of structures that will best suit their environment.

Having said this, the study does aim to identify common factors that support the establishment and running of these bodies, as well as good practices that can possibly be replicated in other parliamentary contexts. To this end, it introduces an analytical framework for understanding parliamentary structures for women MPs in the OSCE region and the ‘enabling environment’ in which these structures implement their mandates and functions most effectively.

Following an outline of the research framework and methodology, the study begins with an analysis of what defines a women’s parliamentary structure in the parliaments of the OSCE

<sup>17</sup> See Gonzalez and Sample.

region. A series of enabling factors for the establishment of such structures is then presented, followed by a more in-depth analysis of women's parliamentary bodies by organization, activities and relationships. The study then presents some of the reported challenges in establishing and running such bodies, and concludes by outlining an eight-step framework to guide the establishment or re-vitalization of a women's parliamentary body, as well as recommendations to enhance the work currently being done by these structures within the OSCE community.

### **Research framework and methodology**

Through its work, ODIHR has supported initiatives to increase women's participation in political and electoral processes, as members of political parties, as political leaders, and as candidates for public office. ODIHR also supports parliamentary support programmes (PSP) implemented by OSCE field operations. In fact, support to parliamentary structures for women MPs is an important component of PSP programming in different OSCE participating States, for example, in the Western Balkans. ODIHR has long-standing relationships with these PSPs, acting as a hub for the exchange of knowledge and good practice, including by co-ordinating regional joint events and contributing expertise and advice on projects. This study was designed with the intention of collecting information and good practices, to be disseminated and shared with OSCE field operations, MPs, and other parliamentary stakeholders across the OSCE region.

Existing research conducted in recent years<sup>18</sup> suggests that numerous parliamentary bodies for women MPs have been established, and that they vary widely in design, structure, activities and degrees of formality. This variety gives rise to the following set of questions:

- 1) Which parliaments in the OSCE currently host these bodies, have established or attempted to establish these in the past, or plan to create these in the future?
- 2) How are such bodies organized, in terms of mandate, structure and membership?
- 3) What activities do these bodies generally engage in?
- 4) What relationships do they build both internally and externally to the parliament?
- 5) How does the parliamentary regime and level of parliamentary development affect the establishment and efficacy of these bodies?
- 6) Are there any good practices or success stories that can be learned from existing bodies?
- 7) What challenges and lessons can be drawn from them?

For the purposes of this study, a parliamentary body for women is defined according to three main criteria: organization, activities and relationships. Each of these criteria can be understood in the following terms:

#### **Organization:**

- Mode of operation and internal organization: including format, status and frequency of meetings, staffing and resources;
- Membership, leadership and procedures: including recruitment of members (nominated, appointed, *ex officio*), leadership structures, established procedures (agendas, decision-making process), required documentation for its establishment and renewal; and
- Mandate and objectives of the body.

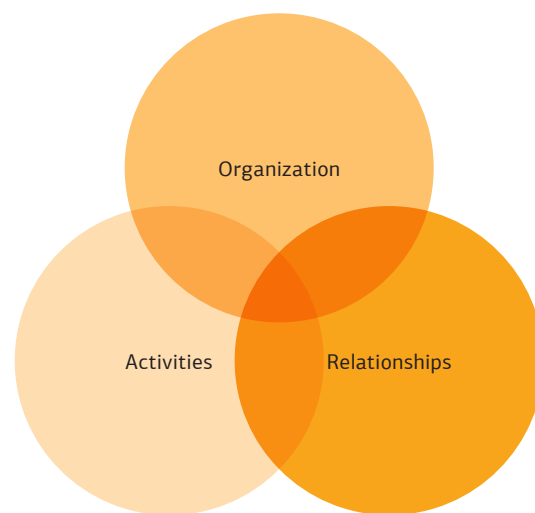
<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Gonzalez and Sample and McLoughlin and Khan. Further documents can be found in the Selected Resources section at the end of this study.

**Activities:**

- Main activities of the parliamentary body, the ability of the body to implement those activities in light of political realities, and the perceived impact of those activities.

**Relationships:**

- Relationships within the parliament with other parliamentary bodies on gender equality (e.g. committees or Secretariat entities), with other parliamentary bodies more generally, with the political leadership as well as the parliamentary administration; and
- Relationships with external stakeholders, namely civil society, academia, the media, the executive, gender equality machinery, international donors, and international organizations.

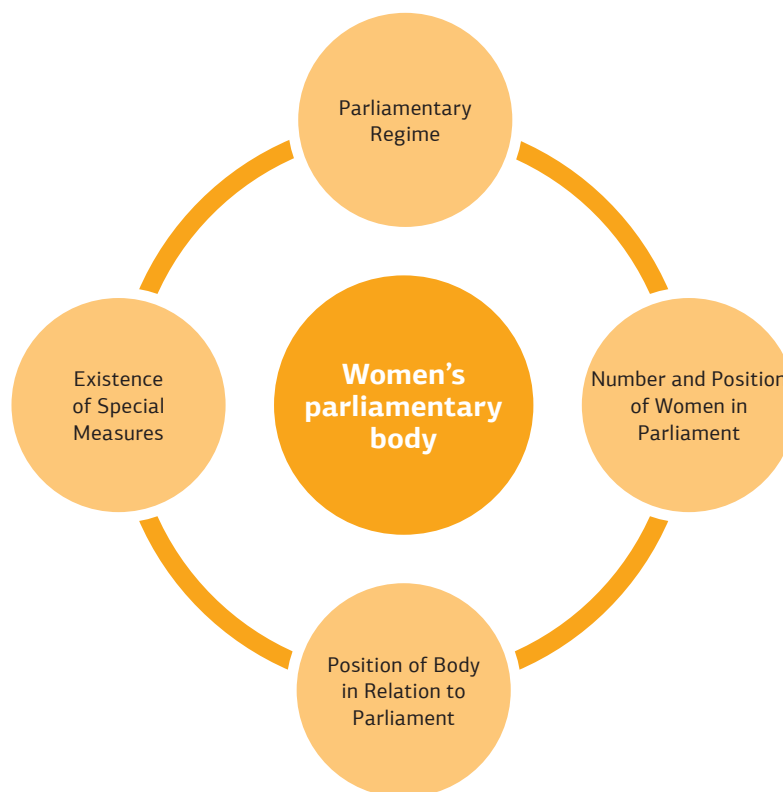
**Figure 1.2 Criteria defining a women's parliamentary body**

Recognizing that MPs work within the confines of their parliamentary institution, it is also important to assess the broader enabling environment for the effective functioning of such structures. Where possible, the study has considered the following factors:

- **Parliamentary regime:** Where relevant, distinctions have been made between presidential or parliamentary systems, bicameral or unicameral parliaments, strong versus weak political party systems, and proportional representation, majority and mixed electoral systems;
- **Number and position of women in parliament:** The relationship between a 'critical mass' of women (e.g. 30 per cent) and the effectiveness and sustainability of a women's parliamentary structure has been considered. The position of key women or gender equality advocates in the parliament (e.g. in the Executive, or as Committee chairs) has also been taken into account.
- **Special measures to promote women's political participation:** The prevalence of special measures in place to promote women's political participation has been noted, with a focus on legal and voluntary gender quotas.

- **Position of body in relation to parliament as a whole:** The effectiveness of the body and its ability to influence mainstream parliamentary processes, as determined by its relationship to the rest of the parliament, has been considered (e.g. whether the body is a marginalized structure, integrated into the parliament's broader processes, or supported by parliamentary leadership).

Figure 1.3 Enabling environment for the effective functioning of a women's parliamentary body



To identify the women's parliamentary bodies currently in existence in the OSCE region, questionnaires were developed on the basis of a literature review; the questionnaires also incorporated questions previously used in similar research conducted by ODIHR and other organizations (the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3).

Data collected from the questionnaires was supplemented by additional desk and field research conducted in the OSCE region. The research began with a review of existing literature on women's parliamentary bodies (see the section on Selected Resources at the end of this study). Selected parliaments, which indicated that a women's parliamentary body existed or used to exist, were contacted to provide additional information, forming the basis of more detailed case studies. These case studies, incorporated throughout the body of the study, serve to highlight what aspects of women's parliamentary bodies have contributed to their successes and to pinpoint the challenges encountered in establishing and running these bodies.



## 2. Defining a women's parliamentary body

This chapter looks into the different types of women's parliamentary bodies established in the OSCE region, as well as the different definitions that have been created to attempt to distinguish these bodies from other types of parliamentary structures. A list of potential benefits connected with the establishment and presence of a women's parliamentary body is then offered.

To systematize the analysis of women's parliamentary bodies surveyed by this study, this section also introduces a new framework, or typology, for these bodies. In the survey, parliaments were asked to identify their own women's parliamentary body, and these results are matched with the typology proposed in the questionnaire.

### *Defining a women's parliamentary body*

Perhaps reflecting the diversity of experience around the world, the existing literature offers diverse definitions of what represents a women's parliamentary body. They have been defined as:

- “voluntary associations [...] which seek to have a role in the policy process. These groups have standard organizational attributes: a name, a membership list, leadership, and staffing arrangements”,<sup>19</sup>
- “[a body] that meets weekly or monthly during session, hires staff, is policy oriented and/or pays dues”,<sup>20</sup> and
- “an institutionalized, bipartisan association of only women legislators who meet more than once during the legislative session”.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, for some experts, a women's parliamentary body is a voluntary association, while for others, it is something more institutionalized; some researchers require such bodies to be

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19 Susan Webb Hammond, Daniel P. Mulholland, and Arthur G. Stevens, Jr., “Informal Congressional Caucuses and Agenda Setting”, *Western Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 1985, pp. 583–605.

20 See Leah Olivier, “Women's Legislative Caucuses”, National Conference of State Legislatures, Briefing Paper on the Important Issues of the Day, Vol. 13, No. 29, 2005.

21 Mahoney, *op. cit.*

policy focused, while others do not specify their activities. Some bodies have resources allocated to them by the parliament, while others collect membership fees or are partially funded by non-governmental or international organizations.

There is, then, no single model of organization, and, as Gonzalez and Sample found, 'one size does not fit all'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, women's parliamentary bodies tend to reflect women legislators' needs and political leverage, as well as the parliamentary system and the political culture of a specific country. Their purpose, decision-making mechanisms, attributes, operations, and areas of activity are commonly decided by those establishing the structure.<sup>23</sup> Women's structures have also evolved over time, for example, by setting rules for the election of leaders long after their creation, developing a formal agenda previously non-existent, or even becoming institutionalized as a gender equality committee.<sup>24</sup>

Contrary to permanent parliamentary committees specialized on gender equality issues, these structures tend to remain outside the formal organs of parliament and often benefit from a higher degree of flexibility of operation. In some cases, both types of structures find a way to co-operate, combining their strengths to advance policy and legislative initiatives.

Importantly, women's parliamentary bodies do not always restrict their membership to women MPs. Some have included men parliamentarians in a clear attempt to ensure that gender equality issues are not only advanced by women. Other bodies also include the participation of civil society organizations or representatives of international organizations.

Because of the multiplicity of experiences, scholars have either focused on the formal/informal aspect of women's parliamentary bodies,<sup>25</sup> or have developed more restrictive definitions that reflect specific national circumstances.<sup>26</sup> This study maintains that, more important than defining a women's parliamentary body, is the process of identifying the different factors that facilitate the establishment and running of these bodies.

### ***The benefits of having a women's parliamentary body***

Regardless of the way a women's parliamentary body is structured and/or organized, the findings of this and other studies<sup>27</sup> suggest that these bodies serve a number of purposes and functions. The reported benefits of establishing such bodies are as follows:

- **They promote women's numerical and substantive representation.** As chapter 3 will explain in more detail, women's parliamentary bodies often advocate for the introduction of legal or voluntary gender quotas and other special measures in order to increase women's representation in parliaments. For example, the Women Parliamentarians' Club of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, established in 2003, achieved an amendment to the Election Code, which ensured that every third place on the political par-

<sup>22</sup> Gonzalez and Sample, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> National Democratic Institute, "Women's Caucuses Fact Sheet" (Washington: NDI, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Mahoney, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> See Kristin Kanthak and George Krause, "Can Women's Caucuses Solve Coordination Problems among Women Legislators? Logic, Lessons, and Evidence from American State Legislatures", Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington DC, 2010, and Palmieri, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> See Mahoney, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> See Gonzalez and Sample, *op. cit.*; Mahoney, *op. cit.*; McLoughlin and Khan, *op. cit.*; and Palmieri, *op. cit.*

ty's candidate list is allocated to the less represented gender. This measure helped secure the election of 28 per cent of women MPs in 2006<sup>28</sup> (see Case Study 5 below).

- **They highlight the importance of gender issues within parliamentary processes.** Canada provides a valuable example in this regard. A 2001 article on the effectiveness of the Liberal Women's Caucus stated that many women MPs admit that simply asking questions (for example, on the impact of budget cuts on girls and boys, women and men), rather than agreeing with the proposed solution, has contributed to important shifts in the political culture on Parliament Hill.<sup>29</sup>
- **They serve to ensure that gender equality issues are mainstreamed into legislative and policy processes.** Such bodies can serve to influence the drafting of legislation and policies in line with gender equality standards, as well as monitor their implementation. Moreover, these bodies can also lobby for the introduction of processes to review legislation and policies from a gender perspective.<sup>30</sup>
- **They can lobby for the development and adoption of gender equality legislation.** While most women's parliamentary bodies do not enjoy the power to initiate legislation, they can nonetheless support the development of legislation on issues of concern to the body, including gender equality. In Ukraine, for example, the parliamentary Equal Opportunities Group, established in 2011, indicated that it would concentrate its efforts on ensuring that the Ukrainian legislation related to equal rights and opportunities conforms to European standards, and on the drafting of amendments to legislation concerning violence against women and domestic violence (see Case Study 4 below).
- **They influence, and sometimes shape, policy and legislative agendas through cross-party co-operation.** In some contexts, women's parliamentary structures can influence legislative and policy agendas by uniting women (and like-minded men) across party lines in the form of a voting bloc. The voting bloc can use the power of numbers to pass or block the adoption of legislation. Where party discipline hinders the emergence of formal cross-party voting blocs, women's parliamentary bodies can still bring women (and men) together to develop a stance on specific issues of concern that can be used to influence how parliamentarians vote.
- **They facilitate communication and dialogue within and across parties.** In line with the point above, women's parliamentary bodies can provide a forum where MPs from different parties come together in an informal, neutral environment to discuss interests of mutual concern. Where political polarization makes cross-party co-operation difficult, if not impossible, women's parliamentary bodies can provide a platform for discussion of topics on which party leaders have not adopted a particular stance. Such topics may include gender-based violence, non-discrimination, healthcare, and/or children's rights.

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28 National Democratic Institute, "Women's Caucuses Fact Sheet" (Washington: NDI, 2008); Cvetanka Ivanova, "Women's Parliamentary Club in the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", iKNOW Politics, 2007.

29 Jackie Steele, "An effective player in the parliamentary process: the Liberal Women's Caucus 1993–2001", (Ottawa: Institute on Governance, 2011), [www.iog.ca/publications/alfhales2001.pdf](http://www.iog.ca/publications/alfhales2001.pdf).

30 For example, the women's structure established in the Assembly of Kosovo, the Women's Caucus Group (GDD), has among its specific objectives the "harmonization, amendment and drafting of legislation with a gender perspective lens". The GDD has successfully lobbied for the adoption of a policy which requires all draft laws discussed by the Assembly of Kosovo to be screened by the GDD from a gender equality and equal representation perspective (see Case Study 3).

- **They provide information to their members and engage in advocacy.** Such bodies can engage in research or advocacy on issues of concern to all women parliamentarians, providing support, for example, to individual women parliamentarians engaged in the drafting or amendment of specific pieces of legislation. They can also raise awareness on gender equality issues by facilitating dialogue on certain issues between government and civil society. For example, women's parliamentary bodies can liaise with NGOs and members of women's movements, in order to ensure that the priorities of civil society, and women's groups in particular, are conveyed to the parliament. Polish women MPs, for instance, have co-operated with representatives of civil society to raise awareness of gender equality issues. Members of the Parliamentary Group of Women established in the Polish Sejm participate regularly in the annual Polish Congress of Women, an event gathering thousands of women (and men) from across all sectors of Polish society to discuss key issues of concern to women across the country (see Case Study 8 below).
- **They provide training and support to their members** in the form of mentoring, capacity building, confidence building, networking, discussion and information sharing. This helps women MPs but also parliaments to institutionalize gender equality learning, and, where appropriate, can also facilitate the revival of a previously established women's parliamentary structure. In this regard, the Network of Women Members of the Finnish Parliament organizes seminars and informal events meant to bring together women parliamentarians. Such events can enhance the individual capacities of women by providing a platform for exchange and training (see Case Study 7 below).<sup>31</sup>

### *Presence of women's parliamentary bodies in the OSCE region*

The study found that a number of parliaments in OSCE participating States have established women's parliamentary bodies. As Table 2.1 shows, of the 36 respondents to the survey, 16, or just over 40 per cent, acknowledged the existence of a body that 'brings women together'. A structure for women MPs used to be present in six of the OSCE participating States, and in another two, women MPs expressed their desire to establish such a body in the near future. Twelve OSCE participating States responded that there was no such body.

**Table 2.1 Presence and number of bodies that bring women MPs together in the OSCE region (n=36)**

Yes, there is one (or more) currently	16	<i>Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Sweden, Tajikistan, Ukraine, United States of America<sup>32</sup></i>
Yes, there used to be one	6	<i>Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Denmark, Latvia, Slovak Republic</i>
No, but there are plans to create one	2	<i>Hungary, Moldova</i>
No, there is no such body	12	<i>Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein*, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain</i>

\* The questionnaire response from Liechtenstein noted that there was not a 'body that brings women together', but nonetheless detailed the activities of similar bodies.

31 National Democratic Institute, "Women's Caucuses Fact Sheet" (Washington: NDI, 2008).

32 The existence of a similar body was also surveyed in the Assembly of Kosovo, thus bringing the total number of structures to 17.

According to these numbers, women’s parliamentary bodies have been established in participating States across the whole OSCE region. Moreover, the number of responding parliaments that currently host a body (16), have hosted a body in the past (six), or intend to do so in the future (two) totals 24, which is double the number of parliaments that indicated that no such body has been established (12).

It is important to identify the different reasons given as to why women’s parliamentary bodies have not been established or are no longer functioning. Where such bodies no longer function, an analysis of the reasons why can bring to light lessons learned that may be of use to other women’s parliamentary bodies. In Armenia, Latvia and Slovenia, the parliaments reported that the mandate of the body had simply not been renewed, sometimes because there were too few women elected to the parliament following elections to justify the continuation of the structure, or too few women MPs were interested in re-establishing the body. This is particularly problematic where the women who created the body are not re-elected, as was the case in Denmark. In Armenia, a body close to being established was ultimately not formed, due to difficulties surrounding the question of leadership. In other cases, the renewal of the body was not achieved due to a lack of support from political parties, a lack of sufficient resources, or changes in the parliamentary environment that rendered a women’s parliamentary body less relevant. A further reason was identified in Andorra, where the body’s functions were formally commissioned to the parliamentary Social Affairs Committee.

Understanding the potential challenges to the establishment or renewal of such bodies can help women parliamentarians better prepare to address these obstacles.

### ***One size does not fit all: The design of women’s parliamentary bodies***

While there is a plethora of *types* that fall under the category of a women’s parliamentary body, differences essentially arise around their organizational *structure*.

A core focus for such bodies is the desire to bring women (and sometimes men) parliamentarians together with the broad aim of facilitating discussion on issues of concern to them. The way in which a group is formed to facilitate that discussion, however, can vary greatly. As outlined in Table 2.2 below, the differences essentially revolve around seven criteria: mandate, formality, structure (or modes of operation), leadership, resources, membership and activities.

**Table 2.2 Points of differentiation between women’s parliamentary bodies**

Criteria	Alternatives
<i>Mandate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal issue-based advocacy and awareness raising</li> <li>• Informal forum for discussion</li> <li>• Information gathering mechanism</li> <li>• Policy and legislative review mechanism</li> <li>• Legislative initiatives</li> <li>• Empowerment and capacity building of women MPs</li> <li>• Research body</li> </ul>

<i>Formality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal body of the Parliament, follows parliamentary rules, has specific powers and privileges</li> <li>• Formal parliamentary committee or sub-committee (not the focus of this study)</li> <li>• Informal group recognized by the Parliament</li> <li>• Informal group not recognized by the Parliament</li> </ul>
<i>Mode of operation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accepted plan of activities</li> <li>• Regularly scheduled meetings (more than 3/year)</li> <li>• Infrequent meetings 'as required' (less than 3/year)</li> <li>• Minutes of meetings recorded</li> <li>• Decisions taken by consensus</li> <li>• Decisions taken by a vote</li> </ul>
<i>Leadership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership positions given to members of governing party</li> <li>• Leadership positions rotated across parties</li> <li>• Leadership via a co-chairing mechanism</li> <li>• No leadership positions (non-hierarchical leadership structure)</li> <li>• Leadership positions held for a fixed term</li> </ul>
<i>Resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff, budget and meeting rooms provided by the Parliament</li> <li>• Staff and budget partly provided by the Parliament and partly provided by other organizations</li> <li>• Staff and budget provided entirely by other organizations</li> <li>• Budget derived from membership fees</li> <li>• Meetings held outside Parliament</li> </ul>
<i>Membership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women only</li> <li>• Men also included</li> <li>• Women (and men) across all parties</li> <li>• Women (and men) from one party only, or from the majority coalition only</li> <li>• Civil society and/or international organizations included</li> <li>• Former parliamentarians included</li> </ul>
<i>Activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing letters, general advocacy</li> <li>• Conducting inquiries into legislation or policy</li> <li>• Drafting and sponsoring gender equality legislation</li> <li>• Monitoring the implementation of laws and international obligations from a gender perspective</li> <li>• Organizing social events</li> <li>• Mentoring of current and future MPs</li> <li>• Advocating for more gender-sensitive parliaments</li> </ul>

### ***Typology of women's parliamentary bodies***

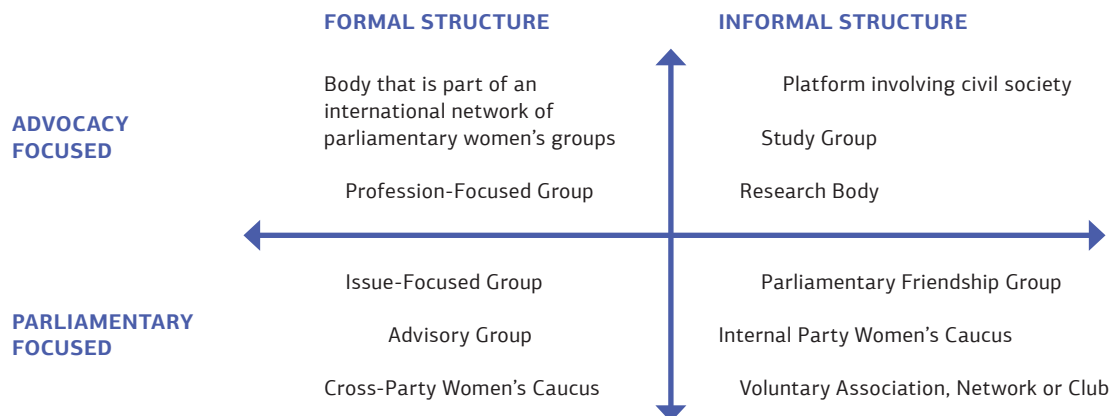
Given the multiple ways in which women's parliamentary bodies can be organized and structured, making sense of the diversity of such structures can be a challenge. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the seven criteria identified in Table 2.2 – mandate, formality, structure (or modes of operation), leadership, resources, membership and activities – have been combined into two groups which form two continuing axes. *Structure* is a composite of formality, mode of operation, leadership, membership and resources. On this axis, bodies can be classified as predominantly formal or informal. At one end of the spectrum, a formal body is one that meets regularly with a pre-determined agenda, in accordance with pre-defined meeting rules and is supported (and possibly resourced) by the parliament. It might have a hierarchical leadership structure and clear procedures by which members are included in the group. At the other end of this continuum, an informal body would meet as required, has no supporting staff or resources provided by the parliament, and can include a loose affiliation of members.

The second axis delineates the parliamentary bodies' *focus*, which combines the mandate and activities criteria outlined in Table 2.2. At one end of this spectrum, bodies that demonstrate a parliamentary focus are those that have as their main goal the scrutiny and influencing of parlia-

mentary legislation, through the tabling of amendments or promotion of gender equality issues within the parliamentary agenda. At the other end, a body focused on advocacy would concentrate on lobbying on selected policy issues as well as with gender mainstreaming in a broader sense.

A mapping of the various types of women's parliamentary bodies according to this typology is presented in Figure 2.1, and further explained below.

**Figure 2.1 Typology of women's parliamentary bodies\***



\* For a detailed description of the various types of women's parliamentary bodies see Appendix 3.

**Formal, parliamentary focused groups** such as cross-party women's caucuses, advisory groups, or issue-focused groups are those established and recognized by the parliament, which may be provided with resources (including parliamentary staff, budget and/or meeting rooms). They are primarily concerned with the review of policy and legislation from a gender perspective, supporting the introduction of amendments to such legislation, or advocating for women's substantive representation in parliament. These groups tend to restrict their membership to women.

**Formal, advocacy focused groups** are those that may be similarly resourced by the parliament (although not to the same extent as parliamentary focused groups) and run as formal groups with clear leadership structures and meeting rules. They are more concerned with advocacy on a specific issue or profession, or with similar parliamentary groups in other countries (e.g. an international network of women's parliamentary bodies). These bodies may include the participation of men.

**Informal, parliamentary focused groups** such as voluntary associations, clubs or networks, or parliamentary friendship groups, can be differentiated in that they are generally not provided with resources from the parliament (but may attract some funding from international or non-governmental organizations). They have less rigid meeting rules and leadership structures (e.g. may rotate their leadership positions), but are still focused on parliamentary activities, such as legislative reviews. These bodies may include the participation of men.

**Informal, advocacy focused groups** tend to be composed of women and men, have a non-hierarchical leadership structure, meet infrequently on an as-required basis, and have no resources provided by the parliament. They are primarily focused on information gathering, writing letters, and general advocacy. Platforms involving civil society and research or study groups are usually very well connected with civil society (and other) organizations outside parliament.



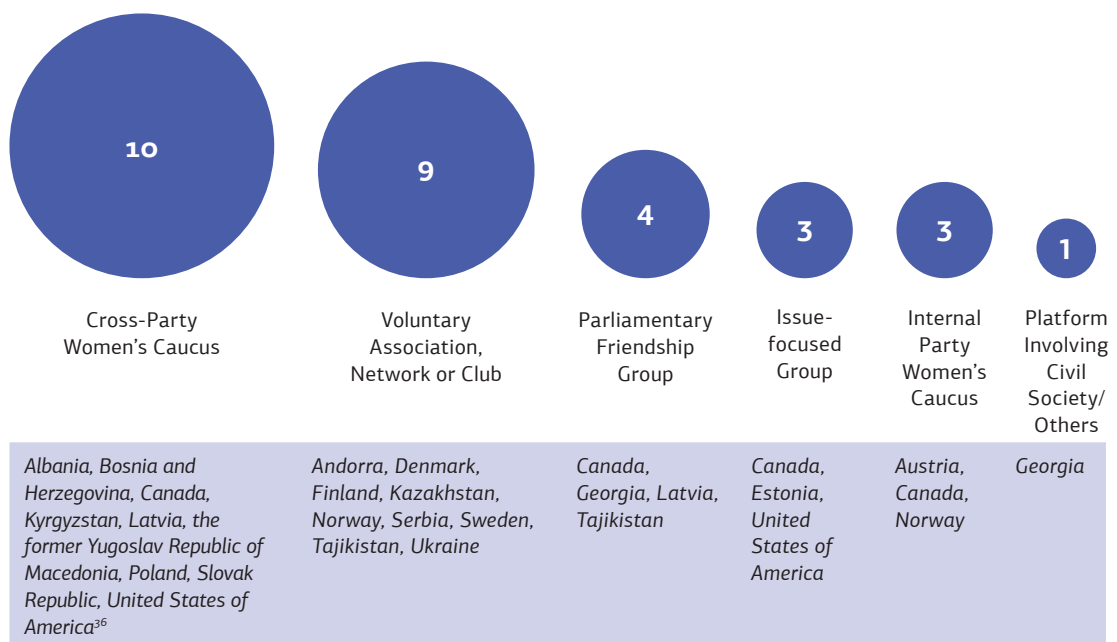
The range of women's parliamentary bodies was presented to respondents in the questionnaire. Each respondent was asked to match the women's parliamentary body in his or her parliament with one of the types identified in Figure 2.1 (the results are presented in Figure 2.2).

Most respondents identified their body as a cross-party women's caucus, followed closely by a voluntary association, club or network. A cross-party caucus is particularly prevalent among the Western Balkan states. With the exception of Canada, it might be said that the parliaments which include a cross-party women's caucus generally have less disciplined party structures than those where an internal party caucus has been identified. The case of Canada, however, is interesting. In practice, the Canadian cross-party caucus generally has not been as active as some parties' internal women's caucuses precisely because of the rigid party discipline that exists in that (Westminster) parliamentary system.<sup>33</sup>

The prevalence of a voluntary association, club or network is also noteworthy. These bodies, by definition, are less reliant on the parliament for resources and support, but perhaps their advantage is a degree of flexibility to address issues of concern to their members (as is the case with the Swedish Speaker's Reference Group on Gender Equality Issues; see Case Study 9 below).

The responses reveal that among those parliaments surveyed, there are both formal and informal bodies that tend to be focused on parliamentary work (that is, legislative and policy review), and informal bodies that are focused on advocacy (that is, raising awareness on specific issues, engaging the community and the electorate in these activities).

**Figure 2.2 Categorizing structures for women MPs in the OSCE region\***



Note: \*The total number is greater than the 16 structures for women MPs reported in Table 2.1, because it includes current, former and/or future parliamentary bodies. Also, multiple answers were possible.

33 See Jackie Steele, "The Liberal Women's Caucus", *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Summer, 2002, pp. 13–19.

34 The figure (10) includes a similar structure for women MPs established in the Assembly of Kosovo.



There were no reported bodies that were primarily formal in structure and focused on advocacy work, or a body that forms part of a larger international network of women parliamentarians. This does not mean that such bodies do not exist at all or indeed that this work is not done to some extent by any of the bodies surveyed across the OSCE region. Rather, it suggests that when a parliamentary body is formed in this region, it is either more focused on parliamentary work, or is a more informal body engaged in advocacy work.

Finally, it is interesting that some parliaments reported more than one type of women's parliamentary body. The case of the United States is illustrative, having both a cross-party and an issue-specific women's caucus. This may suggest that where one type of body (for example, the Cross-Party Women's Congressional Caucus) has not catered to the specific needs and objectives of a sub-group of women, that sub-group has simply chosen to form a second caucus (for example, the Pro-Life Women's Caucus). This also implies that the formation of a women's caucus is more readily accepted in this parliamentary environment.

### **Conclusion**

A number of women's parliamentary bodies have been established in OSCE participating States. Around 68 per cent of the parliaments surveyed noted that a women's parliamentary body is currently functioning, had previously been established, or there were plans to create one in the future. Conversely, 32 per cent of the parliaments surveyed indicated that they did not have one or that they did not have any plans to create one in the future. These bodies appear to be structured and organized in a variety of different ways across the OSCE region. In particular, this study noted that these bodies tend to differentiate themselves along seven criteria (mandate, formality, structure, leadership, resources, membership and activities), which can be further classified along two axes according to their structure and focus.

Presenting this typology to parliaments in the OSCE region, the study found a predominance of women's parliamentary bodies that are parliamentary focused, such as cross-party women's caucuses and voluntary networks or associations. At the same time, however, the wide range of bodies already established and functioning in OSCE participating States indicates that there is no one model for operational success. Rather, the needs and preferences of potential members are the best guides for deciding what type of body is most suitable for each parliamentary setting, and for achieving some of the goals and benefits connected with their establishment.

Regardless of how they are structured, women's parliamentary bodies can provide a wide range of benefits to their members and parliamentarians more broadly. These benefits will be explored in more detail through country case studies in the following chapters.

### 3. Enabling factors

Women's parliamentary bodies do not exist in a vacuum. Taken alone, their internal organization and activities do not define their ability to achieve positive outcomes. It is important, therefore, to consider whether and to what extent political and parliamentary systems, institutional arrangements, as well as the activities of broader civil society, play a role in facilitating the establishment and eventual running of a women's parliamentary body. In other words, what factors facilitate or hinder the establishment and running of women's parliamentary bodies in the OSCE region?

This chapter looks in more detail at the 'enabling factors' that can have a positive impact on whether women's parliamentary bodies are established in the first place, and what type of structure and focus these bodies may have. The chapter focuses on external factors, while subsequent chapters focus on the internal dimensions of how women's parliamentary bodies function.

#### ***Parliamentary and political systems in the OSCE region***

The OSCE region is composed of different parliamentary regimes, as defined by electoral systems, parliamentary systems, and political party composition. Thirty-three of the parliaments in the OSCE region are unicameral; 22 are bicameral. Each of the lower houses and unicameral chambers are directly elected. The upper houses of Germany, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Canada and Tajikistan are indirectly elected or appointed.

Of the 36 OSCE participating States surveyed, proportional representation is used to elect at least one chamber in 23 legislatures; mixed electoral systems (being those that include elements of both proportional representation and plurality or majority systems)<sup>35</sup> exist in ten legislatures, and majority systems are used in four. Parliamentary systems predominate among those States that responded to the questionnaire. Only four of the respondents had presidential systems, and another three reported a semi-presidential system. The vast majority of these

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35 Louis Massicotte and André Balais, "Mixed electoral systems: a conceptual and empirical survey", *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1999, pp. 341–366.

States are defined as having a multi-party system; two are defined by the Inter-Parliamentary Union as using ‘dominant’ party systems.<sup>36</sup>

Survey results indicate that parliamentary women’s bodies have been established in parliaments elected according to all three types of electoral systems (proportional representation, mixed and majoritarian). Furthermore, these bodies have been established in both parliamentary and presidential systems, and in systems where certain parties have dominated the political landscape over long periods of time. It is possible to conclude, therefore, that the type of parliamentary regime and electoral system in place is not necessarily a predictor of whether or not a women’s parliamentary body will be established or, indeed, of its effectiveness.

By contrast, some respondents indicated that the political *context* – for example, the degree of multi-party co-operation and dialogue that takes place in general, the degree of polarization characterizing the political environment, and the strength of political party discipline – rather than political *systems*, has a potentially greater impact on the emergence and effective functioning of women’s parliamentary bodies.<sup>37</sup> Where political polarization creates a level of political party discipline that makes cross-party co-operation difficult or unlikely, the establishment of formal cross-party women’s parliamentary bodies may prove extremely challenging. This does not mean that cross-party bodies do not emerge under these circumstances, but rather that they may take another form – for example, as an informal network. In these cases, cross-party dialogue can be facilitated from the outside, by non-political actors such as international organizations or civil society.

### ***Enhancing women’s parliamentary presence: The use of special measures***

As of July 2013, women’s parliamentary representation in the OSCE region amounted to an average of 24.4 per cent in unicameral or lower houses, and 22.6 per cent in upper houses. Although there is some diversity in the proportion of women’s representation across the OSCE region, this percentage compares favourably with the world average of 21.3 per cent in unicameral or lower houses, and 18.8 per cent in upper houses.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, it falls short of the 30 per cent recommended by the United Nations.<sup>39</sup>

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36 Inter-Parliamentary Union, *PARLINE Database on National Parliaments*, <http://www.ipu.org/parline/>, accessed March 2013.

37 Discussions with participants held during the OSCE/ODIHR Regional Workshop on Parliamentary Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region, organized 11 to 12 December 2012 in Vienna, within the framework of the ODIHR project “Strengthening Parliamentary Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region”.

38 Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in national parliaments*, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>, accessed July 2013.

39 The UN Economic and Social Council originally proposed the 30 per cent target to be achieved by 1995. In its 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, the United Nations recalled that few countries had achieved this goal and urged member states to take actions to achieve the target as a means to build a ‘critical mass’ of women’s representation in political and public life. See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.

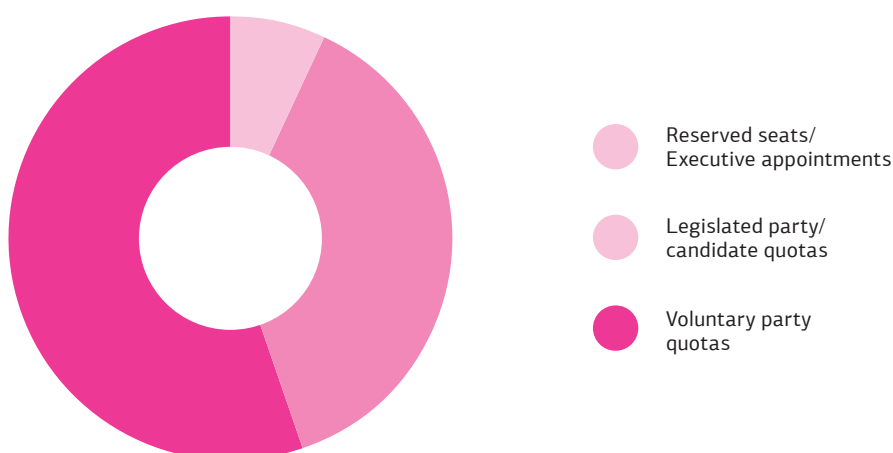
Region	Lower or Unicameral houses (%)	Upper houses (%)
OSCE	24.4	22.6
Northern Europe	42.0	--
Europe and North America (excluding Northern Europe)	22.7	22.6
Western Balkans	20.4	5.8
Commonwealth of Independent States	15.5	12.3

Source : IPU (2013) <http://www.ipu.org/parline/>

High numbers of women in parliament are often associated with the presence of special measures to promote women's political participation. In the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 7/09 on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life, adopted during the 2009 Athens OSCE Ministerial Council, participating States were called upon to "consider possible legislative measures which would facilitate a more balanced participation of women and men in political and public life, especially in decision-making" (see Appendix 1 for key provisions of this Decision). In the 18 participating States surveyed where at least one chamber has over 25 per cent of women MPs, special measures (most commonly legislated gender quotas) are used in ten. Conversely, in those countries where women are least represented, legal quotas have not been implemented, although some have introduced voluntary party quotas.

Reserved seats, or quotas that legally mandate in a Constitution or an electoral law that a certain percentage or number among those elected must be women, appear to be used sparingly among the OSCE participating States, and continue to be marred by some controversy. More frequently, political parties have introduced voluntary party quotas – quotas voluntarily determined by political parties themselves (see Figure 3.1). In 23 of the States surveyed, one or more political parties have nominated a target number (or percentage) of women or of the under-represented sex to be included on party lists or to be elected.

Figure 3.1 Presence of special measures in OSCE participating States



Source: Quota Project (2012) <http://www.quotaproject.org>

The data suggests that there is no direct correlation between the percentage of women MPs and the existence of legal or voluntary measures to promote women's representation on the one hand, and the existence of women's parliamentary bodies in OSCE participating States on the other. Indeed, women's parliamentary bodies have been established in countries with both high and low percentages of women MPs, in countries that have adopted legal quotas (for example, Poland, Kyrgyzstan and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), in countries where some political parties have adopted voluntary quotas or other measures (for example, Austria, Canada, Finland, France, Georgia, Norway, Sweden and Ukraine), as well as in countries that have not introduced any legal or voluntary quotas per se to advance gender representation in parliamentary structures or political parties, but have introduced other types of special measures, including policy and legal instruments and programmes, to promote gender equality and women's participation in political and public life.

Notwithstanding the above, it is worth noting that several women's parliamentary bodies have been actively involved in advocating for the introduction of such special measures and/or in monitoring their implementation. For example, the Polish Parliamentary Group of Women advocated alongside civil society and gender equality organizations for the introduction of an electoral quota for candidate lists in the run-up to parliamentary elections in Poland in 2011. Likewise, the Women's Caucus of the Albanian Parliament (see Case Study 1 below), which existed in the 2005 to 2009 sitting of the legislature, lobbied together with civil society for the introduction of a legal gender quota, which was finally achieved in 2008. Alternatively, where electoral gender quotas have been introduced, women have often grouped together to ensure that increased parliamentary representation translates into increased substantive participation of women in parliament or to achieve amendments to existing special measures, as was the case of the Women Parliamentarians' Club of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that, while the existence of special measures (legal or voluntary) is not a pre-condition for the establishment or running of a women's parliamentary body, such measures can provide a common purpose or issue around which women MPs, and specifically women's parliamentary bodies, can organize and mobilize.

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### *Case Study 1: The Albanian experience of a Women's Caucus*

Albanian women MPs first established a Women's Caucus in 1995. In 2005, with the support of the OSCE, the Caucus was renewed, gathering ten women MPs from the main political parties. The Caucus forged an effective and co-operative relationship with the Sub-Committee on Juveniles and Equal Opportunities, which formed part of the Committee on Health, Labour and Social Issues. Between 2007 and 2009, the Caucus focused its activities on advocating for the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality in the Albanian Society, which was passed in 2008 with the support of the national women's movement, as well as on the reform of the Electoral Code, advocating for the introduction of a 30 per cent legislated party quota for the less represented gender on party lists.

The Electoral Code was successfully changed in 2008 to require, "for each electoral zone, at least thirty per cent of the multi-name list and/or one of the first three names on the multi-name list [to] be from each gender." In the parliamentary elections of 2009, 23 women were elected, increasing women's representation in that chamber from 7 per cent to 16.4 per cent. It has been suggested that one of the reasons why more women were not elected was the differing interpretations of the electoral law, with "weaknesses in the formulation of the legal provisions undermin[ing the quota] objective".<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission to the Republic of Albania, 14 September 2009, p. 18. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/albania/38598>.

In addition to the quota, the electoral law was also amended in 2008 to introduce a list proportional representation system, whereby the 140 members of parliament are elected across 12 constituencies corresponding to the country's 12 administrative regions. Under this electoral system, the lists of candidates are prepared by the political parties. It has been argued that the change in the electoral system resulted in MPs becoming more loyal to their political parties, and less able to pursue political issues independently, outside their party. Political party tensions following the 2009 elections eventually culminated in a six-month parliamentary boycott by the Socialist Party.

In this context, women MPs found it extremely difficult to leave behind their party politics. Women elected for the first time in 2009, who had actively campaigned on gender issues while working in the civil society sector and were passionate about those issues, were unable to put party loyalties aside and find a space for cross-party dialogue. In this political climate, the re-establishment of a women's caucus proved too challenging. Nonetheless, it is clear that the Women's Caucus that previously functioned in the parliament played a key role in introducing special measures to promote women's political participation in Albania.

While women MPs have found it difficult to raise the profile of gender issues and women's political representation at the national level, at the local level, several women networks have had more success. In this regard, the National Platform for Women (NPfW), a network of 1500 women politicians active in local and national-level politics, and supported by the OSCE Presence in Albania, has successfully raised awareness of gender issues in recent years. In addition, the main political parties have formed their own internal party women's leagues/forums operating at the local level, lobbying for an increased presence of women and their empowerment within the respective party structures.

In 2012, the Electoral Code was the subject of further reform.<sup>41</sup> With the support of several international organizations, different women's networks pulled together to advocate for a stronger quota provision, and stronger enforcement provisions. Lack of political will from the main political parties, however, together with divisions among the women's groups and their inability to find a united position, meant that no substantial amendments were introduced. As a consequence, there were concerns that the gender quota would not be enforced by electoral bodies during the parliamentary elections in June 2013, and that again this would affect the number of women elected to the Albanian parliament. In this environment, women parliamentarians continue to seek ways in which to co-operate across party lines, acknowledging the role that the previous Women's Caucus played in lobbying for women's representation in the past.

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### ***The existence of women's movements***

The presence of a women's movement and/or other women's civil society groups, coupled with the degree of their support for a women's parliamentary body, especially in the phases prior to and just after its establishment, can be considered an important enabling factor. While the questionnaire did not survey the existence of a women's movement in the OSCE participating States as a mechanism for promoting women's political participation as such, several respondents noted that the presence of a women's movement did influence the emergence of women's parliamentary bodies.

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41 The Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania, 2012, Art. 67, p. 57. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/albania/14464>.

In the Western Balkans, for example, strong women's movements functioned before, during and following the transitions to democracy. In fact, many of the women eventually elected to parliament in this region were leaders or members of the civil society women's movement. Several members of women's parliamentary bodies in the Western Balkans noted that women's parliamentary bodies are more likely to be successful where they maintain strong links to and relationships with the broader women's movement.<sup>42</sup> This is because women's movements often constitute the 'institutional memory' of the struggle for women's rights and gender equality in a country or region, and, as such, also tend to enjoy the support of society more broadly. Women's parliamentary bodies that capitalize on this knowledge and experience are more likely to be perceived as legitimate by the electorate. The Women Parliamentarians' Club of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is one example of a parliamentary body that has maintained strong links with women civil society activists; the Club often involves these activists in its activities and outreach. A similar relationship with the women's movement was noted by the Women's Caucus of the Assembly of Kosovo.

Likewise, gender equality outcomes in Slovenia have been achieved, in large measure, due to the work of a coalition of women from both inside and outside the parliament. In fact, when partisan competition and personal divisions between women MPs became too strong for a parliamentary caucus to function, a broad-based national Parity Coalition was formed, including individual leaders of women's organizations, trade unions, experts and leaders of political party women's organizations from the left, centre and right wing parties. The Coalition also included three highly prominent men. This Coalition is credited with having lobbied successfully for the introduction of a gender quota in the law on the election of members to the European Parliament (MEPs), requiring at least 40 per cent of the under-represented sex on party lists. As a result, the first delegation of Slovenian parliamentarians to the European Parliament was composed of 42 per cent women.

The Coalition also pressured competing political parties during the 2011 elections to increase the number of women candidates selected. Two parties which collectively won 35 per cent of the vote in these elections ran women in 50 per cent of their eligible constituencies.

### ***A question of timing***

Timing itself can be an important enabling factor facilitating the establishment of a women's parliamentary body. While women's parliamentary bodies can be established at any point during a parliamentary session, it is fair to say that there exist 'windows of opportunity' where the impetus to formalize relations across party lines in the interest of promoting women's substantive representation reaches a peak. For example, in the immediate aftermath of parliamentary elections, women parliamentarians may be motivated to capitalize on or formalize gains in women's political representation by establishing bodies in which to continue lobbying on gender equality issues.

Serbia offers an illustrative example in this regard. In Serbia, parliamentary elections in 2012 resulted in a clear gain in women's representation in the legislature, increasing from 22 per cent to 33 per cent. A record number of new women MPs took up parliamentary mandates following these elections, many of whom were eager and motivated to establish mechanisms for

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42 Discussions with participants held during the OSCE/ODIHR Regional Workshop on Parliamentary Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region, organized 11 to 12 December 2012 in Vienna, within the framework of the ODIHR project "Strengthening Parliamentary Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region".



cross-party co-operation on gender equality issues. In this case, the electoral atmosphere, the increase in women's representation, and the high number of women entering parliament for the first time were factors that, combined, created momentum for the establishment of a cross-party network. The establishment of a cross-party network in Serbia is explored in more detail in Case Study 2 below.

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### *Case Study 2: Towards the establishment of a Women's Parliamentary Body in Serbia*

Following parliamentary elections held on 6 May 2012, the proportion of women elected to the National Assembly of Serbia reached 33 per cent, an increase from 54 to 82 representatives. The increase is in part attributed to amendments to the legislated gender quota, which now requires that the lists of political parties contain at least one representative of each sex among every three candidates (the previous quota provision required one representative of each sex among every four candidates). Capitalizing on the momentum created by the positive results of the 2012 elections, women elected to a parliamentary mandate seized the opportunity to discuss the feasibility of establishing a women's parliamentary body.

The high number of new women MPs taking up parliamentary seats for the first time contributed to a renewed interest in establishing a cross-party women's body, mainly as a means to pursue a legislative agenda in support of gender equality and women's rights. Preliminary discussions among interested women MPs highlighted the limited support of political party leaders for women's political candidacy and the low level of turnout among women voters; women MPs recognized the value of cross-party dialogue in developing strategies to address these issues.

Levels of support for the establishment of a cross-party body varied among Serbian women politicians – not only between members of different political parties, but also between women with different years of experience in politics and in the broader women's movement in the country. In order to learn more about what type of body would best suit the Serbian parliamentary context, women MPs consulted international organizations and NGOs committed to empowering women within political parties and parliaments. Benefitting from the support offered by the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence (BFPE) and the OSCE Mission to Serbia, the MPs organized and participated in dedicated seminars as well as in peer-to-peer exchanges with parliamentarians from other countries. Male parliamentary colleagues, such as the Chair of the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality, attended several of these events, demonstrating broader parliamentary support for the initiative.

These activities facilitated an exchange between more and less experienced Serbian women politicians, thus building inter-generational solidarity and understanding. Moreover, women MPs were exposed to different models of parliamentary bodies (ranging from very formal to very informal structures) and to successful examples and good practices of women parliamentary structures established in other countries. The exposure to such a range of models and types helped the MPs come to a consensus about how they wished to proceed and what type of parliamentary body they wished to establish.

Thus far, developments have been encouraging, with all 82 women MPs establishing a cross-party Network in February 2013. The MPs decided to establish a Network that is informal in nature, with no leadership structure per se. Instead, the members agreed to introduce a 'troika' co-ordination system, whose members are rotated from among the political parties represented in the Network, starting with the political party with the most number of seats in the parliament. Furthermore, the members committed to develop Terms of Reference for the Network



co-ordinators, and agreed that each party would nominate a 'liaison officer' to support the co-ordinator. Open to all 82 women MPs currently sitting in the Serbian parliament, the Network will welcome close co-operation with men MPs.

During the meeting at which the body was established, members also reached agreement on four basic goals around which the Network will structure its activities:

- To influence legislation and promote gender equality
- To monitor implementation of legislation relevant to women in society
- To promote the education of women
- To promote women's solidarity and empower women at all levels of government

Serbian women MPs have decided to proceed by building cross-party co-operation, opting for a more informal structure with a shared leadership system that has garnered support amongst the majority of members, instead of a formal cross-party caucus advocated by a more limited group. To this end, Serbian women MPs have also capitalized on support and expertise from civil society and international organizations in the initial phase of designing and establishing the structure. The exposure to successful experiences and alternative models established in other countries has resulted in a practical exchange of good practices and sharing of knowledge. At the same time, by focusing on select, politically-uncontroversial objectives of interest to all members, the Network was able to come to a rather quick agreement on programmatic goals and activities. All these elements should create a solid basis for the Network's future activities and challenges.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed the potential impact of political systems and special measures on the establishment of women's parliamentary bodies, and highlighted several external enabling factors that can facilitate the establishment of these bodies.

It appears that, while the type of parliamentary and political system in place does not directly affect the emergence of a women's parliamentary body, the political context can influence whether and what type of body may emerge. Likewise, while the existence of legal or voluntary measures can influence the number of women elected to parliament, such measures do not appear to be a direct indicator of the likelihood that a women's parliamentary body will be established. Nonetheless, the study has found that women's parliamentary bodies have played a key role in advocating for the introduction of gender quota provisions into electoral laws, in lobbying for amendments to these provisions, and/or in monitoring the implementation of quota provisions. In addition, topics such as special measures can bring women (and men) from different parties together, creating opportunities for issue-based, cross-party dialogue.

Women's movements can also serve as an enabling factor facilitating the establishment of women's parliamentary bodies, providing women MPs with expertise and connecting them to the electorate. Women's movements often serve as the institutional memory of past achievements and lessons learned in the struggle for women's rights and gender equality. A last factor that can influence whether and when a body is established is timing. Women MPs may be more motivated to establish bodies in the immediate aftermath of parliamentary elections, for example, in order to capitalize on gains in women's representation or, alternatively, in order to come together to ensure that future elections result in more women taking up parliamentary seats.

## 4. Organizing for effectiveness

As outlined in chapter 2, a primary consideration in the analysis of women's parliamentary bodies is the way in which they are structured, particularly in terms of their internal organization, their membership and modes of leadership. The way in which a body is organized often contributes to its ability to achieve the objectives it sets itself. Indeed, challenges faced by women's parliamentary bodies are often a consequence of their structure and organization. A second, but no less important consideration, is the body's objectives; what it intends to do once it is established.

This chapter presents the results of the survey in terms of the *organization* of women's parliamentary bodies. The chapter is also concerned with the question of whether organizational factors – namely, mode of operation, membership, leadership and objectives – have any perceived impact on the overall effectiveness of women's parliamentary bodies.

### ***Mode of operation and internal organization***

The survey results suggest that women's parliamentary bodies, where they exist, are organized fairly informally (see Table 4.1). Meetings are scheduled only when they are required in 11 of the 17 bodies, and formal minutes are kept in half of them. This tends to indicate that the bodies operate on an 'as needs' basis, rather than according to a formalized schedule.

<i>Meetings (n=17)</i>	
Meetings scheduled only as required	11
Regular meetings scheduled during each parliamentary session	8
Formal meeting minutes are kept	6
<i>Staffing (n=17)</i>	
Administrative staff provided by Parliament	7
The body has no permanent staff	6
Research staff provided by Parliament	3
Support staff provided by civil society/international organizations	3
<i>Resources (n=17)</i>	

The body is allocated a meeting room by the Parliament	11
The body is allocated funding by the Parliament	7
The body receives support from civil society/international organizations	5
Members pay a financial contribution	1

Note: The total number for each group of answers might be greater than 'n' as respondents could indicate that multiple options apply under each heading.

Almost half of the bodies surveyed were allocated administrative staff by the parliament, but only three were allocated research staff. In six (Albania, Armenia, Estonia, Finland, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine), the parliament provided no staff at all. In the case of Estonia, this was linked to the broader capacity of the Estonian Parliament:

*The Estonian Parliament is small and resources are limited. Significant financial support to unions and associations has not been possible. Also, information on gender equality issues and research data are supplemented by universities and research centres, where necessary (Estonia).*

Parliaments provided resources to half of the women's parliamentary bodies surveyed, although they were more likely to provide only a meeting room. The Women Parliamentarians' Club of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia created its own website, hosted on the website of the Assembly, which may be regarded as a type of in-kind support from the legislature. Another form of in-kind support by the parliament could be the provision of an intern for the parliamentary body, to assist in organizing meetings, implementing activities, or taking minutes.

Lastly, only one of the bodies surveyed required their own members to pay a financial contribution (United States of America), and none were funded by political parties. A number of the women's parliamentary bodies in the Western Balkans are jointly funded by the parliament and international organizations. In most of these cases, activities of the body could not be organized without the financial contribution of international organizations.

The Women's Caucus of the Assembly of Kosovo is an example of a body that has paid a great deal of attention to modes of operation and internal organization, operating in a highly structured manner in order to maximize its impact, as demonstrated in Case Study 3 below.

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### **Case Study 3: Women's Caucus (GGD) of the Assembly of Kosovo**

Established in 2005, the Women's Caucus is composed of all 40 women MPs that sit in the unicameral Assembly of Kosovo. The Caucus comprises members from all the political parties and ethnicities currently represented in the Assembly. Thanks to a gender quota which reserves one third of the seats (33 per cent) for the less represented gender, the Caucus has been able to make effective use of its numbers to raise the profile of women MPs within national political and social debates, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in various fields (such as women's entry into, and participation in, parliament, as well as the economy, the environment and health sectors). Its internal organization as well as the commitment and dedication of its members, have been keys to its success.

Although it is not recognized formally by the Assembly, the Caucus functions in a highly structured manner. It has established a Board of seven members – one per political group represented in the Assembly – from which a President is then elected by secret ballot at the

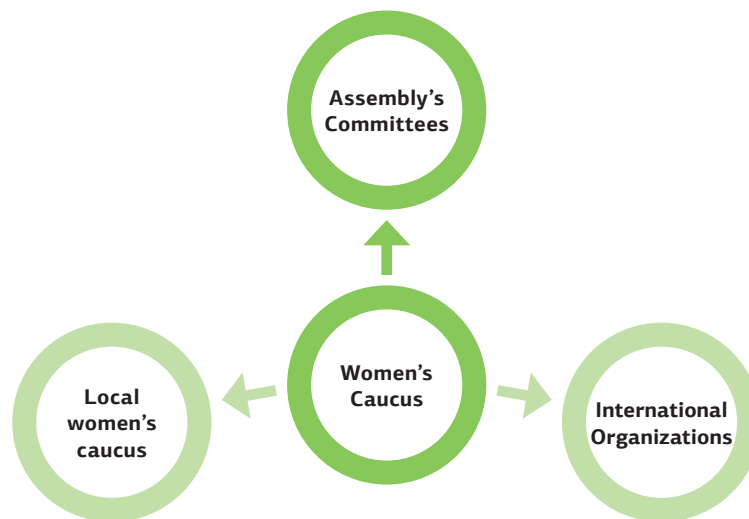
beginning of every legislative term. The Caucus has adopted its own internal procedural regulations. Meetings are held at least twice a month, supported by an assistant provided by the Assembly who circulates a set agenda and takes formal minutes.

Two main factors seem to account for this level of organization: first, political parties have been supportive of the Caucus, or, at the very least, have not opposed its activities; and second, the Caucus has developed a strong degree of co-operation with all committees (especially with the Committee on Gender Equality) and the Speaker of the Assembly.

Respect for and attention to the Caucus's activities has been earned not least through the organization of highly effective actions that have helped demonstrate the potential impact of the Caucus. For example, in a demonstration of cross-party unity, all 40 women MPs once left the chamber, blocking a plenary voting session, due to the fact that their concerns had not been taken into account. As Ms. Teuta Sahatqija, current President of the Caucus, explained, *'When asked about their positions within the political parties, women realise that regardless of the party they are always under-represented at the decision-making levels. And the common interest for changing this situation is what ultimately unites us, and makes the work of the Caucus effective.'*

The Caucus has also focused on formalizing its activities by adopting a Strategic Action Plan and elaborating an Annual Action Plan. The plans are drafted with the active involvement of civil society organizations and international organizations, in order to identify priorities and the most effective ways to achieve them. Co-operation with partners is sustained through joint implementation of the Caucus's activities.

As the figure below shows, the action plans of the Caucus are developed through a multi-level approach: input is provided at the local level, at the national level through the Assembly and the Government, and at the international level through the involvement of international organizations.



At the *local level*, the Caucus has established 'branches' in the form of local women's caucuses. Activities of these caucuses include trainings and roundtable discussions on gender issues, gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting, and other initiatives involving women in the community and local political leaders. Through these activities, national women MPs are given input into the political issues affecting local communities that should be raised in the Assembly

of Kosovo. At the *national level*, the Caucus is concerned with lobbying for greater women's representation and articulating women's interests and gender equality issues within all the Assembly's committees. For example, Caucus members attend meetings of committees that have no female representation – as observers – and provide advice on legislation from a gender perspective. The Caucus has also implemented a media strategy – including an agreement with the national television broadcaster to air gender-sensitive programs on a regular basis – which has resulted in the Caucus attracting good coverage in the media. In addition, the actions of the Caucus benefit from input at the *international level*, as the Caucus often co-operates with other structures for women MPs in the region, and engages in knowledge exchange with similar structures established in Europe.

Given the informal nature of the Caucus, funding remains a considerable problem for the implementation of its activities. In this respect, co-operation with partners such as the OSCE, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and others is extremely important. Such co-operation can increase the body's legitimacy, demonstrate its adherence to international gender equality standards, as well as result in the provision of financial or technical expertise by international actors. For example, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo is currently providing a gender expert/advisor (former MP) to the Caucus, who acts as a liaison between women's caucuses at the local level, and the national-level Caucus.

The most recent achievements of the Caucus include:

- In 2012, the Caucus concentrated its activity on the reform of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly. The support of several committees was sought on four amendments:
  - 1) more gender-sensitive language shall be adopted in all Assembly documents, including the rules of procedure, and in Assembly debates;
  - 2) the President of the Assembly shall request the Women's Caucus to propose a candidate for the Deputy President of the Assembly;
  - 3) the Chair and Deputy Chair of each committee shall not be of the same gender;
  - 4) the composition of committees shall reflect the political power of political groups, and gender equality.
- The Caucus articulated its concerns regarding the list of ambassadorial candidates presented to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which included only male candidates. The Caucus therefore called for greater gender balance, resulting in the appointment of several qualified women to ambassadorial positions.
- A national programme to raise awareness among women on breast cancer prevention was developed in co-operation with the local caucuses and municipalities, and implemented in co-operation with local public health services.

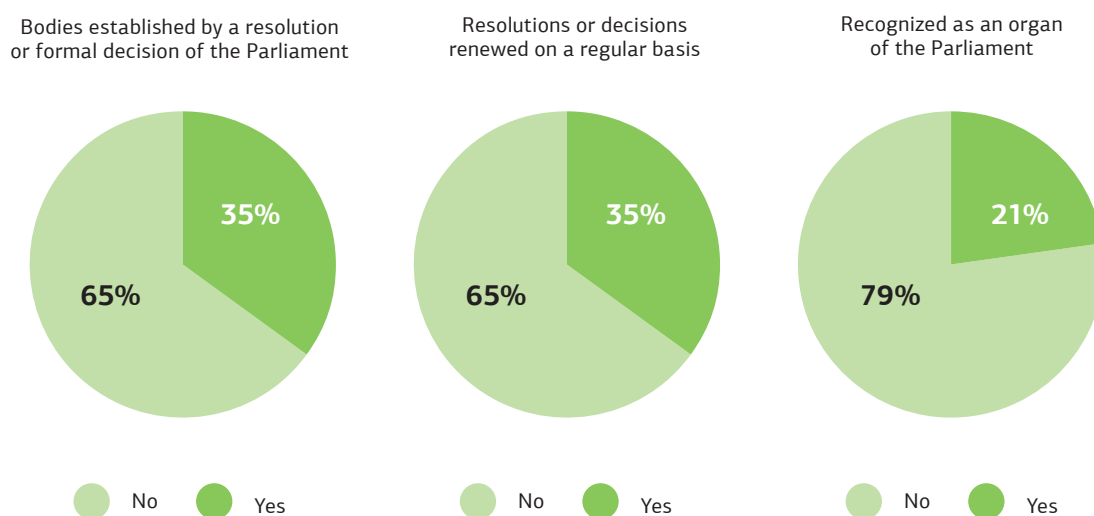
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The experience of the Women's Caucus of the Assembly of Kosovo suggests that a structure for women MPs can be an 'informal' body, but still work within the broader parameters of the Assembly in a highly structured manner. In this case, the leadership is structured according to the partisan make-up of the Assembly, with a seven-member Board. Formal meetings supported by a member of the Assembly's staff are regularly scheduled (twice a month) and minutes are taken; there is also a strong degree of co-operation with legislative committees and the Speaker. This highly structured nature of the Caucus has also meant that the Caucus has been able to elaborate a Strategic Plan, and jointly implement its Annual Action Plan with the help of partner organizations.

### Women's parliamentary bodies and their relationship to the parliament

The institution of parliament may have some effect on the ability of women to make changes to both the parliamentary environment and to legislation. Respondents were asked how the women's parliamentary body was recognized by the parliament (see Figure 4.1). Recognition could take the form of a formal resolution debated or passed in the chamber, or the acknowledgement of the body in the internal rules of the parliament. Likewise, respondents were also asked whether women's parliamentary bodies were automatically renewed with each new parliamentary sitting, or required renewal on a regular basis (for example, every year or with each new parliamentary sitting).

**Figure 4.1 Relationship of women's parliamentary bodies to the parliament in the OSCE region**



Interestingly, in 65 per cent of cases, the parliament has not resolved or formally decided to establish a women's parliamentary body, or to renew that body on a regular basis. Furthermore, the parliament rarely confers on these bodies the kinds of investigative or legislative review powers of parliamentary committees or commissions – that is, they are not commonly recognized as an 'organ' of the parliament.

For the most part, parliaments do not require onerous information or details for the registration of women's parliamentary bodies (see Table 4.2). In most parliaments, however, a name is required. A membership list and organizational chart were expected in Austria, Estonia, Georgia and the United States of America, while in Finland and France internal rules were also required.<sup>43</sup> None of the bodies presented financial declarations from members to parliament, including in the United States, where members are required to pay a membership fee. In the parliaments of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kyrgyzstan, the women's parliamentary body was not formally recognized.

<sup>43</sup> Similar rules are also required by the Assembly of Kosovo.

**Table 4.2 Details required for registration**

Name	6	<i>Austria, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, United States of America<sup>46</sup></i>
Membership list and organizational chart	5	<i>Austria, Estonia, France, Georgia, United States of America</i>
Internal rules	3	<i>Finland, France, Georgia<sup>47</sup></i>
Statement of purpose	3	<i>France, Georgia, United States of America</i>
Staff required	2	<i>France, Georgia<sup>48</sup></i>
Strategic Plan	2	<i>Finland, Georgia<sup>49</sup></i>

## Membership

Nine of the parliamentary bodies surveyed included all women MPs, while in another nine, membership was voluntary, and did not necessarily involve all women members of parliament. It was reportedly uncommon for bodies to have a formal or written procedure for accepting members (25 per cent noted the existence of such procedures, and 75 per cent did not). The Swedish case provides an example of a group with a formal mechanism to appoint members. The Speaker's Reference Group on Gender Equality Issues is headed by the Speaker of the Riksdag, and consists of eight other members, one from each party represented in parliament. The members are nominated by their respective parties and appointed for one parliamentary term. In the current 2010–2014 term, all members of the Reference Group are women. In order to promote a more gender-balanced group, however, each party is asked to nominate two members, one regular member and one deputy member, with the deputy sometimes being a man. As a consequence, the body today consists of eight regular members (all women) and eight deputy members (three men and five women). Thus, the current gender composition of the body is 100 per cent female permanent members, 62.5 per cent female deputy members and 37.5 per cent male deputy members.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, representatives from political parties not elected to parliament are entitled to become members of the Women Parliamentarians' Club. In Georgia, the women's parliamentary body includes representatives of civil society; representatives of international organizations are also allowed to join.

Almost half of the bodies surveyed reported that men could become members (Armenia, Austria, Canada, France, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine). The number of men included in such bodies varied from one to ten (in Ukraine). As the case study on Ukraine below demonstrates, the engagement of men can be critical to the effectiveness of parliamentary bodies in lobbying for greater gender-sensitivity and gender awareness within parliamentary settings. Not all bodies agreed, however, on the need to include men. The Women's Caucus of the Assembly of Kosovo, for example, was established in order to provide a space where women could come together to articulate their priorities and concerns in a safe environment, and to build their capacity and confidence to voice these priorities before the parliament as a whole. In some cases, the restriction of membership to women only is a deliberate design decision.

44 A name was also required by the Assembly of Kosovo.

45 Internal rules were also required by the Assembly of Kosovo.

46 Staff was also required by the Assembly of Kosovo.

47 A Strategic Plan was also required by the Assembly of Kosovo.



#### *Case Study 4: The Equal Opportunities Group of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine*

In late 2011, Parliamentary Speaker Lytvyn officially announced the launch of a “cross-faction deputy association Equal Opportunities”, more commonly referred to as the Equal Opportunities Group, in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Its announcement was met with some scepticism. Indeed, the Verkhovna Rada has witnessed several attempts to establish a cross-party group of parliamentarians with the aim of promoting gender equality issues. Obstacles have included deeply-rooted divisions between political parties in Ukraine, the low level of women’s representation in the Verkhovna Rada (eight per cent from 2009 to 2012), and a limited culture of women’s solidarity.

Members of the group attribute the success of its current incarnation to several factors. First, all members of the Equal Opportunities Group, regardless of their party affiliation, were in agreement on the need to protect benefits to single mothers, which a draft law by the Cabinet intended to cancel; issue-based solidarity was key to defeating the proposed cancellation of benefits. Second, public awareness about gender inequality has steadily increased in Ukraine. At the same time, the prospect of parliamentary elections in 2012 created a ‘window of opportunity’ for women’s groups, politicians and gender experts to join forces to highlight Ukraine’s poor record of women’s representation in public office.

The Equal Opportunities Group was formally registered in the Rada as a ‘voluntary association’ on 6 December 2011. The status of association means that the Group has no formal powers to influence or vote on legislative initiatives, nor does it receive budgetary resources from the parliament. Nonetheless, the Group has played a role in the development of the draft law “On Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences for settlement of the question of responsibility for violence in the family”, and has also held a roundtable on reproductive rights. The Group is entitled to propose drafts or amendments to legislation that may then be submitted by individual MPs. Furthermore, members of the Group advocate within their political parties on various issues, including for the active engagement of women in political life, and for the introduction of voluntary quotas in party lists. Co-operation between the Group and the Sub-committee on Gender Equality (a sub-committee of the Committee on Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities) is limited, partly stemming from the different mandate, objectives and activities of these two bodies.

When it was first established, the Equal Opportunities Group adopted an innovative system of leadership. Until recently, the Group had been co-chaired by three MPs from three different political parties, with the aim of sharing ownership across party lines and of building cross-party consensus on gender issues. Unfortunately, more recently, the Group has not been able to overcome the ideological differences existing between political parties on key issues, resulting in one party recalling all its members from the Group.

In Ukraine, combating gender-based stereotypes is key to enhancing the role of women in politics and decision-making, and advocating for increased political participation of women forms a central part of the Group’s activities. For example, in May 2012, the Group hosted the high-level conference “Women’s Participation in the Parliamentary Elections of 2012 in Ukraine”, in co-operation with the OSCE/ODIHR and NDI Ukraine, and with the support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). In this respect, the participation of men in the Group has been critical; men have been actively engaged in promoting gender equality and in combatting gender-based stereotypes.



Likewise, the Group has sought to forge partnerships and alliances with external stakeholders, namely civil society. The media has been both a target of the Group's activities, as well as a key partner. For example, the Group regularly writes a column in the publication "Business Ukraine" about issues the Group is working on. This partnership serves a dual purpose: raising the profile of the Group and its activities as well as raising awareness on key gender-related issues of importance to the public – both men and women. Importantly, the Equal Opportunities Group was established with the support of NDI Ukraine, who continues to assist it in developing its strategic objectives and activities.

The Group has continued to face several challenges, some of which are similar to the obstacles confronted by such groups elsewhere in the OSCE region, while others reflect the particular political culture of Ukraine. These include a high level of political polarization, limited resources, continued gender-based stereotypes regarding women in politics, limited cross-party co-operation within the Rada, and an insufficient culture of women's solidarity in Ukraine.

Following parliamentary elections in October 2012 (where women's parliamentary representation increased by two per cent), the Equal Opportunities Group was formally re-established as part of the new convocation of parliament on 25 December 2012. Now with 28 members from three different political factions, among them ten men, the Group has elaborated a plan of activities focused on two objectives: the promotion of gender equality, including the participation of women in all spheres of political and social life, and the development and/or reform of legislative initiatives in the spheres of domestic violence, protection of the rights of women and children, and ensuring equal opportunities of men and women in all spheres of life. To this end, the Group has already elaborated three draft laws relating to prevention of domestic violence, prohibition of trafficking in children, and provision of equal social protection to single mothers and fathers. Between January and March 2013, the Group also held several meetings with a number of NGOs in order to draft a Memorandum as a more solid ground for future co-operation.

As noted, whilst the Group itself, as an association of MPs, does not have the power to initiate legislation according to the Rules of Procedures of the Rada, it can elaborate drafts or amendments to legislation which can then be submitted by individual MPs. Furthermore, within their political parties, the members of the Group will advocate for the active engagement of women in political life, as well as support the introduction of voluntary quotas in political parties.

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As noted in Case Study 4 above, men's participation in the Equal Opportunities Group in Ukraine has been particularly helpful in acknowledging and highlighting men's contributions to achieving gender equality. The number of men involved increased (from three to ten) in the parliamentary term following the October 2012 elections, attesting to the growing influence of the Group. Importantly, men help to combat negative stereotypes prevalent in the community about women's political participation and women's broader role in public life.

Notwithstanding the above, ultimately, the membership and composition of a women's parliamentary body should be linked to the mandate and objectives of the body. The engagement of men and/or of external actors such as civil society, academia, or international organizations may be helpful in achieving objectives related to advocacy, awareness-raising, and partnership on key legislative initiatives or reforms, while a women-only composition may be preferable if part of the aim of the body is to provide a safe space for women to voice their needs and concerns.

### ***Leadership, decision-making and procedural issues***

While the internal mode of operation of the bodies surveyed varied in terms of degrees of formality, the approach to leadership in particular appears to be quite formal. Chairs and Deputy Chairs are more often elected for a fixed term than rotated amongst MPs from different parties or chambers. In Ukraine, a third approach to leadership can be discerned, as the statutory documents of the Equal Opportunities Group state that the leadership of the Group should be shared among the three parliamentary political party factions, so as to foster cross-party solidarity.

The length of a leadership term differs across structures. Respondents noted that allowing one person to serve as head of the body for the entire sitting provides stability and strategic direction to the body. This is the case where parliamentary bodies are led by those occupying positions of leadership within the parliament, for example, the Speaker's Reference Group on Gender Equality Issues of the Swedish Parliament and the Gender Equality Council of Georgia, which is headed by the First Deputy Speaker of the Georgian Parliament. At the other end of the spectrum, the positions of Chair and Deputy Chair of the Women's Union of Estonia are rotated every two months. This approach allows every member of the Union the opportunity to exercise leadership. In between these two models, the Women Parliamentarians' Club of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia selects a Chair to serve a one-year mandate from among a co-ordinating body, allowing for both strategic direction and the opportunity for more than one member to hold a position of leadership. In Serbia, members of the Network established in February 2013 opted not to establish a fixed leadership mechanism. Instead, the Network is co-ordinated by a rotating troika (one representative of each parliamentary party faction, starting with the largest) that changes every one to two months; the troika will be supported by liaison officers from each political party.

Other women's parliamentary bodies have established decision-making or executive entities to support the strategic development of the body. In Kyrgyzstan, the process of decision-making itself operates on the basis of consensus among all members. The Women Parliamentarians' Club of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has established a co-ordinating body of Deputy Chairs, one representative from each political group. The Chair of the Club is elected from this co-ordinating group, which meets regularly. Likewise, the Women's Caucus of the Assembly of Kosovo includes a Board of seven members that is empowered to elect the President by secret ballot and provide direction and strategic guidance to the Caucus as a whole.

It is also worth noting that in Finland, France and Poland, there are positions such as Treasurer, Secretary or Public Relations Officer.

Just like parliaments themselves, women's parliamentary bodies in the OSCE region commonly have internal rules, circulate agendas before the meeting, and require decisions to be taken by a vote rather than consensually. Unlike other parliamentary bodies, however, these bodies are not as commonly given the power to inquire into policy and legislation, draft their own legislation, or report to the parliament. Parliaments' responses to the questions of leadership structure and whether parliaments had conferred any particular powers on the body are reported in Table 4.3.

<b>Table 4.3 Organization of women's parliamentary bodies: Leadership and powers</b>	
Leadership and procedure (n=17)	
<i>Leadership positions (Chair, Deputy Chair) elected by body</i>	10
<i>Leadership positions rotated across different parties, different chambers, old/new MPs</i>	7
<i>Fixed term for Chair (e.g. 1 year)</i>	7
<i>The body has established positions (e.g. Treasurer, Secretary, Public Relations Officer, etc)</i>	3
<i>The body has internal procedural rules</i>	8
<i>Governing organ established</i>	6
<i>Sub-committees can be established</i>	3
<i>Agenda prepared and circulated to all members before each meeting</i>	11
<i>No agenda circulated</i>	2
<i>Decisions are taken by a vote</i>	10
<i>Decisions are taken by consensus</i>	8
Powers and functions expressed in rules of procedure (n=17)	
<i>The body may report to Parliament</i>	5
<i>The body may inquire into policy and legislation, and may call witnesses and request expert submissions</i>	5
<i>The body may draft legislation</i>	4

Note: The total number for each group of answers might be greater than 'n' because respondents could indicate that multiple options apply under each heading.

Case Study 5 below outlines in greater detail the leadership and decision-making procedures of the Women Parliamentarians' Club of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

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### **Case Study 5: Women Parliamentarians' Club of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

Established with the support of women's civil society organizations within the framework of the Stability Pact – Gender Task Force programme for South Eastern Europe in 2003, the Women Parliamentarians' Club of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has managed to assert itself as an influential group within the unicameral parliament. All women Members of Parliament belong to the Club.

The Club has established highly-developed leadership and decision-making structures, with a co-ordinating body composed of representatives from each political group (Deputy Chairs) among which a rotated Chairperson is appointed for a fixed period of one year. Meetings of the co-ordinating body are frequent – two to three times a month – while the entire Club meets several times during the year; the Club has also adopted internal procedural rules agreed upon by its members. A Strategic Plan is adopted by consensus after each member has discussed it with, and received approval from, her political party. At the end of each year, the Club reviews the activities in the Plan. The Club also has its own website hosted on the website of the Parliament, which serves to inform parliamentarians and the public of its activities and achievements.

This level of organization requires a high degree of co-operation among the members of the Club in pursuing the aim of gender equality across party lines. Most of the Club's members come from the political majority represented in the Parliament, and therefore have considerable success in attracting the Government's support. However, there have been occasions when consensus reached among Club members has required them to take a different stance to members of their own political party on some issues.

The Club has established a close relationship with the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. The President of the Committee sits on the co-ordinating body of the Club. This relationship is reciprocated: the Chair of the Club is officially invited to all sessions of the Committee. This strong relationship results in strategic co-operation between the two bodies. The Club serves as an informal forum where gender-related policies are debated and agreed upon across party lines. The policies are then formally discussed within the Committee, giving them institutional value and providing for the possibility to bring these policies to the attention of the Minister/Government (see figure below). This policy-formulation process has proven effective: for example, a number of amendments proposed by the Club have been accepted by the Committee, and then presented at the ministerial level. The Law for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men (2012) and the Law on Maternity Leave were passed following this deliberative process.



Co-operation between the Club and NGOs and civil society organizations has also proven fruitful. NGOs assist the Club in organizing trainings, hearings and projects, as well as in the primary drafting of the Club's Strategic Plan, giving civil society a voice inside the Parliament. Local committees on equal opportunities, established in each municipality, are also invited to discuss their priorities on gender issues. Through these discussions, NGOs and the local committees on equal opportunities are able to channel their concerns into the Strategic Plan of the Club. This political strategy to advance gender-related policies is then completed by Coordinators on Gender Equality present in all Ministry offices.

The most recent activities of the Club have included the promotion of three National Strategic Plans addressing (i) gender budgeting, following the implementation of a Council of Europe project on this topic in 2006, (ii) domestic violence and violence against women, and (iii) the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

It is clear that among the women's parliamentary bodies surveyed, leadership and decision-making considerations vary widely. Where attention is paid to strategic planning, guidance, and co-ordination, the existence of decision-making mechanisms – boards or committees – can help facilitate and guide these processes. Leadership of the body can be determined according to different formulas; leadership procedures, or at least mechanisms of co-ordination, are instituted not only to provide direction, but, more importantly, as a means of building cross-party trust, co-operation and dialogue.

## Objectives and mandates

Respondents were presented with a list of possible objectives guiding the work of their parliamentary body, and asked to rank these in order of priority (on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the most important); the findings are captured in Table 4.4 below. The results show that almost all respondents prioritized the objective of influencing policy and legislation from a gender perspective. This result suggests that women's parliamentary bodies in the OSCE region have been formed because there is a specific role for parliaments in gender mainstreaming. Only in Finland was the body concerned with gender budgeting, but here it was a highly ranked objective.

**Table 4.4 Objectives and mandates of women's parliamentary bodies**

9.9	To influence policy and legislation from a gender perspective (n=14)
9	To implement and/or monitor gender budgeting (n=1)
8.2	To lobby for support on gender equality issues (n=12)
8.1	To add items to the parliamentary agenda (n=9)
7.7	To draft legislation and introduce it into the Parliament (n=8)
7.2	To raise awareness both inside and outside the Parliament on gender equality issues (n=11)
7	To review legislation (n=3)
7	To conduct advocacy with civil society organizations (n=5)
6.5	To ensure Parliament's compliance with international obligations such as CEDAW commitments (n=10)
6	To build capacity and empower women (n=5)
5.6	To create a social space for women and men MPs and foster a sense of solidarity (n=6)
5.5	To hear from relevant stakeholders on gender equality issues (n=6)
5.2	To monitor policy implementation (n=8)
5.5	To conduct or commission research (n=4)

Scale: A weighted index was developed, whereby the higher the score (from 1 to 10), the higher the priority accorded the objective.

A second set of objectives relate to lobbying and advocacy on gender issues (lobbying for support on gender equality, adding items to the parliamentary agenda, raising awareness on gender issues). Not only did a number of bodies regard this as one of their objectives but they rated it as one of their most important objectives (with a rating of 8 or 7).

Interestingly, few parliamentary bodies prioritized the empowerment of their women members, although this may be ultimately a corollary of their stated priorities. Regardless of the specific objectives and mandate of the parliamentary body, it is clear that women's parliamentary bodies are established to serve a common, shared goal of their members. The existence of a unifying goal or purpose serves not only to provide strategic direction to the body, but is also important in building cross-party trust and co-operation.

### **Does structure and organization impact on effectiveness?**

When asked whether the structure and organization of the body contributed to its effectiveness, some women's parliamentary bodies responded that there was a positive association:

*The structure and the arrangement of the Forum allow it to work with a high degree of efficiency as the rules and regulations were developed by women MPs. Because decisions are made by consensus, all suggested changes can affect the decision-making process (Kyrgyzstan).*

*Yes, the structure and organization of the Network of Women Members of the Finnish Parliament can work quite effectively. As evidence of this it could be mentioned that the Network has been able to influence policy and legislation from a gender perspective (Finland).*

In Kyrgyzstan, the structure and consensual decision-making process facilitated women's empowerment. In Finland, and to some extent in Sweden, the informality of the Network is understood as one of the keys to its success. In a similar way, in the Assembly of Kosovo, the formal structure of the Women's Caucus, with its executive Board and regularly scheduled meetings, is regarded as a contributing factor to its effectiveness.

Other respondents to the ODIHR questionnaire, however, noted that the structure and organization were not the decisive factors when considering the bodies' effectiveness. Instead, broader institutional factors, such as the partisan make-up of the parliament, played a stronger role:

*The former model of the Caucus was very effective because it was decided in a very consensual way. It needed a longer period, to create experience and effectiveness, to be reinforced and to create tradition. The situation of the parliamentary mandate 2009 till now has not produced a good climate for the existence and sustainability of the Caucus. There were efforts by some women MPs but they did not succeed (Albania).*

*In a minority government, everything is politicized, and it doesn't change much in a majority government. The principal barrier to achieving meaningful action in Canada's all-party women's caucus appears to be a lack of participation by parliamentarians from the governing party. At the same time, women's commitment to working together is small. On gender issues, female government MPs usually vote according to their party's position. Sometimes the minister for women will ask her members to do a particular study, and it will be done, as the government party has the majority. This may lead to legislation. Of course, as there are two government members on the steering committee, the government controls the witness list! And that impacts what is said in the study. The ultimate commitment is to party, not to women (Canada).*

It is interesting to note that, in the cases of Albania and Kyrgyzstan, both emphasized the consensual nature of decision-making as a factor that contributed to the effectiveness of the body. In other cases, however, women's parliamentary bodies may wish to create mechanisms to allow for the articulation of dissenting opinions or may deem consensus as too difficult a condition to achieve.

Two other factors are important in determining the effectiveness of a women's parliamentary body. First, the commitment of members to work together across political divisions and bring consensus-based legislative or policy change on issues that are really important to them, and second, the relationships they form both within and outside the parliament. These factors are the subject of the next two chapters of this study.



## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on findings and observations with respect to the organization and structure of women's parliamentary bodies in the OSCE region. For the most part, these bodies are broadly 'informal' in nature, associated loosely with the parliament and rarely established by formal resolution. Bodies tend to meet as required. While half of those surveyed have administrative staff provided by the parliament, very few are given research staff, which in some cases is a function of the general capacity of the parliament itself. Given that a lack of financial and logistical support has been noted as one of the most significant challenges to the establishment and sustainability of such bodies, this support has to be secured from a reliable source. It is not surprising, then, that women's parliamentary bodies are often supported by international organizations.

Notwithstanding the 'informal' structure of these bodies, their approach to leadership and procedure can be characterized as quite formal. This need not be surprising, given the institutions from which they are sprung. Agendas are typically circulated in advance of a meeting, rules determine meeting procedure, and leadership terms are often fixed. The more organized a parliamentary body, the more likely it is to have developed a Strategic Plan, and/or Plans of Action.

The case studies presented in this chapter demonstrate the importance of sharing leadership positions among the party groups. In Ukraine, until recently, the leadership was shared among three co-chairs, each also a member of a different parliamentary party faction. This exercise in power sharing was aimed at enhancing cross-party collaboration in a politically challenging environment. Conversely, the seven-member governing Board of the structure established in the Assembly of Kosovo is comprised of a member from each party group, while a President is elected to serve as head of the Caucus for the entire parliamentary term.

Membership options also differ: while some parliamentary bodies try to ensure that all women participate (for example, the Women Parliamentarians' Club of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), some are happy to cater only to those who are interested (or of 'like mind', for example, the Pro-Life Caucus in the United States). Men participate in a number of parliamentary bodies, although to differing degrees. The case study from Ukraine illustrates the important role men have played in the Equal Opportunities Group to combat negative stereotypes of women in public office. Elsewhere, restricting membership to women only allows women to articulate their policy priorities and concerns in an environment that is perceived as more conducive to the body's objectives.

Lastly, this chapter identified the mandates of different bodies. It was found that women's parliamentary bodies are overwhelmingly committed to influencing policy and legislation from a gender perspective, and to lobbying on gender equality issues. Importantly, these bodies tend not to have the same kind of powers of parliamentary committees, which would enable them to initiate or amend legislation.

Notwithstanding the organizational and structural diversity of women's parliamentary bodies in the OSCE region, some conclusions can be drawn. First, it is critical that the parliamentary body articulates a common goal or purpose that its establishment is intended to achieve; second, there are benefits in establishing leadership processes that serve to strengthen cross-party trust, co-operation and dialogue; and third, membership provisions (that is, who is entitled to join) should be linked to the ultimate mandate or goal of the body.



## 5. Achieving positive outcomes

What have women's parliamentary bodies been created to achieve? This chapter reviews the activities reported by the surveyed bodies, selected positive achievements, and what impact political polarization and party discipline have had on the ability of these bodies to implement their activities.

The chapter also considers the question of whether women's parliamentary bodies in the OSCE region have been able to organize activities aimed at the empowerment of their members.

### *Activities*

Most commonly, women's parliamentary bodies surveyed in the OSCE region reported activities aimed at influencing policy and legislation and considered these to be 'fairly effective' (see Table 5.1). In Albania, for example, the Law on Gender Equality in Albanian Society was considered as an important law adopted after sustained lobbying from the Women's Caucus, in collaboration with the Government and women's coalitions. In 2008, after 18 years of lobbying for a quota, the Women's Caucus was able as well to introduce an amendment to the electoral law, requiring at least 30 per cent women and men in all legislative, executive and other public organs and at least 30 per cent women and men on all political party candidate lists.

**Table 5.1 Activities engaged in by women's parliamentary bodies**

<i>Influencing policy and legislation (n=13)</i>	2.1
<i>Coalition building around an issue (n=12)</i>	1.8
<i>Raising awareness on gender equality issues among constituents (n=13)</i>	1.8
<i>Holding press conferences (n=13)</i>	1.7
<i>Holding discussions with civil society, business groups, academia, and government departments on gender equality issues (n=13)</i>	1.7
<i>Holding discussions with ministers on gender equality issues (n=14)</i>	1.6
<i>Raising awareness on gender equality issues among parliamentary staff (n=12)</i>	1.3
<i>Advocating for non-discriminatory, gender-sensitive working culture (n=12)</i>	1.2
<i>Monitoring and evaluation of government policy and legislation (n=14)</i>	1.2
<i>International networking (n=13)</i>	1.1

Lobbying for women's promotion to positions of leadership in parliament (n=12)	0.9
Holding social events for members (n=13)	0.9
Commissioning research to inform parliamentary debates (n=12)	0.6
Mentoring of current and future MPs (n=12)	0.5
Harmonizing donor funding and international organization support (n=12)	0.5
Fundraising (n=12)	0.3

Scale: A weighted index was developed, whereby a score of 3 represents 'very effective'; 2 represents 'fairly effective'; 1 represents 'somewhat effective' and 0 represents 'not at all effective'.

A second area of work for these parliamentary bodies has been in communicating with external stakeholders: raising awareness among constituents (considered 'fairly effective'), with the media (considered 'fairly effective'), with civil society, business, academia (considered 'fairly effective'), and with government ministers (also considered 'fairly effective'). In Denmark, the network of women politicians that operated in the Parliament between 2002 and 2007 rated one of its successes as increased awareness of the need for a maternity fund.

Less effectively run, however, were activities aimed at raising awareness of gender equality issues among parliamentary staff, advocating for a gender-sensitive work culture in parliament, monitoring and evaluating government policy, and working to promote more women to positions of leadership in parliament. The rankings on this question suggest that the parliamentary environment in many OSCE States is resistant to this kind of change.

Fundraising activities were the least frequently cited activities. Fundraising activities can be hard to run, but it may be that they are also seen as 'conflicts of interest', or not as important as other activities. In the case of Sweden, it was reported that the Reference Group tends to focus on topics of common concern, or topics that are perceived as being of interest to larger communities, including the staff of the parliament.

As the case study from Estonia demonstrates below, some women's parliamentary bodies choose to engage in advocacy-related work, particularly in co-operation with civil society organizations, universities and research centres. In Estonia, this is in part because of the strength of the relationship established between the Women's Union and the broader women's movement in civil society. These foundational relationships have given the Union a mandate to advocate for and lobby on behalf of women beyond the confines of the parliament itself.

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### **Case Study 6: Women's Union of the Estonian Parliament**

The Women's Union (Riigikogu Naisteühendus) was first established in 1998, a period in which women's political activism was on the rise in Estonia following the restoration of its independence. During those years many women's associations, both political and non-political, were formed in Estonia, drawing attention to a variety of gender equality and equal opportunity issues within civil society and political life. As women's participation in public life increased, a roundtable bringing together representatives of women's associations was convened by the Riigikogu (the Estonian Parliament). This roundtable served as the impetus for the establishment of a permanent cross-party structure – the Women's Union – within the Parliament itself during the VII Riigikogu.

The Women's Union is currently composed of all 20 women elected to parliament following the 2011 elections, and meets regularly once a month. Like all other parliamentary associations (there are currently 47 of them within the Riigikogu), the Union operates according to the Parliament's Rules of Procedure and Internal Rules Act. Not formally recognized by the Parliament, the Union operates as an informal group, with the positions of Chair and Deputy Chair rotating every two months among its cross-party members. This process of rotation serves to strengthen leadership skills among all members of the Women's Union, and also enhances mutual respect and understanding between the members. While there is no formal restriction on men participating in – or becoming members of – the Union, no man has yet expressed a desire to do so.

As the Union is not established by a resolution of the Parliament, it does not have the same powers as other parliamentary bodies to play a formal role in the legislative process, and the Riigikogu does not provide the Union with any administrative or research support. No strategic plan or annual plan is drafted, and the Union tends to work on issues as they arise. The Union's members promote women and family issues, debating them across party lines within the Union. Press releases are regularly published on the Parliament's website, and good coverage of the Union's activities is given by the Estonian media.

As the Union does not receive funding from the Estonian Parliament, it has mainly focused on advocacy work on women, family, and children's issues, in partnership with civil society organizations, universities and research centres, focusing on the promotion of public debates on gender-related issues rather than directly influencing policy and legislation. Research papers and studies are also commissioned from university centres and civil society institutes. An example of this co-operation is a recent initiative, jointly organized with the NGO ETNA Eestimaal (funded by the Open Estonia Foundation), to support small businesses for women in rural areas of the country. Although this will not necessarily result in any legislative change, this co-operation has resulted in the betterment of the lives of women members of the electorate.

Survey respondents were also asked to provide examples of achievements of women's parliamentary bodies (see Table 5.2). Most commonly, respondents provided examples where the body had tried to influence legislation and policy, and where they had held discussions with relevant stakeholders.

**Table 5.2 Reported achievements of women's parliamentary bodies in the OSCE region**

<b>Influencing legislation and policy</b>	
Finland	The Network played an active role in the process to accord a universal right to day care for children under 7 years and in the adoption of legislation concerning the provision of micro-loans to women entrepreneurs. The Network has also been active in promoting gender budgeting within the parliament.
Georgia	The Advisory Group played a key role in lobbying for the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality (26 March 2010).
Ukraine	The Equal Opportunities Group helped organize a series of awareness raising roundtables, including the Roundtable on "Strengthening political parties through the involvement of women," 1 March 2012. Roundtable on abortion and family planning, 27 April 2012. Roundtable "Women's participation in the parliamentary elections of 2012 in Ukraine", 31 May 2012. It has also played a role in advocating for the adoption of the draft law "On Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences for the settlement of the question of responsibility for violence in the family".

Kyrgyzstan	The women's parliamentary body in Kyrgyzstan has played a key role in lobbying for the adoption of the Family Code, Code on Children, as well as in advocating for amendments to the Criminal Code and the constitutional law on Election of the President of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan and Deputies (MPs) of the Zhogorku Kenesh (Parliament) of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan.
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	The Club played a critical role in the adoption of the Law for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men in 2012. It supported the promotion of three national strategic plans on gender budgeting, domestic violence and violence against women, and UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.
Albania	The lobbying efforts of the Women's Caucus in Albania helped secure amendments to the Electoral Code, which introduced a legislated gender quota requiring a minimum percentage of the less-represented gender on candidate lists.
<b>Holding discussions with relevant stakeholders</b>	
Estonia	The Women's Union organized a conference on issues of local governance; ideas resulting from this conference were presented to the committees of the Parliament.
France	The delegation has published a number of reports on issues examined by the National Assembly, such as political parties; civil rights (e.g. inheritance law, divorce); social rights (e.g. equal pay, professional equality between men and women, women and retirement, part-time work); protection against domestic violence; the situation of women prisoners; women's rights (e.g. contraception, abortion). The delegation publishes an annual report on its recommendations to improve legislation and regulations in its specific areas of competence. For example, these reports have been in areas such as the professional equality between men and women, part-time work, women immigrants, and abortion. The delegation also organizes hearings, and can hold meetings with its counterpart in the Senate.
Poland	The women's parliamentary body in Poland has co-organized conferences and debates with civil society and self-governing bodies on raising the age of retirement for women and on cervical cancer prevention, and members participate in the annual Polish Congress of Women. It also helped organize the Disabled Women's Awards Gala event organized with parliamentary groups for disabled people.

### ***The role of parliamentary and political party systems***

The political party system can have a substantial impact on the collaborative work of cross-party bodies and on the ability of these bodies to achieve their objectives. In evaluating the impact of political parties on the efficacy of women's parliamentary bodies, respondents were asked whether women's parliamentary bodies in their parliament had been able to gain support on a range of issues across party lines, and to rank their level of effectiveness in doing so (see Table 5.3). The survey uncovered a number of policy areas on which women were able to achieve cross-party support. These predominantly relate to non-discrimination, equal opportunities, violence against women and the equal representation of women in parliament (rated, on average, as 'fairly effective'). It may be because these areas are not particularly divisive along party lines that women have been able to find sympathetic ears within their parties on these issues.

The results also show that it has been more difficult for women's parliamentary bodies to reach agreement across party lines on issues relating to women's bodies (achieving agreement on issues related to reproductive rights, prostitution and trafficking was rated, on average, as 'somewhat effective').

**Table 5.3 Effectiveness in gaining political support across party lines**

Non-discrimination/equal opportunities (n=13)	1.9
Violence against women (n=13)	1.8
Women's political participation (special measures) (n=13)	1.6
Labour/employment/benefits (n=11)	1.5
Healthcare (n=13)	1.3
Equal pay (n=11)	1.3
Reform of parliamentary rules of procedures (n=12)	1.3
Reproductive rights (n=11)	1.1
Prostitution/trafficking (n=13)	1.1
Children's rights (n=13)	0.8
Citizenship/status law (n=11)	0.5
Inheritance rights (n=11)	0.4

Scale: A weighted index was developed, whereby a score of 3 represents 'very effective'; 2 represents 'fairly effective'; 1 represents 'somewhat effective' and 0 represents 'not at all effective'.

In five parliaments (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary and Kyrgyzstan), respondents noted that the nature of political party functioning in parliaments can impact the degree to which women's parliamentary bodies achieve positive outcomes. To this end, one of the respondents to the questionnaire noted that the political behaviour of Albanian parties is very restrictive and hinders party members and MPs from collaborating with each other on different issues (see Case Study 1, above). MPs in Canada voiced a similar frustration.

*Women have been trying [to work together] for decades; unless they're in a national crisis, it doesn't happen (Canada).*

As party leadership support is often needed in order for women party members (indeed, for all party members) to engage in cross-party initiatives, a political environment characterized by a high level of political party discipline can make it challenging – but not impossible – for women to come together across party lines. Highly polarized political environments, on the other hand, can have a very detrimental effect on opportunities for women's parliamentary bodies to engage in their work, and may prevent the establishment of such bodies in the first place. Political polarization can generate extreme forms of party discipline that go beyond the conventional parameters of party allegiance. Under normal circumstances, allegiance to party factions can help create stability and stimulate debate in legislatures. In polarized environments, political party discipline can prevent all forms of cross-party communication, dialogue and co-operation.

One strategy for dealing with strong party discipline and political polarization is to focus on issue-based co-operation. In this case, women's parliamentary bodies, or women MPs interested in establishing cross-party co-operation, may be more effective if they select issues on which their parties do not have a strong stance. Likewise, at the beginning of cross-party dialogue at least, women may wish to avoid issues that involve strong ideological dimensions upon which parties differentiate themselves (e.g. abortion). Some parliamentary committees have established processes whereby 'dissenting reports' are issued on committee topics.

Women's parliamentary bodies could also introduce a mechanism by which dissenting opinions can be articulated and considered.

Even in parliamentary environments where cross-party co-operation is easier, however, support from political party leadership remains important. Indeed, party support for women's cross-party dialogue can give women MPs greater freedom to engage in legislative, policy and advocacy work. At the same time, excessive pressure from political party leaders may hinder cross-party dialogue within women's parliamentary structures.

### **Empowering members**

Consistent with the earlier finding that women's parliamentary bodies in OSCE participating States tend to be less interested in actively undertaking capacity building of their women members, less than half of those surveyed reported on the need to run training activities (see Table 5.4). Where they did, trainings on definitions and application of gender equality, gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive parliaments were the most commonly cited. Some parliamentary bodies were interested in enhancing parliamentary skills such as chairing meetings and using parliamentary procedure. Very few were concerned with learning how to build a voter base (Albania only) or forging issue-based coalitions (Armenia only).

<b>Table 5.4 The need for capacity building</b>	
<i>Definitions and application of gender equality, gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive parliaments</i>	6
<i>Chairing meetings and other leadership skills</i>	5
<i>Parliamentary procedures</i>	4
<i>Public speaking, negotiation and persuasion skills</i>	3
<i>Legislative drafting</i>	2
<i>Representing and championing constituents' interests in Parliament</i>	2
<i>Conflict resolution</i>	2
<i>Building a voter base</i>	1
<i>Forging issue-based coalitions</i>	1

Note: The total number of answers is greater than 'n' because respondents could choose multiple options.

The Finnish Women's Network is one example of a parliamentary body that undertakes a range of activities, a number of which aim at enhancing the gender-sensitivity of the parliamentary working culture and procedures, as detailed in Case Study 7 below. In pursuing its overall objective of advancing gender equality, it is also worth noting that the Finnish Network works collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society, international counterparts and the male network of MPs active in the Finnish Parliament.

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### **Case Study 7: The Network of Women Members of the Finnish Parliament**

The Finnish Parliament has hosted a network of women MPs since 1991, referred to as the Women's Network. The Network was established during a period in which record numbers of women (77 out of 200 parliamentarians) won seats in the Parliament following the 1991 general elections. Given these particular circumstances, women MPs felt the time was right to establish a special parliamentary structure to capitalize on the high level of women's repre-

sentation. Since then, the Network has remained an informal voluntary network to which all women MPs automatically belong regardless of party affiliation, organizing its work according to its own internal rules.

Overall, the primary aim of the Network is to assemble women MPs from across party lines to discuss questions of particular relevance to women, and to promote equality between women and men as well as women's rights. In particular, the members aim to ensure that women's perspectives are included in all legislative work in general, and that legislation conforms to gender equality principles. Seminars and meetings on issues like equality and co-operation between women are often arranged. In past years, the Network has been successful in drafting amendments to the law on gender equality (1994), and the right of children to day care (1997).

The Network also sends representatives to international conferences on equality and women's rights, and emphasizes international co-operation as a key networking tool among women MPs. To this end, the Network co-operates closely with civil society organizations and women MPs from other countries. Speakers are also invited to the Network's meetings so that women MPs can learn more about current political issues. The Network has occasionally met with the network of men MPs that was established in 2010 in the Finnish Parliament. One of the subjects that the male network has focussed on is empowering men to prevent and combat domestic violence; for its part, the Women's Network has been active in raising awareness of domestic violence and violence against women.

To help organize its activities, the Network prepares an operational plan and budget each year, benefitting from one part-time assistant who is currently recruited from outside the Parliament. The Parliament's internal research service and International Unit are at the disposal of the Network. Also, like many other collaborative groups inside the Finnish Parliament that operate on a similar basis, the Network receives funds from the Parliament to cover the costs of meetings and events.

During the period of the first woman Speaker of the Parliament (who served from 1994 to 2003) amendments were passed regarding the working conditions of the Parliament. As a result, an internal agreement on the duration of parliamentary debates was reached, limiting long plenary sessions in order to make it easier for both male and female MPs to combine their parliamentary mandate and family life. These gender-sensitive parliamentary reforms have been helpful in creating a better work-life balance in the Finnish Parliament.

As in other countries characterized by a high level of gender equality development, the approach to women's issues in Finnish politics has changed in recent years, focusing more on specific forms of legislation such as gender budgeting. Women MPs engage in more targeted action in support of gender equality, in part due to the widespread gender awareness prevalent in Finnish society and politics.

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### **Conclusion**

Activities aimed at influencing policy and legislation and those involving consultation with external stakeholders were considered the most effective of those undertaken by women's parliamentary bodies in the OSCE region. Respondents provided a number of examples of legislative changes successfully proposed by these bodies, particularly in relation to electoral laws, gender equality laws, and laws to prevent violence against women and domestic violence.



Perhaps because these bodies have often been formed with the support of women's movements, some women's parliamentary bodies have effectively consulted with gender experts in the community on a range of issues. This was certainly the case in Estonia and Poland.

Political party discipline can make it challenging for women to co-operate across party lines, but does not constitute an obstacle per se. Political polarization, however, can make cross-party communication virtually impossible. The research also showed that disagreement is more likely when cross-party bodies communicate or lobby around issues relating to women's bodies, such as reproductive health, prostitution and/or trafficking. Where political tension is evident, women parliamentarians may wish to consider alternatives to formalized, cross-party caucuses (even if their aim is to facilitate cross-party co-operation and trust), focusing instead on informal networking and co-operation with external actors, such as civil society. Alternatively, women can choose to focus on issues on which their parties themselves do not have strong ideological or political stances.

## 6. Fostering strong relationships

A much-cited key to success for women's parliamentary bodies is the strength of their relationships with other bodies, both inside and outside parliament.

This chapter considers the nature of these bodies' relationships with other organizations. In examining these relationships, this chapter is interested in understanding whether women's parliamentary bodies have a mandate to liaise directly with other organs of the parliament or with organizations outside the parliament, and if so, whether this has been used to pursue gender mainstreaming and/or gender-sensitive parliamentary reforms.

### *Connecting with communities of interest*

Survey respondents were asked to rank the effectiveness of their interactions with bodies and organizations both inside and outside parliament. The results suggest that relationships are built along two fundamental requirements for women's parliamentary bodies: first, the need for information and publicity; and second, the need to build partnerships that make change possible.

Overwhelmingly, parliamentary bodies surveyed regarded their interaction with civil society organizations as quite effective. This suggests that civil society organizations continue to be an important and reliable source of information and support for women's parliamentary bodies, and that without the support of these organizations, women's parliamentary bodies do not function as effectively. In particular, as noted in chapter 3, women's parliamentary bodies have derived a strong sense of legitimacy from their connections with women's movements. Often, it has been because of the efforts made by these movements that women have been elected to parliament in the first place, so there is a fundamental need to continue, and sometimes formalize, that relationship once women hold positions of formal or public power.

Other information and publicity sources that were considered effective included the media (2.2), national women's machinery (1.7), other bodies of the parliament dealing with gender equality (1.6) and universities and research institutes (1.5).

*We need a large campaign publicised in the mass media, to continuously raise awareness on gender issues, show best practice examples and international success stories (Albania).*

**Table 6.1 Interaction with other bodies and organizations**

Civil society organizations (n=14)	2.3
The media (n=13)	2.2
Political party(s) of Government (n=13)	1.9
Other organs of the Parliament (e.g. Executive body) (n=13)	1.8
National women's machinery (n=12)	1.7
Other parliamentary bodies dealing with gender equality in the Parliament (e.g. committee) (n=14)	1.6
Political party(s) of the Opposition (n=13)	1.6
Universities and research institutes (n=13)	1.5
International organizations (n=14)	1.5
Independents (n=13)	1.4
Women's parliamentary bodies in other countries (n=12)	1.3
The Ombudsperson (n=13)	1.2
Other women's parliamentary bodies at the sub-national level (n=13)	1

Scale: A weighted index was developed, whereby a score of 4 represents 'very effective'; 3 represents 'fairly effective'; 2 represents 'somewhat effective'; 1 represents 'not at all'; and 0 represents 'there is no relationship'.

The case of Slovenia discussed in chapter 3 highlights the fundamental importance of working with women's organizations outside the parliament, including women's wings of political parties and the wider women's movement. It also reveals that sometimes, it is easier for coalitions to be built between like-minded actors across a range of institutions, than between women from different sides of the political spectrum in parliament. Furthermore, co-operation with civil society can also build the legitimacy of women's parliamentary bodies in the eyes of the public. For example, as noted below in Case Study 8, the participation of members of the Polish Sejm's Parliamentary Group of Women in the annual Polish Congress of Women, the largest grassroots gender equality initiative in the country, has provided the Parliamentary Group of Women with more visibility and credibility.

### **Case Study 8: The Polish Parliamentary Group of Women<sup>48</sup>**

In April 1991, Polish women MPs established the Parliamentary Group of Women (PGK) to better advocate, both within the Parliament as well as in civil society, for the adoption of legislation related to the equal status of men and women.

Formally recognized by the Parliament, the PGK includes women MPs from across party lines and is officially re-formed after each parliamentary election. The Group receives support from the Parliament, and is represented in both the Sejm (lower house) and the Senate. Largely inclusive in terms of cross-party membership during its first years of activity, the PGK was able to discuss difficult issues such as abortion and violence against women, also establishing fruitful co-operation with civil society organizations. In this regard, following a PGK suggestion, a Forum of Co-operation between the Parliamentary Group of Women and civil society

48 For more information on the PGK, please see <http://www.sejm.gov.pl/SQL2.nsf/zesp?OpenAgent&126>

women's organizations was established. The Forum discussed, among other things, the bill on the equal status of women and men, provisions regarding the dissolution of marriage, and preparations for the harmonization of Polish legislation with EU standards in the context of Poland's efforts to join the European Union.<sup>49</sup>

After focusing its activities on the introduction of a legal gender quota for many years, the Group was re-established in January 2012 following the October 2011 parliamentary elections, gathering 50 members across the political spectrum (albeit, without representation from the largest conservative opposition party, Law and Justice). According to its Declaration, the Group intends to work on adapting Polish legislation to international standards on gender equality, mainly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. In June 2012, the PGK supported the Minister for Equal Treatment in her efforts to have the Polish government sign the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

In addition, Polish women MPs have consistently aimed to co-operate with women's movements in Poland. Several members of the PGK participate in the annual Polish Congress of Women, a gathering of Polish women and gender advocates from across all sectors of Polish society. When first established in 2009, the Polish Women's Congress gathered thousands of women (and men) to share their discontent over the under-representation of women in Polish politics. They proposed the introduction of parity on electoral lists, guaranteeing half of all positions to women. After a series of political and parliamentary discussions, the desired parity (50 per cent of female and male candidates) was not achieved. Nevertheless, the idea of equalizing political chances for women and men as electoral candidates remained important for women's NGOs. Thanks to their determination and co-operation with the Parliamentary Group of Women, a 35 per cent gender quota was introduced. The new Electoral Code of 2011 guaranteed both women and men at least 35 per cent of positions on the electoral lists. If an electoral committee does not fulfill this requirement, the list will not be registered.

Most recently, the PGK has supported the submission of a legislative initiative to the Sejm concerning draft amendments to the Electoral Code to introduce a 'zipper' system. The zipper system requires, in addition to the 35 per cent gender quota, that women's and men's names be alternated on candidate lists. This amendment is considered a concrete and positive move towards meeting the expectations of the women's movement and gender activists in Poland.

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The Polish experience highlights the importance of co-operation between women's parliamentary bodies and civil society, particularly women's organizations. Women's parliamentary bodies can help ensure that the views of women representatives of civil society are channeled into parliamentary debates. Likewise, civil society – including women's groups and members

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49 Until elections in 2005, the PGK was dominated by deputies from ruling parties. However, in the years from 2005 to 2007, the body lost its inclusive character and divisions emerged between those espousing more progressive values, and those committed to more traditional ones. This inhibited the activities of the PGK, which had been forced to adopt a short-term approach, becoming more of a forum for discussion rather than a legislative advocacy group. During the next parliamentary term of 2007–2011, despite the presence of women MPs with more progressive viewpoints, the PGK adopted a rather passive stand, focusing on topics such as women's health-care and the gender pay gap, and avoiding more controversial issues such as reproductive rights like abortion. When the PGK proposed a set of amendments to the Standing Orders of the Sejm aimed at the establishment of the Standing Committee for Equal Status of Women and Men, the proposal to establish the committee was ultimately rejected by the Sejm, attesting to its weakened influence within Parliament.

of the women's movement – can help legitimize and give credibility to women's parliamentary bodies. Together, the two sectors can more effectively advocate on issues of mutual concern.

The Polish case study also demonstrates that women's parliamentary bodies need to build relationships with the 'power brokers' in parliament. Table 6.1 above shows that relationships with political parties that form Government (1.8), organs of the Executive (1.7) and the Opposition (1.5) were considered somewhat effective. By ranking these relationships relatively highly, women's parliamentary bodies are acknowledging that they need the parliament and other public institutions to implement the changes they themselves can only recommend.

*Challenges can be overcome through coordination and collaboration between executive and legislative powers (Georgia).*

In Georgia, where a national women's machinery body has not yet been established, it has been very important for the Advisory Group on Gender Issues (also referred to as the Gender Equality Council) of the Georgian Parliament, headed by the Deputy Speaker, to establish and maintain relations with representatives of the Executive on gender-related issues.

Relationship building with political party leadership is also important. In Moldova, where attempts are underway to establish a cross-party women's caucus, respondents noted that women MPs interested in establishing a caucus first discussed the initiative with their party leadership in order to build party support. This process resulted in the elaboration of a joint statement of shared principles and goals regarding institutionalization of communication between women parliamentarians. Obtaining the buy-in and support of party leaders is deemed critical to the eventual establishment of a woman's caucus in Moldova.

In addition, this study has found that many women's parliamentary bodies in OSCE participating States have benefited from co-operation with and support from international organizations as well as international NGOs. Support can range from the provision of financial and technical assistance, to the facilitation of access to communities of expertise and experience. For example, OSCE field operations have provided support to women's parliamentary bodies in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, mainly through their parliamentary support programmes (PSPs).

International support can be important, and even critical, to the establishment and running of women's parliamentary bodies. Nonetheless, international organizations can be most helpful when they serve the role of facilitators and supporters, rather than as drivers of initiatives to establish such bodies. Women parliamentarians and/or parliamentary gender advocates should remain the primary driving force, in co-operation with party leadership, parliamentary leadership and civil society, where appropriate.

### ***Relationship building for gender mainstreaming***

Since 1997, the United Nations has defined gender mainstreaming as:

*...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (OSAGI, 2001).*

Parliaments have an essential role to play not only in ensuring that gender mainstreaming, as a strategy, is implemented by Government, but also in monitoring and evaluating that implementation. International organizations have recommended that mechanisms be developed to assist parliaments in performing this oversight role.<sup>50</sup> These mechanisms include women's parliamentary bodies, dedicated parliamentary committees on gender equality, or parliamentary committees that include gender/women's affairs among a number of other related portfolios.

**Table 6.2 Gender mainstreaming mechanisms in Parliament**

A multi-functional parliamentary committee (e.g. committee on social affairs, human rights and gender equality/women's issues)	14	Albania, Armenia, Canada, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Tajikistan
Personal initiative of a parliamentarian (e.g. co-operation with civil society)	11	Albania, Belgium, Canada, Bulgaria, Finland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Tajikistan
A specialized parliamentary committee on gender or women's issues	8	Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Sweden, Ukraine*
A gender equality commission	7	Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, France, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Spain
A body that brings women together	7	Albania, Canada, Estonia, Finland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Poland
A gender equality body established in the Parliament's Secretariat/Administration	3	Austria, Finland, Germany
A research body capable of analysing data from a gender perspective	3	Canada, Estonia, Slovak Republic
A mechanism for collecting and/or analysing sex-disaggregated data	3	Canada, Kyrgyzstan, Slovak Republic

\*Ukraine has established a sub-committee on gender equality.

Parliaments surveyed by this study more commonly noted that gender mainstreaming was left to a multi-functional parliamentary committee (for example, one that included in its remit social affairs, human rights and gender equality) and/or the initiative of individual parliamentarians (see Table 6.2). These parliaments are diverse in terms of the parliamentary system in place, the level of parliamentary development (gender mainstreaming mechanisms have been established in well-established parliaments such as Canada, Finland, Norway and Portugal, as well as those less developed, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), and in their proportion of women parliamentarians (ranging from 12 per cent in Georgia to 42 per cent in Finland).

The level of parliamentary development does seem to have an effect on whether the parliament has established what might be classified as 'more sophisticated' gender mainstreaming machinery, such as a specialized parliamentary committee on gender equality, a gender equality commission, or a technical body established in the parliamentary administration. These bodies have been created in Austria (28 per cent women), Belgium (38 per cent), Denmark (39 per cent), Finland (42 per cent), Germany (33 per cent), Spain (36 per cent), Canada (24 per

50 See, for example, Inter-Parliamentary Union, *The Role of Parliamentary Committees in Mainstreaming Gender and Promoting the Status of Women*. Reports and documents No. x. (Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2007).

cent), France (27 per cent) and Sweden (46 per cent), where women's representation is high, and where there is a sustained commitment to gender equality – both in the parliament and in the wider community.

No parliament surveyed reported on the existence of a 'temporary parliamentary committee on gender or women's issues', and three reported a mechanism for collecting or analysing sex-disaggregated data. Women's parliamentary bodies were never identified as the sole gender mainstreaming mechanism in existence in the parliament. As noted, in addition to the women's parliamentary body, other mechanisms included multi-functional parliamentary committees or specialized committees on gender equality.

In terms of parliamentary gender equality policies, of the legislatures surveyed, the parliaments of Austria, Canada, Kyrgyzstan and Spain reported the existence of a 'Gender Equality Policy'; a 'Strategic Plan' was cited in Austria, Georgia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Slovenia and Sweden. These policy frameworks are important not only because they might set objectives for the parliament in terms of gender mainstreaming, but also because they outline a clear direction for how the parliament, through its various mechanisms, might work as a whole on gender equality. This is an area in which there is a great deal of scope for improvement. The Speaker's Reference Group on Gender Equality Issues established in Sweden (see Case Study 9 below) provides a positive role model in this regard.

*The focus on the gender dimension has to be actively part of the daily political arena, otherwise it will fail (Finland).*

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### **Case Study 9: The Swedish Speaker's Reference Group on Gender Equality Issues**

The Speaker's Reference Group on Gender Equality Issues is a parliamentary group within the Swedish Parliament (the Riksdag). It consists of the Speaker and eight parliamentarians, one from each political party represented in the Parliament, as well as eight substitute members. The key objective of the body is to raise and discuss issues on gender equality across the work of the Riksdag.

The Reference Group was initially established as the Speaker's Network for Female Parliamentarians in 1995 by the then Speaker, Birgitta Dahl (Social Democratic Party), following a meeting to which she invited seven female MPs, one from each of the seven parties then represented in parliament. The original purpose of the Network was to discuss how best to use the high representation of women in the Swedish Parliament (at that time, 41 per cent), to raise awareness on gender issues and build the capacity of women MPs. Breakfast meetings and seminars on wide-ranging gender equality and democracy issues were arranged. In 2006, the Network was renamed the Speaker's Reference Group on Gender Equality Issues by the Speaker Per Westerberg (Moderate Party), to reflect a shift in focus from understanding gender equality issues as women's issues, to issues that concern both men and women.

The rules of procedure regulating the Reference Group and its activities are stipulated in the *Gender Equality Action Plan of the Swedish Parliament 2006-2010* and the *Gender Equality Action Plan of the Swedish Parliament 2010-2014*. In these action plans, the Reference Group is recognized as a key organ of the Riksdag to promote gender equality. It is also noted that the body is provided a gender secretariat comprised of two parliamentary staff (civil servants) with gender expertise, responsible for research and administrative support. The Group also has its own budget provided by the Parliament.



The eight members of the Reference Group are nominated by their respective parties and appointed for one parliamentary term. In the current 2010–2014 term, all members of the Reference Group are women. In order to promote a more gender-balanced group, however, each party is asked to nominate two members, one regular member and one deputy member. Thus, the current composition includes the eight regular members (all women) and eight deputy members (three men and five women).

The Reference Group schedules meetings on a regular basis; it normally meets twice a semester to plan its activities. It meets in the Speaker's Office, and the Speaker chairs the meetings. The dates of the meetings and seminars are decided upon at the first meeting of every term, and a notice as well as an agenda is distributed to the members by e-mail one week prior to the next meeting. Where a permanent member is unable to attend the meeting, a deputy member may substitute.

The Reference Group has no formal powers; it may not draft or review legislation, add items to the parliamentary agenda, or monitor the implementation of government policies. Rather, the Speaker's Reference Group has evolved into a meeting point for gender equality spokespersons and a forum for discussion and raising awareness inside the parliament on gender equality issues. It normally decides on themes and topics for various seminars to be arranged. Decisions are made after deliberation and by consensus. Hence, no formal decisions are made, and decisions are not taken by a vote. While formal minutes are not taken, the secretariat does take informal notes.

One member of the Reference Group described it as “an excellent arena ... to raise gender related problems that might take place in the Parliament, but also an excellent platform for raising awareness of gender related problems in society that need to be discussed in Parliament.” Another member noted that, “the body provides me with a recognized platform to act as a spokesperson for gender equality issues”.

The Speaker's Reference Group has three main sets of activities: arranging seminars and workshops in the field of gender equality for parliamentarians, party officials and parliament staff members; arranging a large public seminar at Almedalen; and conducting additional activities, including support to MPs on issues pertaining to gender equality. It also meets with foreign delegations.

The Reference Group has developed relations and contacts with other bodies, both inside and outside Parliament. It co-operates from time to time with the Male Network of the Swedish Parliament and the Network Against Discrimination and Honour Related Oppression.

Four of the eight members of the Reference Group are also members of the Committee on the Labour Market, which is one of the 15 parliamentary committees. One of the key responsibilities of the Committee on the Labour Market is to consider issues relating to equality between women and men insofar as these matters do not fall to any other committee. It also prepares appropriations falling within expenditure area 13 on integration and gender equality.

The combined membership means that many members of the Reference Group are also key legislators in the field of gender equality, with a special mandate to decide on the state budget for gender equality issues.

The Speaker's Reference Group also has extensive contacts with international counterparts including the FEMM Committee (Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality) in the

European Parliament and the EIGE (the European Institute for Gender Equality) in Vilnius, Lithuania.

The Reference Group also meets with foreign visitors, including MPs, civil servants and journalists. For instance, in April 2012, members of the group met with MPs and civil servants from Indonesia, and in May 2012, the group met with journalists from the MENA region. In recent years the group has welcomed MPs from the Assembly of Kosovo and Viet Nam, among others.

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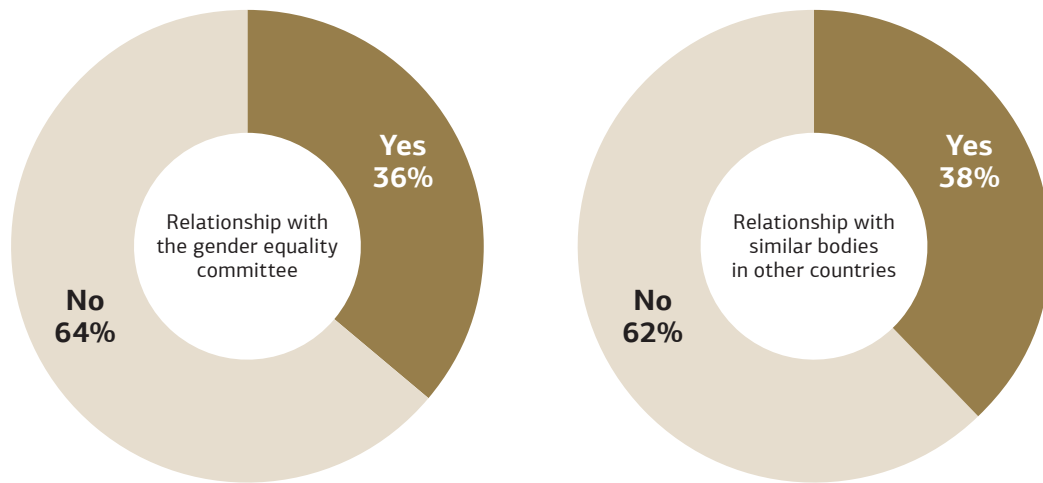
As highlighted in the case study on Sweden above, four members of the Speaker's Reference Group are also members of the Standing Committee on the Labour Market, which is tasked with initiating gender equality legislation and other issues. This means that what the Reference Group cannot do, a related body can. Moreover, this relationship is co-ordinated under the Gender Equality Action Plan that is revised in every parliamentary term. The Action Plan notes that a gender equality plan shall be established by the Riksdag Board for each term and that there shall be a gender secretariat. The Action Plan maps out activities for every parliamentary year, notes who is responsible for the implementation of the activities, and describes the ways in which the Action Plan is to be monitored and evaluated. The Secretary General of the Parliament is responsible for the Plan and implementation is undertaken by parliamentary staff with gender expertise. The development of strategic policy documents as well as the institutionalization of relations with key gender-related organs of the Swedish Parliament clearly enhances the impact that this body has on the process of parliamentary gender mainstreaming.

The question remains, then, how these bodies can best co-operate with each other, how they share information, and how they distribute the 'work load' on gender mainstreaming.

### ***Formalizing parliamentary relationships***

Half of the women's parliamentary bodies surveyed have not institutionalized a relationship with the gender equality parliamentary committee (where the latter exists). An institutionalized relationship might take the form of regular meetings between the two bodies or a work plan with areas of agreed upon collaboration. The Swedish Reference Group, described above, is one example of a women's parliamentary body that has institutionalized relations with parliamentary committees, in this case the Standing Committee on the Labour Market, and has noted that this formalized relationship has enhanced the influence and impact of the Reference Group. Institutionalized relations between women's parliamentary bodies and relevant parliamentary committees have also been noted in the case of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in the women's parliamentary body recently established in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see Case Study 10 below).

**Figure 6.1 Relationship of women's parliamentary bodies with gender equality committees and similar structures in other countries**



In terms of these bodies' relationships with counterparts in other countries, the results suggest that regional co-operation has worked well in the Western Balkans and in some countries of the South Caucasus (for example, Georgia). In these regions, there is a sense that parliaments have much to offer each other on the basis of a shared social and political culture and level of parliamentary development. These parliaments are also interested in maintaining a connection with the European Parliament.

A second form of international co-operation is evident between more established parliaments, such as Finland and Austria, and those where parliamentary democracy is in a phase of development. The Finnish Network, by establishing a relationship with international organizations, has been able to share some of its lessons learned with other parliaments in the OSCE region. Likewise, parliaments have also received support from other legislatures, through activities such as study tours and peer-to-peer exchanges among parliamentarians, allowing for an exchange of good practices and lessons learned.

One emerging trend may be the establishment of women's parliamentary bodies at local or municipal levels that are linked in some way to national bodies. In the Western Balkans, there have been initiatives to develop relationships between the central and municipal levels. In this regard, as illustrated in Case Study 3, the Women's Caucus of the Assembly of Kosovo provides a successful example of co-operation between the national level and the local level, where local women's caucuses have been established. Through the organization of conferences, roundtables and other activities, members of the national-level Women's Caucus and those of the local caucuses can share their perspectives on issues of mutual concern, and also inform one another about developments and issues arising at local or national level specifically.

More recently, in March 2013, a women's parliamentary body was established at entity level in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina); a national level women's parliamentary body does not yet exist (see Case Study 10 below).

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### *Case Study 10: The Women's Parliamentary Club at entity level in Bosnia and Herzegovina*

In March 2013, women MPs of the entity-level Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) established a women's parliamentary body entitled the Women's Parliamentary Club. In contrast to other examples presented in this study, the Club has been established at entity as opposed to the state level, reflecting the specific governance system in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>51</sup> The first structure of its kind to be established in the country, the initiative brings together women MPs from across party lines, and has benefitted from the strong support of the international community, in particular the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the Embassy of the United States. The Women's Parliamentary Club gathers all 21 women MPs currently serving in the House of Representatives of the FBiH.

The Women's Parliamentary Club was officially launched to the public on 4 March 2013, during an event co-organized with various international organizations, including the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). More than 200 MPs, politicians, and representatives of both international organizations and civil society attended the event, including the Ambassador of the United States to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Club was formally recognized as an official parliamentary body by plenary vote in late April 2013. However, as is the case for other bodies presented in this study, the Club does not currently receive any budget or administrative assistance from the parliament. In order to address this lack of resources, the Club intends to put forward a proposal for funding during the next budgetary cycle. In the meantime, international donors, including the American Embassy and IRI, will support the body. In addition to this, the Club will be supported by an assistant, who will be responsible for facilitating the work of the body.

The leadership structure of the Club reflects the unique political set-up of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a division of power between each of the three different ethnicities recognized in the Constitution of the country. At present, the Chair is a representative of the main opposition party, Ms. Hafeza Sabljaković; the two Deputy Chairs are reserved to representatives of the remaining two ethnicities. All positions are designed to last for the entire parliamentary mandate.

The Women's Parliamentary Club is also in the process of drafting several working documents, including a Strategic Plan and an Annual Action Plan. This drafting process benefits from the support of IRI, civil society and several NGOs active in the field of gender equality. The principal objective of the Club is the promotion of women parliamentary candidates. For example, the Club intends to advocate for the introduction of reserved seats for women MPs, to ensure their future representation in the parliament. At the same time, members of the Club have also decided to advocate for a larger representation of women in executive positions, as the percentage of women's representation in these positions remains particularly low in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Club also intends to co-operate closely with relevant parliamentary committees, in particular the Committee on Gender Equality, the Committee on Labor and Health Insurance, and the Committee on Refugees and Displaced Persons; all of these committees are currently

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<sup>51</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina is composed of a state-level parliament (Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina), two entity-level parliaments (the National Assembly of Republika Srpska and the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), the Assembly of the District of Brčko (Brčko District Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina), and parliaments that operate in each of the ten cantons.

chaired by women MPs who are also members of the Club. This co-operation is expected to facilitate and support the process of introducing legislative change, as well as to raise gender related considerations with more political efficacy vis-a-vis the parliament of FBiH and the government. The Club will also advocate for the creation of similar bodies in other parliamentary institutions in the country.

Given the recent establishment of the Club, its members are in the process of learning successful practices from other countries in the region. To this end, meetings with women MPs from Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have already been scheduled. In parallel, seminars and events will continue to be organized with the assistance of the international community, making good use of the favourable media coverage and high interest accorded the Club during its first political steps.

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The experience of the Women's Parliamentary Club in Bosnia and Herzegovina suggests that a parliamentary body can be established also at sub-national and/or local levels. Although the peculiar institutional arrangement of the country favours the emergence of decentralized gender equality bodies, the same approach could be considered by other countries, especially where national-level politics are characterized by a high degree of political polarization.

### **Conclusion**

The study has found that establishing a relationship between national women's movements and women's parliamentary bodies can be of benefit to both parties. Women's NGOs and gender activists can provide members of women's parliamentary bodies with important data, research and statistics, while women's parliamentary bodies can help channel civil society concerns into parliamentary processes.

Women's parliamentary bodies, however, also need to build relationships with the 'power brokers' within the parliament (including the Executive and the Opposition), and with the relevant parliamentary committee tasked with gender mainstreaming. This is important because women's parliamentary bodies are rarely attributed powers to make the change they seek. Therefore, formalizing relationships between the women's parliamentary body and the relevant, authoritative committee or other organs of the parliament can prove a successful strategy in implementing gender mainstreaming. The Swedish Speaker's Reference Group on Gender Equality Issues is a good example of a group that works closely with other gender bodies of the Riksdag, most notably the Standing Committee on the Labour Market.

## 7. Impeding progress: What challenges remain?

Despite the significant achievements made by a number of women's parliamentary bodies in terms of promoting gender equality and women's political representation, challenges remain. This chapter presents some of the challenges identified by representatives of women's parliamentary bodies in the survey. These include a lack of resources, sustained stereotypes about the role of women in society, and the influence of political polarization.

<i>Lack of resources (n=14)</i>	2.1
<i>Cultural norms and stereotypes about women in society (n=14)</i>	2
<i>Lack of support from party leaders to work across party lines (n=14)</i>	1.7
<i>Lack of solidarity among women (n=13)</i>	1.7
<i>Lack of dedicated support staff (n=15)</i>	1.3
<i>Discriminatory or sexist working culture in Parliament (n=13)</i>	1.1
<i>Lack of reliable information/research on gender equality issues, including a lack of sex-disaggregated data (n=14)</i>	0.8

*Scale: A weighted index was developed, whereby a score of 3 represents 'very significant'; 2 represents 'fairly significant'; 1 represents 'somewhat significant' and 0 represents 'not at all significant'.*

The most frequently cited challenge of the bodies surveyed related to resources. As discussed earlier (see chapter 4), women's parliamentary bodies are not provided with enough funding to allow them to do the kind of outreach or research work they would like. A related challenge, although not ranked as highly, is the lack of support staff. Like any parliamentary structure, these bodies require staff to assist with logistics, planning, administration and continuity.

The lack of parliamentary support, both financial and logistical, can make it very difficult for a women's parliamentary body to run activities. A body requires, at the very least, a room in which its members can meet – preferably in the parliamentary precincts – but also a time to meet that does not conflict with parliamentary business. A woman parliamentarian from the

Wisconsin State Assembly reported that chamber meetings were systematically scheduled at the same time as meetings of the women legislators. The response from the Assembly of Kosovo is illustrative as well:

*One of the main challenges remaining for the Women's Caucus is that it does not receive sufficient funds from the Assembly of Kosovo to be sustainable. This means that support to the Caucus mainly comes from international organizations such as OSCE, UNDP and NDI. [These funds are] important for the implementation of the activities of the Caucus.*

In these cases, dedicated structures for women MPs can consider other types of support – for example, seeking in-kind support from the parliament in the form of a meeting room, hosting information about the structure's activities on the parliamentary website, including activities of the body in parliamentary outreach materials, or allocating part of the parliamentary budget to procuring research materials and tools on gender equality issues that members of the body – and other MPs – can easily access.

Very few structures for women MPs reported the existence of a gender secretariat, such as that which supports the Swedish Speaker's Reference Group on Gender Equality Issues. While respondents did not consider a lack of reliable information or research of particular significance, where staff and resources are not attributed to the group, they will not be able to analyse sex-disaggregated data or other research provided to them, due to time constraints and heavy workloads.

A second challenge is confronting gender-based stereotypes about women's roles, responsibilities and capacities. Many women MPs find it hard to fight cultural stereotypes that position them as being less effective, and less legitimate, in that role than men. This resistance was cited in the responses from Albania and Ukraine:

*There exist strong cultural stereotypes about women even among the MPs and inside the Parliament. The political parties, even when they declare themselves in favor of women's participation, have resisted amending the electoral law to include an article that would require "both genders in every three names" (Albania).*

*Women are under-represented in decision-making bodies of the parties and the elected offices in Ukraine. Gender inequality remains a prominent feature of Ukrainian politics. This is despite a number of adopted laws, ratified international legal instruments, hundreds of round tables and workshops. Work in the community is required to overcome existing patriarchal stereotypes. Political parties should be responsible for raising awareness on gender equality issues in the electorate through trainings, roundtables, public discussions. It is extremely important to demonstrate that women are on equal terms with men, that they can represent voters and hold positions of leadership (Ukraine).*

Political polarization is a third challenge. Indeed, political polarization, which often results in much stricter party discipline, can have a negative impact on the collaborative work of cross-party bodies, or prevent them from being established in the first place. This is because women are, first and foremost, members of their political parties to which they ultimately depend for their future political career. This is the case where electoral politics is fiercely fought by parties that seek to distinguish themselves from other parties on policy, and which do not value compromise and consensus. Women, just like men, can disagree on political ideology and might decide to prioritize other political issues than gender equality ones.



Where the degree of political polarization is high, and political parties require their members to vote along party lines and threaten those members with expulsion where they do not adhere to that line, there can be little scope for women (and men) to work together on gender issues. Moreover, to the extent that political parties do not allow it, women will not be able to show a sense of ‘solidarity’ on gender issues. As identified earlier (see chapter 5) and as is clear from the responses below, however, party loyalty trumps collaboration on some issues more than others.

*One of the major challenges is that the strong party structures and strong division between government and opposition sometimes makes it difficult to work across party lines. [O]n some equality issues consensus can easily be obtained, [o]n others not (Finland).*

*The [women’s caucus] established in the 4th Parliament of Armenia was very passive. In my opinion, this was because of the strong political nature and party affiliation of women MPs. The solution is to find common fields of interest – social, gender and family issues, education, and military service – and to start active participation in these areas (Armenia).*

The Albanian experience with women parliamentary structures also highlights the role political polarization and the resulting high levels of political party discipline can play in hindering cross-party collaboration. As described in Case Study 1, in a fiercely competitive political environment, the women of the Albanian parliament were not able to re-establish the Women’s Caucus. In similar conditions, the level of formality of, as well as mode of, organization and structure acquires particular relevance. In fact, women’s parliamentary bodies have succeeded where they have been able to devise a structure that mitigates the challenge of political parties requiring their members to abide by their ideology. In some bodies, this is achieved by becoming active on issues that are not politically sensitive or on which party leaders have not developed a strong stance. Moreover, women’s parliamentary bodies that are able to clarify (and in some cases, set in writing) a vision or strategic plan, have proved successful in keeping the negative effects of extreme party discipline at bay.

Resistance to women’s parliamentary bodies can be found among both men and women MPs that are critical of bodies that introduce membership requirements based on sex. For example, a woman parliamentarian in a state-level legislature in the United States noted that: “I would be highly offended if my male Senate colleagues had a caucus that I was unable to attend. My allies are people with the same positions on issues”.<sup>52</sup>

This is an issue that parliamentary structures for women MPs need to take into consideration, to ensure that the establishment of a body with membership restricted on the basis of sex does not undermine the broader goal of gender equality promotion. In these situations, a possible solution is to consider including men as members of the women’s parliamentary body. As the example of Ukraine shows (Case Study 4), opening membership to men can be one way of addressing the concerns identified above, particularly if the body is involved in awareness raising and advocacy on gender equality in societies where gender-based stereotypes and discrimination are broadly entrenched, or where there is a need to stress that gender equality is not a ‘women’s issue’ alone. Allowing men to join may also help protect such parliamentary structures against complaints of unfairness.

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52 See Kanthak and Krause, *op. cit.*

Overemphasis on the structure and organization of a women's parliamentary body in terms of leadership or practical organization (setting the agenda, sorting out the logistics, internal communication and so forth) can obstruct its ability to perform its designated functions, leaving most achievements at the initiative (and sometimes personal cost) of individual parliamentarians. Notwithstanding the above, however, a lack of agreement on leadership procedures in cross-party caucuses in particular can stifle concrete action.<sup>53</sup> In these cases, a system of shared leadership among representatives of different parties could offer an effective solution, allowing women MPs to focus on objectives and activities.

Another challenge encountered concerns the workload and political priorities of parliamentarians. The workload of MPs is often demanding, and leaves less time to dedicate to what might be seen as 'extracurricular activities'. "[W]omen legislators are often very busy people, and setting aside the time to coordinate via a women's caucus may be a luxury they feel they cannot afford".<sup>54</sup> The assistance offered by international organizations, women's movements, and NGOs could represent an effective means of relieving the burden of advocacy or policy reform from women MPs' shoulders alone.

Lastly, re-establishing women's parliamentary structures following the end of parliamentary convocations can also pose a considerable challenge. This is closely connected with the nature of such structures, which are often flexible and not formally recognized by the parliament, leaving the responsibility for the re-establishment of the body on its members. More importantly, however, parliamentary elections may result in incumbent women MPs that are members of a women's parliamentary body not being re-elected, as was partly the case in Denmark. New women may take up parliamentary mandates, but may not necessarily wish to join or re-establish the body. Alternatively, as can be seen from the case study from Latvia below, women parliamentarians that assume positions of power within the parliament may not have the time to commit to a women's parliamentary body, or may feel that such a body advocating for women's political advancement may be no longer needed. Women's parliamentary bodies that keep track of their achievements and record practical considerations regarding the functioning of the body can create an institutional memory that may serve to convince new women MPs to renew the body, or minimize disruption to the bodies' activities in between parliamentary sittings.

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#### ***Case Study 11: The Women's Parliamentary Co-operation Group in Latvia***

While a parliamentary group for women operated in Latvia between 2002 and 2010, it has proven difficult to re-establish the group in subsequent sittings of parliament.

Twelve of the women elected to the 8th Saeima in October 2002 formed a women's parliamentary group. While 17 women members were elected to the 100-seat parliament, some were appointed ministers and were therefore unable to continue their parliamentary mandate. The remaining 12 women represented all political party factions in parliament, with the exception of one that did not have any women members.

The main goal of the women's parliamentary body was to facilitate co-operation with women parliamentarians in other countries, including participation of its members in international

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53 Agora and iKNOW Politics, 2011, "Women's Caucuses", Summary of an electronic discussion forum, 9-20 May 2011.

54 See Kanthak and Krause, *op. cit.*

women's forums. Other goals included the enhancement of dialogue with NGOs as well as the promotion of gender equality issues among the public.

During the time of the 8th Saeima, the women's group held the status of 'parliamentary friendship group'. There are no formal records of many of its activities apart from a letter sent to diplomatic representation offices of various countries residing in Latvia, informing them of the group's formation. Although the group formally elected a chairperson and deputy chairperson, there appears to have been a lack of leadership in setting both the priorities of the work as well as in driving its agenda forward. The group did not enjoy any legislative powers, and there is no record of collaboration with the Sub-committee on Gender Equality of the Social Affairs and Human Rights Committee.

With the election of the 9th Saeima (2006–2010), the women's parliamentary group was re-established with an increased membership: 20 of the total 21 women parliamentarians became members. The group elected a new leadership that injected renewed energy into the work of the body. The group's chairperson served in a voluntary capacity, with no remuneration. The membership continued to reflect the composition of the parliament, with the exception of the one party that did not have any female deputies.

During this period, the group forged a close co-operation with the women's rights organization *Marta* that promoted the adoption of a Law on Gender Equality. This law was discussed over the course of the same parliamentary term (2006–2010), although the priority to mainstream gender equality across all policy documents and applicable laws eventually took precedence. The group also actively engaged with small rural women business owners and promoted initiatives that were geared towards supporting self-employment as well as life-long learning. In addition, the group focused on women's health, with a particular emphasis on women's reproductive health. Members actively engaged in discussion with social partners and NGOs with the aim of channelling civil society concerns onto the parliamentary agenda. In the above-mentioned areas the group managed to raise awareness and achieve on certain occasions positive legislative and budgetary changes.

Among the group's other activities was the establishment of a forum gathering members of the group and women entrepreneurs, who presented concrete proposals to the respective ministries on how to promote women's entrepreneurship by providing access to grants and other forms of financing.

In 2010, 22 women were elected to the 10th Saeima, but due to an election being called less than one year later, the group was not able to continue its work. The 11th Saeima was elected in 2011 and included 23 women. However, by the end of 2012, the women's parliamentary group had still not been able to resume its work.

This can be explained by two main factors. First, there was little carryover from the 9th Saeima in terms of membership, as many of the current women members were elected to parliament for the first time. Second, despite their relatively small number (23 of 100 members) women are well represented in parliamentary leadership positions. The Speaker and Vice-Speaker of Parliament are both women. Of nine legislative committees, four have women chairpersons, while two of the six oversight committees are chaired by women. One woman is the deputy chairperson of the second largest faction, and three women are deputy chairpersons of committees. Thus, of the 23 women parliamentarians in the present parliament, 11 women, or almost half, occupy leadership positions in the parliamentary presidium, committees or factions.

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Even when a parliamentary body for women has proven successful and achieved desired outcomes, it can be difficult to re-group in successive parliaments. As the above case study of Latvia shows, it proved too difficult to re-establish the women's group when the original women members were not re-elected, and when the few women who were elected were subsequently appointed to positions of parliamentary or political leadership.

In this case, it may be worthwhile to encourage the members of women's parliamentary bodies to regularly produce a comprehensive report of their activities, lessons learned, and challenges encountered. This could be done at the end of each year, as a mechanism to assess progress made and the achievements secured. Documented evidence of the impact of women's parliamentary bodies can provide the impetus for renewal of such bodies even when there is a high turnover in women MPs following elections, or at least provide an institutional record of the body's achievements that may be of use to future women parliamentarians.

## 8. Conclusions and the way forward

Democracy presupposes the equal participation of women and men. Yet across the OSCE region, women continue to be under-represented in political and public life, particularly in decision-making positions. To redress the historical bias of parliaments towards men, significant change is required. This change would not only see the inclusion of more women in parliament, but would also make parliaments themselves more responsive to the concerns, needs and interests of women. Parliaments would become more gender-sensitive.

Women's parliamentary bodies can play a critical role in shifting the responsibility of making parliaments more gender-sensitive from women MPs alone, to parliaments as a whole, including parliamentary leadership. 'Gender mainstreaming infrastructure', such as a women's parliamentary body, often has as one of its objectives the goal of ensuring that gender equality is addressed across all areas of parliamentary work.

This study investigated the existence of women's parliamentary bodies in the OSCE region. The first contribution of the study is the development of a typology of women's parliamentary bodies. The typology aims to systematize the plethora of organizational types that fall under the category of a women's parliamentary body. By classifying each type according to whether it is informally or formally structured, and whether it is advocacy focused (that is, concerned with advocacy on selected policy issues as well as with gender mainstreaming in a broader sense) or parliamentary focused (having as its main goal the scrutiny and influencing of parliamentary legislation, through the tabling of amendments or promotion of gender equality issues within the parliamentary agenda), the study identified the most common types of parliamentary bodies created in the OSCE region. Women's parliamentary bodies that are parliamentary focused, such as cross-party women's caucuses and voluntary networks or associations, were most commonly identified.

The organization, activities and relationships of these bodies were then examined. The study found that women's parliamentary bodies in the OSCE region were largely 'informal' in nature (that is, they were not formally registered bodies of the parliament), but had formal operational mechanisms (agendas, internal rules, fixed leadership structures). Power-sharing arrangements (i.e., where leadership is shared among the political parties, either as joint members of a board, or rotated chair positions) were seen as helpful in overcoming political party tensions. Men participated constructively in some of the women's parliamentary bodies.

Most women's parliamentary bodies have been created with the common intention of influencing policy and legislation from a gender perspective. Interestingly, however, these bodies often

do not have the parliamentary power which would enable them to present legislative initiatives or amendments. To achieve this, they must forge relationships with power brokers in the parliament and the gender mainstreaming infrastructure (e.g. standing committee on gender equality or relevant networks), and the extent to which these relationships work is a measure of the body's overall effectiveness.

The other marker of success is the relationship a women's parliamentary body has with the wider women's movement, civil society and general gender expertise outside the parliament. These relationships provide the women's parliamentary body with the necessary information and knowledge to be able to make a difference.

### ***An eight-step framework for the establishment of a women's parliamentary body***

As this study has highlighted, one size does not fit all when it comes to the establishment of a women's parliamentary body. Different types of bodies gathering women MPs exist across the OSCE region; these vary widely in their activities, mandates, membership, resources and degree of formality. Moreover, such bodies tend to adapt to (and reflect) the political dynamics characteristic of their parliamentary assemblies and national context, often achieving political successes in spite of significant challenges, because of the tireless work of their women members.

The study has identified a wealth of good practices that support the establishment of women's parliamentary bodies and help avoid the potential challenges and obstacles that have been presented. Recognizing that each country context is unique, this study has developed an eight-step framework of action for parliaments and women MPs interested in establishing or revitalizing a women's parliamentary body. It is important to note that, although the strategies are presented in a certain order, MPs interested in establishing such bodies can select the strategies most appropriate to their political context.

1. ***Initiate broad consultations.*** The first step consists of initiating consultations among women MPs, aiming to be as inclusive as possible. Initially informal, these consultations should serve to identify the existence of a *common interest* in establishing a women's parliamentary structure. Capitalizing on *windows of opportunity*, such as the period where parliaments are formed following elections, women MPs should try to build *cross-party support* for their initiative, involving all political party representatives in the discussions. Once a shared commitment among women MPs to establish such a structure is achieved, more *formal consultations* should take place, which may, if appropriate, also involve the parliamentary leadership, other gender mainstreaming organs of the parliament, women's movements, interested civil society NGOs, international organizations and/or political party leadership.
2. ***Outline common goals and objectives.*** Once a common interest in establishing a body is identified, parliamentarians should identify common goals and objectives which can, on the one hand, unite them in their action across political party lines and, on the other hand, help provide strategic direction. In politically-challenging environments in particular, members may wish to choose *uncontroversial policy issues* (for instance, the promotion of gender equality, the advancement of women MPs, the delivery of better services to women in society) as a vehicle to build cross-party co-operation and also to build support from external bodies, such as parliamentary leadership. Issues where parties have a strong political or ideological stance may want to be avoided during the first steps in building cross-party co-operation. The drafting of a *Strategic Plan* will also give women MPs solid ground on

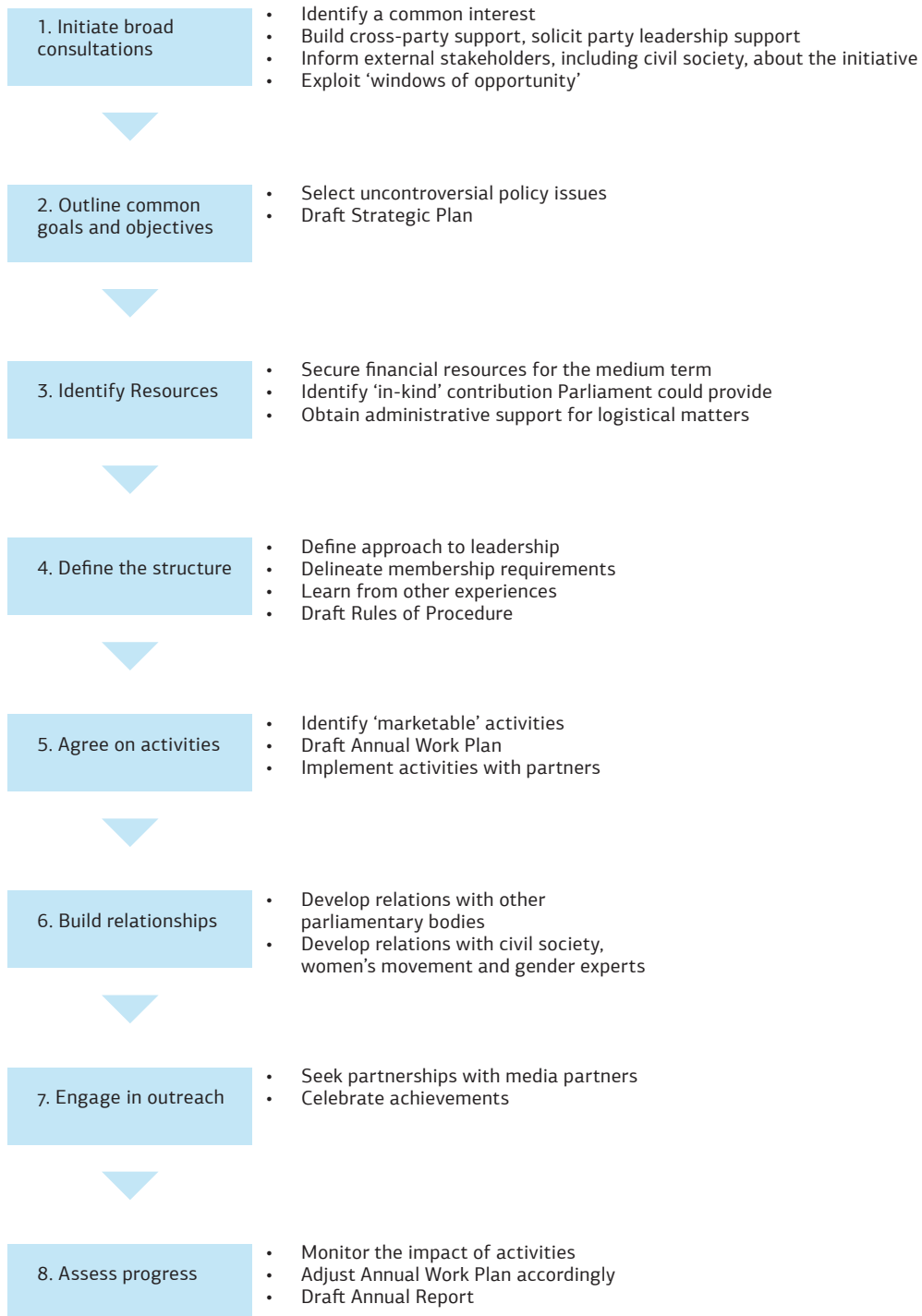
which to proceed. If the parliament itself has developed a gender equality policy, the body should take this document into account, and identify ways in which the body's activities may contribute to the parliament's gender equality policy.

3. **Identify resources.** Securing financial resources, as well as administrative and logistical support, represents one of the main challenges for women's parliamentary bodies. For this reason, it is important that women parliamentarians identify the main sources of support, which should preferably be sustainable in the medium term. At the same time, women parliamentarians should identify in-kind or other types of resources that parliaments can provide, such as administrative assistance, meeting rooms, or access to outreach tools. Likewise, members of the women's parliamentary body may consider reaching out to international organizations as well as NGOs in order to secure financial and in-kind support.
4. **Define the structure.** Once goals and objectives have been outlined, and women MPs have confirmed their commitment to the women's parliamentary body, the fourth step involves deciding on the best organizational structure to suit the objectives and purpose of the body. This step may be politically sensitive (especially, for example, when deciding on issues of leadership) and should be addressed accordingly, so as to avoid a breakdown or cessation of co-operation at this stage in the process. As many of the case studies presented throughout this study demonstrate, *leadership* arrangements can be settled in many different ways, and should aim to enhance cross-party trust. Likewise, the *membership* of the body can be decided upon according to different formulas, but should reflect the ultimate objectives the body wishes to achieve. The body should also take into consideration the *institutional requirements* for registering, formalizing or operating such a structure; these requirements will vary from parliament to parliament. In order to find the most effective way to structure a women's parliamentary body and avoid stalemate, it is advisable to *learn from successful experiences* in other OSCE participating States. Participation in international or regional conferences on this issue, as well as study tours to other countries where women's parliamentary structures have been active for several years, could present women MPs with a wide range of options and suggestions on how to effectively define the structure of the body and draft comprehensive *rules of procedure*.
5. **Agree on activities.** After reaching agreement on the common goals and structure of the body, the next step requires the identification of the activities the body wishes to implement. In line with the agreed goals and objectives, women MPs may wish to focus on activities that reap *politically 'marketable' results* relatively soon, so as to demonstrate both within the body and externally what it is capable of achieving. These activities should also be designed to help women MPs obtain political support among voters, making the benefits of their political action tangible to citizens. The women's movement, NGOs, international organizations, as well as elected women at the local level could participate in the drafting of an *Annual Work Plan*, sharing the costs and responsibilities of activities wherever possible. These Work Plans can also be submitted to political parties and to the parliament, so that parliamentary and party leaders can build support to these bodies into their budgets, or provide other in-kind resources as appropriate. Such an inclusive approach will help women MPs develop more effective activities, and will make the women's parliamentary structure known to the various communities of interest.
6. **Build relationships.** At this point, the women's parliamentary structure will be ready to implement activities. To effectively do so, members of the structure should aim at establishing formal *relationships with other parliamentary bodies*, in particular with the parliamentary committee dealing with gender equality issues, if one exists. This will allow the body's members to better advocate for legislative changes and acquire the parliamentary



power necessary to present legislative amendments. At the same time, relationships should also be fostered with similar structures present at the local level as well as with the wider women's movement, civil society and gender experts *outside the parliament*. These relationships, together with the assistance of international organizations, will provide the newly established women's parliamentary structure with the necessary expertise to be able to implement successful policies and activities.

7. **Develop a communication strategy.** Given the under-representation of women parliamentarians in the media in many OSCE participating States, it is important for women's parliamentary bodies to consider developing an effective communication or outreach strategy. This may involve *partnerships with national or local TV channels/newspapers* to report on the achievements of the body, making the work of the body visible to the larger public. Promotion of the body's work may be accomplished through the use of new social media, like Twitter, Facebook and possibly the parliamentary website. Moreover, the body should *celebrate its achievements*, involving civil society in public events and visibility initiatives.
8. **Assess progress and evaluate results.** Ultimately, each women's parliamentary structure should put in place *mechanisms to evaluate and assess the impact of its activities*, especially newly established ones. Using the adopted Annual Work Plan as a benchmark document, women MPs will benefit from drafting an annual report, analysing progress as well as shortcomings in implementing their initiatives, and using the results to plan activities more effectively in the following year. Such a report will also help to create an institutional memory, which future women MPs will be able to draw upon.

**Figure 8.1: The Eight-Step Framework for Action**

## 9. Recommendations

This study has identified many of the enabling factors that support the establishment and effective running of women's parliamentary bodies in the OSCE region. Likewise, it has uncovered some of the major challenges facing women's parliamentary bodies in OSCE participating States. These often relate to lack of resources, undefined or unclear relationship structures to parliament, discriminatory institutional and cultural values in favour of men, and strong political polarization.

To address these obstacles, the following recommendations are proposed for women's parliamentary bodies currently existing in the OSCE region, for parliamentarians interested in establishing such bodies, and for their parliaments more broadly. The recommendations reflect the 'Eight-Step Framework for Action' elaborated on in chapter 8.

### *Recommendations to women's parliamentary bodies*

- 1. Establish consensus on issues and priorities and celebrate achievements.** It is clear that women's parliamentary bodies have had some successes in influencing policy and legislation on specific issues, including gender equality laws and electoral laws. Limited and well-articulated actions may be more effective than trying to address an extensive agenda. Moreover, irrespective of the issue pursued, it is important to celebrate achievements, and to keep the momentum for change alive.
- 2. Develop and maintain strong relationships.** Women's parliamentary bodies need to build strong ties with men MPs, civil society, NGOs working on gender issues and the wider women's movement. Their success lies in having communication channels with all actors willing to be involved in furthering gender equality. As identified in chapter 6, two kinds of relationships need to be built. First, relationships that provide the body with much needed sources of information and research, including from civil society, women's party organizations, national gender machineries and academia. Second, relationships with the 'power brokers' in parliament that can allow the recommendations of the body to be implemented, such as with the Executive, the Board or Bureau of Parliament, all parliamentary party groups and relevant parliamentary committees (not only those specialized in gender equality), need to be fostered.
- 3. Balance the need for rules with the need for fairness.** Parliaments are procedurally-based institutions. They rely on rules of procedure which have been unanimously agreed

to avoid unnecessary conflict. In turn, it is not surprising that the women's parliamentary bodies examined in this study were similarly grounded in (unofficial) rules of procedure, particularly in terms of electing leaders and making decisions by vote.

Moreover, given that most of the parliamentary bodies studied aim to work across parties and could be considered 'extra-parliamentary' (in that they are not formal organs of the parliament), there may be scope to allow for a more equitable leadership structure. Chairs and Deputy Chairs could be rotated on a yearly or six-monthly basis across parliamentary parties, or a system of 'co-chairs' could be established. Furthermore, consensus models of decision-making could be adopted.

In a more politically contentious environment, women's parliamentary bodies might also consider strategies for dealing with political differences. Parliamentary committees, for example, often are able to cater to partisan disagreement, by incorporating a 'dissenting report'. These bodies may wish to identify their own mechanism by which differences of opinion can be acknowledged and accommodated, rather than always having to strive for consensus and unanimity.

4. **Develop a Plan.** The more organized a women's parliamentary body, the more likely it is to have a plan of action. In a strategic plan, activities can be described and planned, particularly with respect to their timeframe and who is responsible for implementing them. Check lists can be created. These strategic plans are important not only for the functioning of the body, but also to demonstrate to external stakeholders that the activities undertaken by the group have been monitored and evaluated. This is vital if the group needs to seek funding – be it from the parliament or from external sources. Likewise, members of women parliamentary bodies should seek to create an institutional memory of their work, in the form of an annual report or other similar documents. Such documents can allow members to assess progress and celebrate achievements.
5. **Seek assistance from international organizations.** International organizations, including the OSCE, are well positioned to provide support to women's parliamentary bodies. The OSCE can provide support through its parliamentary support programmes implemented by the OSCE field operations, as well as through ODIHR, which serves as a 'knowledge hub' of regional parliamentary developments.

At the same time, women's parliamentary bodies are encouraged to call on the expertise that many other international organizations and NGOs can offer, including, but not limited to, institutions such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Council of Europe (CoE), UN Women, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), International IDEA, and bilateral donor agencies and embassies. Such entities could provide training for women MPs as well as facilitate the placement of gender experts with the body.

### ***Recommendations to parliaments***

1. **Implement pro-active policies to foster the number of women MPs and promote them to leadership positions in parliament.** Women's representation in parliament and in leadership positions is a question of representative democracy: without women, a parliament cannot be described as representative or democratic. The Athens Ministerial Council Decision 7/09 of 2009 called on the OSCE participating States to consider developing legis-

lative measures to facilitate the participation of women in decision-making in all spheres of political and public life.

- 2. Provide resources to women's parliamentary bodies.** Parliaments can also support the work of women's parliamentary bodies by providing them with adequate resources, such as financial resources, support services or office and meeting spaces. The parliament can also consider hosting the activities of the body on its website, creating an e-mail address for the body, or supporting the body's outreach and media activities, in order to promote the work of the body among the public. The parliament could also provide human resources support to the body, including interns or other parliamentary support staff. Those determining the parliamentary schedule should take into account the scheduled meetings of these bodies, so that members do not have conflicting responsibilities.
- 3. Foster stronger and formal relationships among parliamentary bodies on gender equality.** The work of women's parliamentary bodies will continue to be marginalized if they are not taken seriously by other organs of the parliament. To avoid this marginalization, parliaments can establish stronger and more formal relationships between the women's parliamentary body and the Executive (for example, through regular hearings or meetings), or between the women's parliamentary body and specialized parliamentary committees (this could be done by defining a clear division of labour that is, for example, expressed in the parliament's Gender Equality Policy, or the rules of procedure).

The rules of procedure might also allow the women's parliamentary body to become formally involved in the legislative process, by conferring it the power to initiate legislation, draft amendments to legislation, and/or monitor the implementation of legislation (including the budget).

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## **Appendix 1: OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 7/09 on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life, Athens, 2009**

The 2009 Ministerial Council Decision was adopted in response to continued concern over the under-representation of women in the OSCE area in decision-making structures within the legislative, executive and judicial branches.

The Decision calls upon participating States to:

- Develop legislative measures to facilitate the participation of women in decision-making in all spheres of political and public life;
- Take measures to ensure balanced recruitment, retention and promotion of women and men in security services, including the armed forces;
- Promote shared work and parental responsibilities between women and men in order to facilitate women's equal opportunities to effectively participate in political and public life.

In particular, the Decision calls on the participating States to:

(...)

2. Consider possible legislative measures, which would facilitate a more balanced participation of women and men in political and public life and especially in decision-making;
3. Encourage all political actors to promote equal participation of women and men in political parties, with a view to achieving better gender-balanced representation in elected public offices at all levels of decision-making;
5. Develop and introduce where necessary open and participatory processes that enhance participation of women and men in all phases of developing legislation, programmes and policies;
6. Take necessary steps to establish, where appropriate, effective national mechanisms for measuring women's equal participation and representation;
7. Encourage shared work and parental responsibilities between women and men in order to facilitate women's equal opportunities to participate effectively in political and public life.

## Appendix 2: List of respondents<sup>55</sup>

<b>Albania</b>	Diana Culi, President of the Independent Forum for the Albanian Women
<b>Andorra</b>	Jordi Puy, Secretary of the Andorran Delegation to the OSCE PA
<b>Armenia</b>	Elinar Vardanyan, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs Ermine Nagdalyan, Vice Speaker of the Parliament
<b>Austria</b>	Gisela Wurm, Chairperson of the Committee on Gender Equality
<b>Belgium</b>	Thibaut Cardon, European affairs and interparliamentary relations, Belgian Senate
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	Davorin Semenik, Secretary of the Gender Equality Committee
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Penka Lyubenova, Adviser, Human Rights, Religion, Citizens' Complaints and Petitions Committee
<b>Canada</b>	Nancy Ruth, Senator
<b>Czech Republic</b>	Hlaváček Karel, Researcher
<b>Denmark</b>	Gro Iversen, Secretary to the Committee on Gender Issues
<b>Estonia</b>	Laine Randjärv, First Vice-Speaker of the Estonian Parliament
<b>Finland</b>	Gunilla Carlander, Counsellor of International Affairs
<b>France</b>	Isabelle Labernadie, Secrétariat de la délégation aux droits des femmes et à l'égalité des chances entre les hommes et les femmes de l'Assemblée nationale
<b>Georgia</b>	Rusudan Kervalishvili, Deputy Chair of the Parliament of Georgia, Head of the Gender Equality Council
<b>Germany</b>	Sibylle Laurischk, Chairwoman of the Committee on Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth
<b>Hungary</b>	Katalin Ertsey, MP, Green Party

<sup>55</sup> A response was also received from Teuta Sahatqija, MP and Chairwoman of the Women's Caucus of the Assembly of Kosovo.

<b>Italy</b>	Emma Bonino, Vice President of the Italian Senate
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	Svetlana Ferho, Member of Mazhilis (Lower Chamber)
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	Ainuru Altybaeva, MP, Vice-Speaker Roza Aknazarova MP, and OSCE PA Vice-Chair of the Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment
<b>Latvia</b>	Vineta Porina, Head of the Latvian Delegation to the OSCE PA
<b>Liechtenstein</b>	Marion Kindle-Kuehnis, Member of Parliament, Member of the OSCE PA Delegation
<b>former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia</b>	Liljana Popovska, President of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
<b>Moldova</b>	Liliana Palihovici, Deputy Speaker, Parliament of the Republic of Moldova
<b>The Netherlands</b>	Arjen Westerhoff, Secretary to the Dutch Delegation of the OSCE PA
<b>Norway</b>	Hotvedt Bjørnar, Senior Adviser, International Secretariat
<b>Poland</b>	Jolanta Cichocka, Senior Administrative/Project Assistant, OSCE/ODIHR
<b>Portugal</b>	Elza Pais, Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Equality
<b>Romania</b>	Anca Constantin, Parliamentary Advisor, Secretary of the Romanian Delegation to the OSCE PA (the Senate)
<b>Serbia</b>	Sanja Pecelj, Secretary of the Committee for Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality
<b>Slovak Republic</b>	Anna Okruhlicova, Senior Adviser
<b>Slovenia</b>	Andrej Erer, Research Section, Secretary
<b>Spain</b>	Maria Del Carmen Quintanilla Barba, President of the Equality Commission
<b>Sweden</b>	Ingrid Tollin, Secretary of the Swedish Delegation to the OSCE PA
<b>Tajikistan</b>	Bibidavlat Avzalshoeva, Member of Parliament
<b>Ukraine</b>	Olena K. Kondratyuk, Member of Parliament
<b>United States of America</b>	Robert A. Hand, Secretary of the U.S. Delegation to the OSCE PA

## Appendix 3: Questionnaire

### **Information note**

This questionnaire was prepared for the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) as part of an ongoing project on “Strengthening Parliamentary Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region”.

Parliamentary structures for women are recognized as important forums for representing women’s interests and – often – for influencing political agendas within parliaments. Accordingly, in co-operation with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA) and the Special Representative of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on Gender Issues, OSCE ODIHR aims to identify the wide variety of parliamentary structures for women MPs in existence in the OSCE region, collect good practices in establishing and running such structures, and highlight the impact of these structures on parliamentary agendas and working environments. **Your support and information is critical to the success of this project, and we thank you in advance for your co-operation!**

### **Target Audience**

We recommend that the questionnaire be completed by parliamentarians in the following capacity:

- Chairs, co-chairs, vice-chairs and/or organizers of bodies that bring women together in parliaments (i.e. women cross-party section, women caucuses, or other women organizations);
- Where such bodies do not exist, the chair, co-chairs or vice-chairs of a parliamentary committee on gender equality and/or women’s issues;
- Where such a parliamentary committee does not exist, a gender equality advocate (male or female parliamentarian).

### **Objective**

This survey concerning parliamentary structures for women MPs in the OSCE region aims to identify mandates, structures, memberships and activities of these parliamentary bodies. The

intention in analysing these bodies is to collect information about different models, good practices, success stories, challenges as well as lessons learned in establishing and running these bodies. The survey will form the basis for a comparative report on women's parliamentary caucuses and related bodies in the OSCE region.

It should be noted that there are no 'right answers' to any of the questions posed, nor is any assessment of the existing parliamentary bodies being undertaken. Responses to this questionnaire will be used to identify ways to better support parliaments in addressing gender equality and women's interests in the OSCE region.

### ***Instructions***

This questionnaire contains **23 questions**. It is estimated that this will take up to an hour to complete. **There are two sections. We ask that ALL PARLIAMENTS, even those without parliamentary structures for women, respond to SECTION I. Parliaments WITH structures for women MPs should respond to both Sections I and II.**

### ***Requests for clarification***

**Please send your completed questionnaires BY 25 JUNE 2012 directly to the OSCE ODIHR at [psw@odihr.pl](mailto:psw@odihr.pl).** In the event that respondents require additional details or have questions, they should be directed to Kristin van der Leest at OSCE ODIHR, [Kristin.Vanderleest@odihr.pl](mailto:Kristin.Vanderleest@odihr.pl).

### **Information on the respondent**

<b>Country</b>	
<b>Completed by:</b>	<b>Name:</b>
	<b>Position:</b>
<b>Contact e-mail:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

### **The parliamentary context**

<b>1. Is the Parliament unicameral or bicameral?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Unicameral <input type="checkbox"/> Bicameral
<b>2. Percentage of women MPs in Parliament:</b>	----- %
<b>3. Are there any special temporary measures to ensure women's representation in the Parliament?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<b>4. If yes, are they:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Reserved seats? <input type="checkbox"/> Executive appointments? <input type="checkbox"/> Legislated party quotas? <input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary party quotas?

## SECTION I: FOR ALL PARLIAMENTS

### Presence of gender mainstreaming mechanisms

<b>1. Does the Parliament have a Gender Equality Policy or Gender Equality Strategic Plan?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Gender Equality Policy (date adopted _____ ) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Gender Equality Strategic Plan (date adopted _____ )
<b>2. Does the Parliament host a mechanism to address/ensure gender equality, gender mainstreaming or promote women's interests of any kind? (Please tick all that apply)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> A specialized parliamentary committee on gender or women' issues <input type="checkbox"/> A multi-functional parliamentary committee (e.g. committee on social affairs, human rights <u>and</u> gender equality/women's issues) <input type="checkbox"/> A temporary parliamentary committee on gender or women's issues <input type="checkbox"/> A gender equality commission <input type="checkbox"/> A gender equality body established in the Parliament's Secretariat/ Administration <input type="checkbox"/> A research body capable of analysing data from a gender perspective <input type="checkbox"/> A mechanism for collecting and/or analysing sex-disaggregated data <input type="checkbox"/> Personal initiative of parliamentarian (e.g. co-operation with civil society) <input type="checkbox"/> A body that brings women together <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):

### Presence of a women's parliamentary body

<b>3. Is there (or has there been) a body in your parliament that brings women together?<sup>57</sup></b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, there is one (or more) currently Please provide name and date created	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, there used to be one Please provide dates active	<input type="checkbox"/> No, but there are plans to create one*	<input type="checkbox"/> No, there is no such body

\* If there are plans to create a women's parliamentary body, please refer to those plans in answering the remaining questions.

<sup>56</sup> By "body that brings women together", we mean any mechanism established within the Parliament with the broad aim of facilitating women MPs' discussion on issues of concern to them. Such mechanisms can vary greatly in mandate, structure, formality, membership and activities, and can include men, members of civil society and others.

4. If there is (or was) such a body, how would you describe it? (Please tick the most appropriate response)

- Women's caucus
  - Cross-party
  - Internal party
- Study group approved by Parliament
- Issue-focused group<sup>58</sup>
- Profession-focused group (e.g. business group)
- Parliamentary friendship group<sup>59</sup>
- Voluntary association, club or network<sup>60</sup>
- Advisory group<sup>61</sup>
- Platform involving civil society/others
- Research body
- Body part of International network/group of women
- Other: Please describe what type of body it is:

5. If there used to be such a body, why is it no longer functioning? (Please tick all that apply and provide details where appropriate)

- Lack of leadership among potential members
- Too few women MPs or too few interested women MPs
- Lack of support from political party
- Lack of resources
- Mandate not renewed
- Other mechanisms found to be more effective (please specify):
- Other reason for the body no longer functioning (please specify):

6. Does the parliamentary and/or the political party system hinder the functioning of a women's parliamentary body? (Please tick the most appropriate response)

- Political party structure is too under-developed to support cross-party initiatives
- Political party discipline is too strong to support cross-party initiatives
- Advocacy on gender/women's issues is most effective through parliamentary committees
- Advocacy on gender/women's issues is most effective through alliances/networks of parliamentarians, civil society and government mechanism representatives
- Women's parliamentary bodies are considered to marginalize women
- Other reason:

57 By "issue-focused group", we mean a body established to address an issue or issues of concern to the members, for example, promoting legislation on equal pay, violence against women, or **equal opportunities**.

58 By "**parliamentary friendship group**", we mean an informal group of MPs that organize to promote parliamentary relations between the host parliament and parliaments of another country or other countries around specific issues, and that may involve travel.

59 By "voluntary association or club" we mean an informal body with an undetermined membership serving a social or other purpose but that is not presented as a formal **women's parliamentary group**.

60 By "advisory group", we mean a body established to provide advice or guidance to parliament on specific issues, based on the members' **expertise**.



## SECTION II: FOR PARLIAMENTS WITH PARLIAMENTARY STRUCTURES FOR WOMEN MPS

### Relationship of the body to Parliament

<b>1. Is the body established by a resolution or formal decision of the Parliament?</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes Date: _____ Who introduced the resolution: _____
<b>2. Does the resolution or decision require that the body be renewed on a regular basis?</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes How often: _____
<b>3. If the body is recognised as an organ of the Parliament, what details were required for its registration? (Please tick all that apply)</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not recognised	<input type="checkbox"/> Name? <input type="checkbox"/> Membership list and organizational chart? <input type="checkbox"/> Statement of purpose? <input type="checkbox"/> Staff required? <input type="checkbox"/> Financial declaration of members? <input type="checkbox"/> Internal rules? <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Plan?
<b>4. If there is a gender equality committee, does it meet formally with the women's parliamentary body?</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>5. Does the women's parliamentary body co-operate with similar bodies in other countries?</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes In which countries? ----- Is the body part of an international network of any kind? If so, which one(s)? -----

### Organization of the women's parliamentary body

<b>6. What are the objectives or mandates of this body? (Please rank the responses using the boxes on the left, with "1" serving as the main or most important objective/mandate. Please number as many as are appropriate.)</b>
To influence policy and legislation from a gender perspective
To add items to the parliamentary agenda
To draft legislation and introduce it into the Parliament
To lobby for support on gender equality issues
To create a social space for women and men MPs and foster a sense of solidarity
To hear from relevant stakeholders on gender equality issues
To raise awareness both inside and outside the parliament on gender equality issues
To ensure Parliament's compliance with international obligations such as CEDAW commitments
To monitor policy/legislative implementation

To build capacity and empower women
To conduct or commission research
To implement and/or monitor gender budgeting
To conduct advocacy with civil society organizations
Other (please specify):

### 7. How is the body structured? (Please tick the most applicable response and provide details)

	<i>Please provide details as appropriate</i>
<b>Meetings</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Regular meetings scheduled during each parliamentary session	<i>How often?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Meetings scheduled only as required	
<input type="checkbox"/> Formal meeting minutes are kept	
<b>Leadership and Organization</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership positions (Chair, Deputy Chair) elected by group	<i>Which position? Who is the current leader?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership positions remunerated	
<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership positions rotated across different parties, different chambers, old/new MPs	<i>How rotated?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Fixed term for Chair (e.g. 1 year)	<i>How long?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Sub-committees can be established	<i>If yes, on what?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Governing organ established	
<input type="checkbox"/> The body has internal procedural rules	
<input type="checkbox"/> The body has established positions (e.g. Treasurer, Secretary, Public Relations Officer, etc)	<i>What positions?</i>
<b>Agenda</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> No agenda circulated	
<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda prepared and circulated to all members before each meeting	
<b>Staffing</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> The body has no permanent staff	
<input type="checkbox"/> Research staff provided by Parliament	<i>How many?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Administrative staff provided by Parliament	<i>How many?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Support staff provided by civil society/international organizations	<i>How many?</i>
<b>Resources</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Members pay a financial contribution to the body	
<input type="checkbox"/> The body is allocated funding by the Parliament	
<input type="checkbox"/> The body is allocated a meeting room by the Parliament	
<input type="checkbox"/> The body receives support from civil society/international organizations	
<input type="checkbox"/> The body receives budget support from political parties	

**Powers and functions expressed in rules of procedure**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The body may draft legislation   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The body may inquire into policy and legislation, and may call witnesses and for submissions |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The body may report to Parliament  |  |

**Decision making procedures**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decisions are taken by consensus |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decisions are taken by a vote    |  |

**8. Do you think the structure and organization of the women's parliamentary body allows it to work effectively?**

*Please explain your answer*

**9a. What is the membership of the body? (Please tick all that apply)**

- |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary   | <input type="checkbox"/> All women MPs                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Women MPs from a single chamber (if bicameral) | <input type="checkbox"/> Women MPs of a single party or a parliamentary party group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ex-parliamentary representatives of political parties | <input type="checkbox"/> Representatives of civil society | <input type="checkbox"/> Representatives of international organizations | <input type="checkbox"/> Other<br><i>Please provide details</i>                     |

**9b. Is there a formal or written procedure for accepting members?**

- No

**10. Can men become members of the body?**

- No                       Yes                       *If yes, how many men participate in the body?*
-

## Activities of the parliamentary body

### 11. Has the body organized capacity building training for members on the following? (Please tick all that apply)

- Definitions and application of gender equality, gender mainstreaming and gender sensitive parliaments
- Public speaking, negotiation and persuasion skills
- Chairing meetings and other leadership skills
- Conflict resolution
- Building a voter base
- Representing and championing constituents' interests in Parliament
- Parliamentary procedures
- Forging issue-based coalitions
- Legislative drafting

### 12. How effective has the body been in gaining political support across party lines in the following areas? (Please tick the most applicable response for each area)

	Very	Fairly	Somewhat	Not at all	Don't know
Non discrimination/equal opportunities					
Women's political participation (special measures)					
Violence against women					
Prostitution/trafficking					
Labour/Employment/Benefits					
Equal pay					
Inheritance rights					
Citizenship/status law					
Healthcare					
Reproductive rights					
Children's rights					
Reform of parliamentary rules of procedures					

### 13. How effectively does the body work in the following areas? (Please tick the most applicable response for each area and provide an example)

	Very	Fairly	Somewhat	Not at all	Please provide an example
Influencing policy and legislation					
Monitoring and evaluation of government policy and legislation					
Coalition building around an issue					

Raising awareness on gender equality issues among constituents					
Holding press conferences					
Commissioning research to inform parliamentary debates					
Holding discussions with civil society, business groups, academia, and government departments on gender equality issues					
Holding discussions with ministers on gender equality issues					
Mentoring of current and future MPs					
Lobbying for women's promotion to positions of leadership in parliament					
Fundraising					
Harmonising donor funding and international organization support					
Holding social events for members					
Raising awareness on gender equality issues among parliamentary staff					
Advocating for non-discriminatory, gender-sensitive working culture					
International networking					

#### 14. What have been significant achievements of the body since it was created?

*Please cite any laws initiated/passed/amended; any events held; any oversight activity organized*

### Relationships with other organizations

#### 15. How effectively does the body interact with the following bodies and organizations? (Please tick the most applicable response for each organization)

	Very	Fairly	Somewhat	Not at all	There is no relationship
Other parliamentary bodies dealing with gender equality in the Parliament (e.g. committee)					
Other parliamentary women's bodies at the sub-national level					
Parliamentary women's bodies in other countries					
Other organs of the Parliament (e.g. Executive body)					

Political party(s) of Government				
Political party(s) of the Opposition				
Independents				
The media				
National women's machinery				
Civil society organizations				
Universities and research institutes				
The Ombudsperson				
International organizations				

### Challenges and obstacles

**16. To what extent do the following pose challenges or obstacles for the body?**  
(Please tick the most applicable response for each challenge)

	Significant	Fair	Not a great deal	Not at all
Cultural norms and stereotypes about women in society				
Discriminatory or sexist working culture in Parliament				
Lack of support from party leaders to work across party lines				
Lack of solidarity among women				
Lack of resources				
Lack of dedicated support staff				
Lack of reliable information/research on gender equality issues, including a lack of sex-disaggregated data				
<b>Please list any additional challenges you have encountered</b>				

**17. In your opinion, how can these challenges be overcome?**

Please provide your answer

**Thank you for your time and considered responses!**

