

STUDY

Requested by the AFET Committee



Promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy



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STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to support the European Parliament (EP), in particular its standing delegations, in implementing the commitment made in the EP resolution of 23 October 2020 on gender equality in EU foreign and security policy. Based on desk research as well as quantitative and qualitative empirical analysis, the study describes the existing EP practices of gender equality promotion, analyses whether the current practices deliver on the commitment, and presents what can be learned both from the bottlenecks identified in the EP's existing institutional arrangements and from the practices of other national parliaments and international parliamentary institutions. The study concludes that while the EP is highly advanced when it comes to gender mainstreaming in external relations, there are a number of aspects that need improvement or fine-tuning. To facilitate the implementation of the overarching EP gender action plan, the study provides a set of policy recommendations aimed at increasing the effectiveness of gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy. The recommendations comprise proposals to strengthen the institutional framework, clarify the roles of gender focal points, increase access to gender-specific information and training, maximise the use of interparliamentary meetings and DEG activities for gender mainstreaming abroad, streamline the links with civil society and other external stakeholders, and improve the gender dimension of oversight over EP external relations.

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
AFET	European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs
APA	Accredited Parliamentary Assistant
BDPA	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
BUDG	European Parliament Committee on Budgets
CEDAW	United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CELAC	Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
CETA	EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
CONT	European Parliament Committee on Budgetary Control
COP21	21 st session of the Conference of Parties
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSW	United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
D-RS	European Parliament Delegation to EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee
DARP	European Parliament Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula
DLAT	European Parliament Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly
DAW	Division for the Advancement of Women
DEG	Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group
DEVE	European Parliament Committee on Development
DROI	European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EMPL	European Parliament Committee on Employment and Social Affairs
ENVI	European Parliament Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party

EPRS	European Parliamentary Research Service
EuroLat	Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly
FEMM	European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality
FFP	Feminist Foreign Policy
FIAP	Feminist International Assistance Policy
GMN	Gender Mainstreaming Network
GREVIO	Group of experts on action against violence against women and domestic violence
HLG	High Level Group for Gender Equality and Diversity
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
INTA	European Parliament Committee on International Trade
IPI	International Parliamentary Institution
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
LIBE	European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MPs	Members of Parliament
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OAS	Organisation of American States
ODA	Official development assistance
OSCE/ODHIR	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PECH	European Parliament Committee for Fisheries
REGI	European Parliament Committee for Regional Development
RoP	Rules of Procedure
SAPC	Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
VAWIP	Violence Against Women In Politics
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Executive summary

Research topic and objectives

This study carries out an in-depth analysis of the manner in which the European Parliament (EP) promotes gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy, and of the lessons which can be learnt from other parliaments and International Parliamentary Institutions (IPIs) for effectively engaging on gender issues in international relations.

The European Union's (EU) and the EP's push towards greater mainstreaming of gender in external relations is evident from two important documents which form the policy basis for this study. The first one is the Commission's and the EU High Representative's Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III), which highlights the insufficiencies stemming from women's under-representation across parliamentary processes, ranging from elections to legislative and budgetary processes to peace negotiations. The second is the EP Resolution of October 2020 on gender equality in the EU's foreign and security policy, which specifically calls for gender equality to be pursued in the Parliament's relations with third countries, and which supports the appointment of gender focal points in each delegation.

This study examines these policy commitments through an extensive analysis of the formal legal and policy frameworks applicable to the activities of the following EP bodies: (a) committees and subcommittees responsible for gender equality and external relations: the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), the Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE), the Committee on Development (DEVE) and the Committee on International Trade (INTA); (b) the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG); and (c) interparliamentary delegations. This encompasses an examination of the Rules of Procedures (RoP), Conference of Presidents' Decisions, and, to the extent that their contents are publicly available, the EP's Gender Action Plan and the accompanying Roadmap.

The study also investigates the current practices of gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy, with a view to identifying the bottlenecks hampering its effectiveness and assessing how they could be overcome. It covers the 8th and partly the 9th legislature, and focuses on the interparliamentary delegations, where the establishment of gender focal points is a more recent development.

Another goal of this study is to assess the EP's frameworks and practices from the perspective of the international benchmarks on gender-responsive parliaments set by international organisations, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Organisation for Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The study furthermore maps good practices and tools used by other parliaments and parliamentary institutions for the promotion of gender equality in parliamentary diplomacy, and assesses their relevance for the EP's future engagement.

The specific objectives of the study are therefore threefold. The *descriptive objective* is to determine the current practice of the EP when it comes to the use of parliamentary diplomacy for promoting gender equality. The *analytical objective* aims to answer whether the current practice is delivering on the gender equality commitments. The *evaluative/normative objective* is to place the EP's efforts in the broader context of the practices of other national parliaments and IPIs.

Relevance

This study makes an important contribution to the existing literature on parliamentary diplomacy and gender equality as one of the first systematic studies on the use of parliamentary diplomacy for promoting

the EU founding value of equality between women and men, laid down in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

The existing literature has valuably addressed a variety of topics related to gender in the context of parliaments as well as the political, economic and social empowerment of women in general. Scholarship has also analysed parliamentary diplomacy as a phenomenon which has three key dimensions: (a) parliamentary scrutiny of foreign affairs, which is not considered parliamentary diplomacy as such, but which is essential to parliamentary diplomacy; (b) the conduct of autonomous diplomatic relations by parliaments; and (c) the establishment of parliamentary organs of regional and global organisations. The study encompasses all three dimensions of parliamentary diplomacy. The first dimension is covered by examining the above-mentioned committees' and subcommittees' initiatives for the adoption of EP resolutions on EU external relations, and by determining the substantive gender equality claims made in these resolutions. The second dimension is incorporated by providing a detailed presentation of the different parliamentary diplomacy actions of delegations, committees and subcommittees and the DEG. The third dimension is covered through the inclusion of a multilateral assembly as one of the case studies, and through an assessment of the gender equality practices of selected IPIs. By doing this, the study sheds light on the processes, channels and instruments through which gender issues find their way into interparliamentary relations between the EP and partner countries or regions.

Methodology

The study applies a range of methodological approaches to collect data and provide a holistic empirical insight into the way the EP promotes gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy.

The first method was *documentary analysis* and was performed through desk research of key EP instruments for external action (e.g. resolutions, statements, mission reports, activity reports, studies, and public events) as well as through analysis of the tools and practices of other parliaments and parliamentary bodies (e.g. parliaments' replies to the ECPRD Request No. 4607 on Gender Equality in Parliamentary Diplomacy, documents and information published by parliaments in the countries identified as leaders in feminist foreign policy, and international organisations' publications addressing parliamentary diplomacy and gender mainstreaming in external relations). The second method was *qualitative analysis* through semi-structured interviews held with members, staff of the EP, and representatives from parliaments, international organisations and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) external to the EP. The third method was *quantitative and qualitative analysis* and had two components. One component was a statistical analysis of the minutes of all EP delegation meetings and interparliamentary meetings covered by the case studies in the period 2014-2020. The other component was an online survey widely distributed among Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and administrative staff from delegations, and an analysis of a dataset on the participation of members in the meetings of EP delegations, committees and subcommittees.

Three case studies were selected in order to delve deeper into the concrete practical application of the instruments and tools of parliamentary diplomacy and determine how and to what extent they are used for gender equality promotion in the EP's partner countries and regions. The case studies examine Saudi Arabia, Serbia and the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat). The case studies were chosen to provide an illustrative sample of diverse EP experiences of gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy, taking into account the following criteria: (a) geographical coverage of different regions; (b) the countries' gender equality ranking in the Global Gender Gap Report for 2021 (in the case of EuroLat member countries); (c) the frequency of references to gender equality and/or women's rights in EP delegation meetings; and (d) the relevance of the DEG activities to gender equality promotion. While the case studies primarily focus on the gender equality promotion activities of inter-parliamentary delegations, the relevant work of selected committees, subcommittees and the DEG is also presented in order to show the extent to which EP bodies work in a complementary manner and in line with the criterion of joint venture. With respect to committee missions and activities, those by AFET and DROI were the most

relevant ones for the case studies of Saudi Arabia and Serbia (human rights being the key consideration in the former case and enlargement in the latter), while focus was on INTA and DROI in the case study of EuroLat (where human rights and trade links are particularly salient). While the study examines the committees' and subcommittees' statements and public hearings addressing gender equality, it is important to note that many of their mission reports are not publicly available (partly for security and confidentiality reasons), while their activity reports (covering the duration of an entire legislature) may not always make the gender-oriented work visible. These limitations are reflected in the conclusions of the study.

Key conclusions

The main conclusion of the study is that the EP is already highly sophisticated when it comes to gender mainstreaming in external relations. Based on international organisations' gender equality benchmarks, practices of selected non-EU parliaments and IPIs, and interviews, the criteria used in this study show that the EP is a strong performer in gender equality promotion abroad. These criteria are: (a) authenticity in the Parliament's own actions; (b) co-creation of policies with all relevant stakeholders; (c) contextualisation of parliamentary action so as to take account of the specific socio-cultural circumstances in the partner country or region; (d) pragmatism in understanding and addressing the Parliament's own limitations; and (e) joint venture as a means of creating a commitment to gender equality promotion within all relevant EP bodies. The lessons learnt from other parliaments and inter-parliamentary institutions show that diplomatic action around gender equality requires involvement with local stakeholders and CSOs to ensure that the tools and practices are addressing actual problems in the third country or region. Additionally, the Gender Transformative Approach aimed at challenging the current gender dynamics in the society turned out to be a powerful framework for diplomatic action. Understanding how foreign policy affects the equality between women and men is crucial for achieving success in promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy. Another important lesson learnt from the parliaments and interparliamentary organisations analysed for the purpose of this study is that without being gender sensitive as an institution, the parliament cannot effectively promote gender equality outside.

When it comes to the EP's internal and external engagement on gender equality, the *committees and subcommittees* have been the key engines for gender mainstreaming in EP external action, consistently referencing gender issues across security, trade, development, enlargement and environmental protection policies. Their key drawback concerns the need for better coordination and visibility of the outcomes of their missions abroad. The *DEG's* capacity-building work, spearheaded by its Simone Veil programme, is an essential component of the EP's parliamentary diplomacy efforts in promoting gender equality. However, its mediation initiatives – exemplified by Jean Monnet dialogues, which focus on party political consensus building – are an under-utilised tool for gender equality promotion. Although their pronouncements are not legally binding, *delegations* are critical to parliamentary diplomacy due to their being uniquely placed to interact with parliamentarians, government officials and representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the EP's partner countries or regions. Thanks to delegations' 'soft influence' in such interactions, they are able to contribute to awareness raising and peer-to-peer dialogue on gender equality. Advocacy for policy change at high political levels, (co-)drafting of resolutions and reports in bilateral and multilateral interparliamentary forums, the issuance of press releases announcing political positions, and the (confidential) sharing of the conclusions reached abroad with other EP bodies and EU institutions are all examples of the influence that parliamentary diplomacy can generate in the area of gender equality promotion. The influence of delegations could be enhanced by refining and fine-tuning their procedures and practices. Below we summarise our core policy recommendations.

Key policy recommendations

Our policy recommendations are divided into two parts: one addressing the internal dimension of parliamentary diplomacy, and the other addressing its external dimension. The external dimension is sub-

divided so as to provide advice regarding the work of committees/subcommittees, the DEG, and delegations.

The most important *internally-oriented recommendations* concern the need for clearer referencing of gender equality in formal governing documents of the EP (e.g. Conference of Presidents' Decisions); broader and more centralised access to gender-specific information drawn from international organisations, EU member states and third countries; greater gender mainstreaming at the level of EP political groups and MEPs' assistants; and stronger focus on external relations within the Gender Mainstreaming Network (GMN).

Among the *externally-oriented recommendations*, those addressed at *committees/subcommittees* advise creating an impact assessment questionnaire for scrutinising the gender impacts of EU international agreements; enhancing the mechanisms of oversight over the implementation of the committees'/subcommittees' gender action plans and over the financing of EU external action; and improving the effectiveness of committee missions abroad through greater follow-up with counterparts, governmental and non-governmental actors abroad, as well as through more consistent and visible ex post reporting.

The recommendations concerning *the DEG* activities suggest refining the Sakharov Prize selection procedure to place greater emphasis on gender equality, the enrichment of the Simone Veil programmes by including more training on international relations and diplomacy, and greater use of Jean Monnet dialogues for gender equality promotion.

The recommendations for the work of *delegations* are the most numerous and include stronger institutionalisation of delegations in formal EP documents or delegations' own terms of reference; the empowerment of delegations to adopt documents beyond communiqués; the introduction of annual reports of delegation with sections on gender equality promotion; ensuring gender balance in the composition of delegations sent abroad; offering greater opportunities for gender equality training to MEPs and staff involved in parliamentary diplomacy activities; and stronger recognition for gender equality achievements within and beyond the EU, through several categories of gender equality awards.

Specifically relating to interparliamentary meetings, the recommendations include stronger institutionalisation of links with IPAs; the promotion of women's parliamentary forums and caucuses; closer relations between MEPs sent abroad and women parliamentarians from the partner country or region; insistence on a guaranteed agenda point on gender equality; the creation of 'mentoring' or 'pairing-up' programmes; and greater awareness of the importance of symbols while on missions abroad (e.g. clothing, seating arrangements, rules of procedure of the meeting).

Of particular importance for delegations are also links with CSOs, stakeholders and external experts. We recommend drawing up lists of organisations with which regular cooperation can be agreed (e.g. in the context of interparliamentary meetings or public events); ensuring greater follow-up with them; publishing extensive summaries of discussions; and referring to the outcomes of these discussions in formal EP documents (e.g. a committee report).

We also recommend greater mainstreaming of gender in the studies commissioned by the EP and in delegation communiqués. Delegations should furthermore exploit the advantages of social media (e.g. by maintaining Twitter accounts).

Finally, the role played by gender focal points should be clarified. Their tasks could include information gathering (e.g. on international developments in gender equality); liaising with foreign actors (e.g. civil society abroad) so as to increase delegations' interactions with partner countries or regions; monitoring the inclusion of gender in proposed annual reports of delegations; and assisting with the maintenance of a centralised EP database on gender equality.

1 Introduction

This study is embedded in two key EU institutional approaches to gender equality in external relations: one adopted by the EP and the other by the Commission. We present their core aspects at the very outset so as to lay out the policy basis on which this study was constructed.

In October 2020, the EP passed a resolution on gender equality in the EU's foreign and security policy.¹ This specifically underlined 'the importance of promoting gender equality in the EU's foreign policy, including through Parliament's relations with third countries; welcomes, in this respect, the decision of Parliament's delegations to appoint a representative for gender issues in each delegation; underlines the need to promote equality and diversity in all activities of the delegations, including during official parliamentary meetings with third countries'.²

About a month later, the Commission presented the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III),³ which provides the EU with a policy framework for accelerating progress towards meeting international commitments and towards a world in which every woman and girl may fulfil her potential. GAP III also addresses parliaments, although not in the context of parliamentary diplomacy. Specifically, GAP III relies on IPU data to emphasise that 'women continue to be under-represented as voters, political leaders and elected officials, as official peace negotiators and mediators' and that '[c]hange is slow in elected positions and decision-making bodies at all levels'.⁴ The document recalls that women only represent around 25 % of national parliamentarians worldwide, and that between 1992 and 2018 women constituted only 13 % of negotiators, 6 % of mediators and 6 % of signatories in major peace processes. To remedy this, the focus of EU action in relation to women and parliaments is on 'enhancing women's capacity as political leaders in governments and parliaments through training, women's caucuses, and promoting gender-responsive legislative processes and budgeting and promoting young leaders programmes'.⁵

The following subsections provide a description of the objectives and research questions (1.1), the relevance of the study in light of the existing literature (1.2), the methodological approach (1.3), the definition of the concepts used in the study (1.4), and the structure of the study (1.5).

1.1 Objectives and research questions

The study's **main objective** is to 'support the EP and in particular its standing delegations in implementing the commitment made in the EP resolution of 23 October 2020 on gender equality in EU's foreign and security policy'. This is to be achieved through a series of **specific objectives**. These objectives are descriptive, analytical and evaluative/normative and are outlined below.

1. **Descriptive objective:** What is the current practice in the EP? While there are numerous examples of existing EP practices in terms of promoting gender equality in EU foreign and security policy, the EP lacks a systematic overview of the existing practice that is supported by qualitative and quantitative data.
2. **Analytical objective:** Is the current practice in the EP delivering on the commitment? The need for a thorough analysis is even more pronounced when it comes to the performance of the EP's practices.

¹ European Parliament, Resolution of 23 October 2020 on Gender Equality in EU's foreign and security policy, doc. no. P9_TA(2020)0286.

² Point 33 thereof.

³ European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council 'EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III—An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action', JOIN(2020) 17, 25 November 2020.

⁴ GAP III, at 17.

⁵ GAP III, at 17.

Here, the objective is to identify the internal and external factors that contribute to the existing bottlenecks in the EP's gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy. As shown below in subsection 1.2, there is also a gap in the literature when it comes to parliamentary diplomacy and the promotion of gender equality, which this study seeks to address.

3. **Evaluative/normative objective:** What can be learned from the practices of: a) other national parliaments (selected national parliaments within the EU and in third countries) and b) IPIs (selected parliamentary institutions of international organisations and regional organisations)? This objective corresponds to an important aspect of parliamentary diplomacy, which is the exchange of information, best practices and experiences of gender equality promotion among parliamentarians from different countries and regional organisations. This component highlights peer learning opportunities for the EP.

In addition, the study provides **policy recommendations**, which focus on the practical tools and measures for consideration by MEPs and EP bodies. The objectives of each of these research areas are summarised below in subsection 1.5.

The study focuses on the 8th and partly on the 9th legislature, covering information up to July 2021. As per the technical specifications, the analysis excludes the work of EP election observation, as it takes place in a well-defined normative framework, the international engagement of the EP President or vice-Presidents, as well as the external activities of political groups or informal bodies such as EP friendship groups.

1.2 Relevance

The existing academic and grey literature on parliamentary diplomacy does not specifically address the different aspects of gender equality promotion in EP international relations. While there is an evident gap in the literature, the latter does provide a rich and stimulating theoretical context in which to embed the research objectives of this study.

First, the existing literature helpfully discerns between three highly relevant aspects of the EP's international action and recognises the different channels of influence over outcomes in foreign policy.⁶ These outcomes are pursued through: (a) ex ante and ex post parliamentary scrutiny over the foreign policy behaviour of the executive at the domestic level; (b) autonomous parliamentary conduct of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations with other domestic or international parliamentary institutions but also with executive actors; and (c) the establishment of parliamentary bodies within international and regional organisations. Although the first aspect is usually not considered parliamentary diplomacy because it relates to parliaments performing scrutiny at home rather than parliaments taking international action, this study captures all three aspects due to their importance to the efficient conduct of international relations by the EP. The first aspect is analysed through the lens of gender-oriented scrutiny of EU external relations by committees and subcommittees. The second aspect is covered by an in-depth analysis of the applicable regime and activities of delegations. The third aspect is addressed from a twofold perspective: a regional perspective through a case study of a bi-regional parliamentary body established between the EU and the Latin American region (EuroLat) and by examining the practices of selected international parliamentary institutions.

Second, the study aims to place gender equality promotion by the EP within the existing scholarly arguments about the EU as a normative power promoting values and norms in global governance,

⁶ Malamud, Andrés and Stelios Stavridis, 'Parliaments and Parliamentarians as International Actors' in Bob Reinalda (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Non-State Actors* (Ashgate 2011), 101-115, at 101.

including that of gender equality.⁷ This helps to situate the EP within this context and assess the EP's contribution to value-oriented diplomacy with a focus on the understudied dimension of gender equality.⁸ In this respect, the study draws on and develops the literature on the role of parliaments – and the EP in particular – in the broader field of human rights protection.⁹ In doing so, the study also identifies how general arguments about the EU and the EP as rule makers or rule takers apply to the international action of the EP in the field of gender equality.¹⁰

Third, the findings of the study furthermore enrich Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) by adding a parliamentary dimension in what is a mainly government-oriented body of literature.¹¹ Additionally, the study deepens the existing literature on gender equality promotion within parliaments in general,¹² and within the EP in particular.¹³ Since this body of literature predominantly focuses on internal affairs, among which prominently the role of women in politics and legislative processes, the present study adds a gender dimension that is oriented to external affairs.

What remains understudied in the existing literature, therefore, is the question of the nexus between parliamentary diplomacy itself (parliaments' external action) and the gender responsiveness of the institutional arrangements that enable parliamentary diplomacy (parliaments' internal action). The present study seeks to analyse this nexus by examining the EP's institutional framework and political practice of gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy.

1.3 Methodological approaches

The research methods used to collect data include documentary analysis of the EP's legal and policy framework through desk research, and qualitative and quantitative empirical analysis.

1.3.1 Documentary analysis through desk research

When it comes to the EP's institutional framework, analysis focused on legal documents, policy instruments and action plans which form part of the EP's regime of parliamentary diplomacy, above all the rules that govern the composition, activities and institutional relationships of delegations. These are contained primarily in: the RoP of the EP; the Conference of Presidents' decisions on the implementing provisions on the DEG activities and on delegations and missions abroad; and the EP Bureau's Roadmap for the implementation of the gender action plan adopted in April 2021.¹⁴ As regards political practice,

⁷ Šimáková, Michaela Anna. 'The EU's External Engagement in the Promotion of Gender Equality', in Chad Damro et al (eds), *The European Union's Evolving External Engagement: Towards New Sectoral Diplomacies?* (Routledge 2018), Ch. 4; Feliu, L. and Serra, F. 'The European Union as a "normative power" and the normative voice of the European Parliament', in Stavridis, S. and Irrera, D. (eds), *The European Parliament and Its International Relations* (Routledge 2015), at 17-34.

⁸ Jančić, D. (2016) 'World Diplomacy of the European Parliament', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, Vol. 11, Nos 2&3, 121-143, at 131.

⁹ Hunt, M., Hooper, H., and Yowell, P. (eds). *Parliaments and Human Rights: Redressing the Democratic Deficit* (Hart Publishing 2015); Lyer, K. R. (2019). 'Parliaments as Human Rights Actors: The Potential for International Principles on Parliamentary Human Rights Committees', *Nordic Journal of Human Rights*, 37:3, 195-215.

¹⁰ Ripoll Servent, A. and MacKenzie, A. (2012) 'The European Parliament as a "Norm Taker"? EU-US Relations after the SWIFT Agreement', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 71-86.

¹¹ Aggestam, K. and Rosamond, A.B. (2019). 'Feminist Foreign Policy 3.0: Advancing Ethics and Gender Equality in Global Politics', *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 37-48.

¹² United Nations Development Programme (2016). 'Strategies and Good Practices in promoting Gender Equality Outcomes in Parliaments'.

¹³ Ahrens, P. and Agustín, L. R., 'European Parliament', in Abels, G., Krizsán, A., MacRae, H., and Van der Vleuten, A. (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and EU Politics* (Routledge 2021), Ch. 9; Kantola, J. and Agustín, L.R. (2019) 'Gendering the Representative Work of the European Parliament: A Political Analysis of Women MEP's Perceptions of Gender Equality in Party Groups', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 4, 768-786; Ahrens, P. (2016). 'The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in the European Parliament: Taking Advantage of Institutional Power Play', *Parliamentary Affairs* 69(4), 778-793.

¹⁴ Although this is not a publicly available document, its adoption was publicly announced. See: Press release, 'Gender Equality: Parliament Strives to be Frontrunner among EU Institutions', 30 April 2021, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210430IPR03214/gender-equality-parliament-strives-to-be-frontrunner-among-eu-institutions>, accessed on 25 September 2021.

documentary analysis concentrated on the instruments of pronouncement by the relevant committees and subcommittees (FEMM, AFET, SEDE, DROI, DEVE and INTA), the DEG, and a selection of delegations for relations with partner countries or regions (Saudi Arabia, Serbia and EuroLat). Depending on their availability on the EP's websites and in the Public Register of Documents of the EP, these instruments included: resolutions and recommendations which were adopted by the plenary; agendas/programmes and, where available, minutes of public events organised by committees, subcommittees, the DEG and delegations (such as hearings, debates, workshops, seminars, conferences and study visits); minutes and/or agendas of meetings; mission reports; activity reports of committees and subcommittees; annual reports of the DEG; and other relevant documents.

Two caveats are in order. First, plenary resolutions can be initiated by committees and subcommittees on the basis of reports and opinions, but they can also be prepared by EP political groups (e.g. urgency resolutions). Second, many committees' and subcommittees' mission reports are not publicly available partly for security and confidentiality reasons, while their activity reports, which cover the duration of an entire legislature, may not always make the gender-oriented work visible. These limitations are reflected in the conclusions of the study.

1.3.2 Qualitative analysis

Information thus gathered was complemented by that collected through 28 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from EU institutions, international organisations and CSOs.¹⁵ Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two pools of interviewees.

The first pool (internal EP perspective) consisted of political and administrative representatives of different EP bodies such as MEPs,¹⁶ MEPs' assistants, advisors of EP political groups, standing rapporteurs, members of the EP's DG EXPO and representatives of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The objective of these interviews was to gain an in-depth first-hand insight into the current practices of gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy beyond those gained through documentary analysis. This enabled us to learn about the personal approaches and experiences of those conducting or facilitating parliamentary diplomatic activities on gender issues. The insights gained concern not only the interviewees' views about the existing institutional framework for parliamentary diplomacy, but also information about their participation in the work of delegations and interparliamentary engagements with the EP's counterparts abroad. In relation to the latter, the documentary analysis of the case studies was complemented by targeted interviews on the practices of EP delegations that are responsible for relations with Saudi Arabia, Serbia and EuroLat. These case studies were selected in order to have an optimal representative sample given the scope and time frame of the study. The considerations taken into account when making the case study selection were to:

- have a geographical coverage of different regions (non-EU Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Latin America);
- to encompass countries with varying gender equality ranking according to the Global Gender Gap Report for 2021 (with Serbia scoring highest, Saudi Arabia lowest, and Latin American countries occupying the middle ground);
- to include countries or regions where our preliminary analysis indicated differing degrees of reference to gender equality or women's rights in delegation meetings (with high levels of reference detected in the

¹⁵ Where interviews with MEPs were held with an active or passive presence of their assistants, this was still counted as one interview.

¹⁶ The selection of interviewees among MEPs was guided by the relevance of MEPs' roles to our case studies and priority was given to those MEPs who combined several such roles (e.g. membership of an externally-focused committee, membership of a delegation for relations with a case study country or region, and, where relevant, the possession of other gender-related roles within the EP, such as membership of GMN).

EP Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (DLAT), medium level in the Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula (DARP), and low in the Delegation to EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (D-RS)); and

- to cover countries/regions where different types of DEG activities have been relevant (e.g. the Sakharov Prize, Jean Monnet dialogues, the Simone Veil programme).

Therefore, the case studies primarily focus on the gender equality promotion activities of inter-parliamentary delegations. Yet the relevant work of the committees, subcommittees and the DEG is also presented in order to show the extent to which EP bodies work in a complementary manner and in line with the criterion of joint venture.

The second pool (external perspective) consisted of stakeholders external to the EP who work in the field of gender-responsive parliaments and gender mainstreaming in foreign policy. To identify existing international benchmarks on gender equality in parliaments and international benchmarks on gender mainstreaming in foreign policy, interviews were conducted with representatives of: *national parliaments* outside the EU (Canada, North Macedonia), *governments* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden), *experts* (Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance), representatives of *international parliamentary institutions* (Interparliamentary Union, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Commonwealth Parliamentary Organisation), as well as *EU bodies and international institutions* working in the field of gender equality and parliaments (European Institute of Gender Equality, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)).

1.3.3 Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis has three components:

- online survey of the political and administrative members of EP delegations;
- statistical analysis of the minutes of EP delegation meetings and interparliamentary meetings covered by the case studies in the period 2014-2020;
- analysis of the dataset on the participation of members in the ordinary and inter-parliamentary meetings of EP delegations and committees/subcommittees in the period 2014-2020.

All three components aim to further enrich the data collection process and enable us to verify our insights, while widening the circle of EP members whose feedback informed the study. The specific detail of the quantitative analysis is presented in Section 5 of the study devoted to 'Assessment and bottlenecks'.

1.4 Definitions of concepts used

1.4.1 Parliamentary diplomacy

While it is possible to understand parliamentary diplomacy as being restricted to its narrow sense of diplomatic relations developed by parliaments in parallel to those conducted by executive institutions, this study adopts a wide definition of parliamentary diplomacy. This corresponds to the three theoretical aspects of parliamentary diplomacy presented in subsection 1.2 above.¹⁷ A wide definition is also favoured

¹⁷ The three dimensions are covered by different sections of the study, but predominantly by Section 4 (Institutional framework) and Section 3 (Mechanisms and approaches to gender responsiveness in parliaments). The first dimension, which concerns parliamentary scrutiny of foreign affairs and which is usually not considered to be parliamentary diplomacy as such, is covered in Section 4 through an analysis of the manner in which EP committees, subcommittees and, to a smaller extent, delegations scrutinise the gender dimension of EU external relations. The second dimension, consisting of parallel diplomatic relations

by parliamentary practitioners who have been active in parliamentary diplomacy. A former Speaker of the Dutch House of Representatives (*Tweede Kamer*), *Frans Weisglas*, advocates understanding parliamentary diplomacy as capturing ‘the full range of international activities undertaken by parliamentarians’ with a view to improving inter-state understanding, enhancing representation and democratic control over the national government and increasing the legitimacy of intergovernmental organisations.¹⁸ The choice in favour of a wider approach has been made because the internal and external aspects of the EP’s diplomacy work on gender equality promotion are mutually reinforcing, and form an inextricable part of the EP’s overall institutional effort to place gender on international parliamentary agendas.

1.4.2 Gender equality

This study takes into account the multifaceted nature of gender equality in both international and EU realms. For that reason, it espouses a substantive definition of gender equality which draws on the *policy objectives* (prohibition of discrimination/harassment, equal treatment/opportunities, fairness and rights creation/positive action) and *sectoral policy areas* (economic, social, political, etc.) which are central to the various existing attempts to unify or highlight the diverse components of the overarching value of gender equality.

Such an approach is adopted following a preliminary analysis of the pivotal international and EU primary sources, and is informed by scholarly views. Since the international sources are fully covered in Section 2, the sources presented below are those of the EU.

Gender equality is a core value of the EU and its founding treaties explicitly establish this.¹⁹ **Article 2 TEU** declares ‘equality between women and men’ a value common to the Member States. Article 3(3) TEU then obliges the Union to promote such equality. Importantly for parliamentary diplomacy, **Article 21(1) TEU** lists equality and the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms as principles which guide the Union’s action on the international scene and which it seeks to advance in the wider world. **Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)** establishes a duty for the EU to pursue gender equality by laying down that ‘[i]n all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women’. Article 10 TFEU similarly specifies that, among other grounds, the Union shall ‘combat discrimination based on sex’ and that it shall do so ‘[i]n defining and implementing its policies and activities’. Article 19 TFEU then enables action by the Council acting by unanimity and in accordance with a special legislative procedure, after obtaining the EP’s consent, to combat sex-based discrimination. Finally, one of the most famous gender equality provisions in EU law is Article 157 TFEU, which establishes the principle of ‘equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value’.

Having the same legal value as the founding treaties, **Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (CFR)** enshrines equality between women and men as a core value stipulating that: ‘equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay. The principle of equality shall not prevent the maintenance or adoption of measures providing for specific advantages

between parliaments, is covered by Section 4, by an examination of the bilateral interparliamentary meetings between EP delegations and their counterparts in partner countries/regions (the case studies of Saudi Arabia and Serbia and various examples outside these case studies). The third dimension is covered by Section 4 through an inquiry into the EP’s multilateral interparliamentary relations (the case study of EuroLat and other examples) as well as by Section 3 insofar as it concerns international parliamentary institutions.

¹⁸ Weisglas, F.W. and De Boer, G. (2007), ‘Parliamentary Diplomacy’, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 93-99, at 93.

¹⁹ See the evolution of this in: Abels, G., Krizsán, A., MacRae, H., and Van der Vleuten, A. (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and EU Politics* (Routledge 2021); Jacquot, S. *Transformations in EU Gender Equality: From Emergence to Dismantling* (Palgrave Macmillan 2015); Abels, G., and Mushaben, J. (eds), *Gendering the European Union: New Approaches to Old Democratic Deficits* (Palgrave Macmillan 2012).

in favour of the under-represented sex'.²⁰ Despite the significant amount of EU legislation in place in relation to gender equality, there is no single unified definition of gender equality at the EU level.²¹ In terms of the key sectoral policy areas, the **European Commission (EC)** holds that promoting gender equality means 'promoting equal economic independence for women and men, closing the gender pay gap, advancing gender balance in decision making, ending gender-based violence and promoting gender equality beyond the EU'.²² On a more operational level, the EC's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 places emphasis on three areas of action for the near future: freedom from violence and stereotypes, thriving in a gender-equal economy, and leadership at the level of companies, communities and countries.²³ It also seeks to address gender equality and women's empowerment across the world as a core objective of EU external action.²⁴ The latter goal is particularly thrashed out in the EU's Gender Action Plan III of November 2020, which aims to increase the effectiveness of EU gender equality engagement as 'a cross-cutting priority of EU external action in its policy and programming work'.²⁵ For its part, the **EIGE**, an autonomous body of the EU aimed at strengthening gender equality promotion, adopts the definition of gender equality provided by UN Women (see chapter 2).²⁶

These definitions identify equality, including gender equality, not only as an internal EU principle but also as one that should be promoted in EU external relations. This creates an expectation for EP parliamentary diplomacy to uphold this principle in interparliamentary relations and make it integral to all aspects of diplomatic activities, ranging from the gender-responsive operation of the EP's own bodies to mainstreaming gender equality in relations with EP's partners, stakeholders and local communities abroad.

1.4.3 Gender mainstreaming

Other than the definitions of gender mainstreaming in the international instruments surveyed in Chapter 2 of this study, it is instructive to review how this concept was defined by relevant European institutions.

The **Council of Europe (CoE)** defines gender mainstreaming as 'the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making'.²⁷

According to **EIGE**, gender mainstreaming is 'a means to achieve gender equality' and has been embraced as a strategy towards this end.²⁸

For its part, **EC** defined gender mainstreaming in 1996 as something that is 'not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality'. Furthermore, according to the EC

²⁰ Schiek, Dagmar. 'Article 23–Equality between Women and Men', in Steve Peers et al. (eds), *The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights: A Commentary* (Hart Publishing, 2nd ed., forthcoming in 2021).

²¹ Verloo, M. (ed). *Multiple Meanings of Gender Equality: A Critical Frame Analysis of Gender Policies in Europe* (Central European University Press) 2007.

²² See: European Commission, 'Gender Equality', available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality_en, accessed on 9 November 2021.

²³ European Commission (2020a), Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 'A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, COM (2020) 152 final, 5 March 2020.

²⁴ Ibid, p.17

²⁵ European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2020c), Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, 'EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III–An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EU External Action', JOIN (2020) 17 final, 25 November 2020, p.3

²⁶ See: EIGE. 'Gender equality', available at <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1168>, accessed on 9 November 2021.

²⁷ CoE. 'What is Gender Mainstreaming?' Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/what-is-gender-mainstreaming>

²⁸ EIGE. 'What is Gender Mainstreaming?' Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/what-is-gender-mainstreaming>

gender mainstreaming ‘is not just about women, but about ensuring that women's as well as men's experiences and concerns are built in to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policy, legislation and spending programmes, and that both individual rights and structural inequalities are addressed. It also entails looking at institutions and how they work, including gender representation within policy areas and decision-making structures’.²⁹

1.4.4 Feminist foreign policy

FFP is defined by the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) as ‘a political framework centred around the wellbeing of marginalised people and invokes processes of self-reflection regarding foreign policy’s hierarchical global systems’.³⁰ According to the CFFP, it constitutes an alternative to traditional foreign policy thinking focused on military force and domination, offering an intersectional rethinking of security from the point of view of the most vulnerable – women and other marginalised groups.

The **feminist approach** has been also used by the EP as a part of the wider “Foreign Affairs and International Security” framework. The resolution on Gender Equality in the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy³¹ calls to *integrate gender mainstreaming and an intersectional perspective into the EU’s foreign and security, enlargement, trade and development policy*, which reflects the principles of the FFP approach (for more detailed description of the FFP see 3.1). The EP briefing from March 2021 presents various examples of the implementation of the FFP agenda.³² The FFP will be analysed within the study as an approach constituting an important point of reference and source of inspiration for parliaments, interparliamentary institutions and all organisations aiming at promoting gender equality through external actions.

1.4.5 Gender transformative approach

The Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) is defined in GAP III as an ‘approach which aims to shift gender-power relations, for a positive change of the paradigm(s) that produce discriminations and inequalities’.³³ It aims ‘to reshape gender relations to be more gender equitable, largely through approaches that free both women and men from the impact of destructive gender and sexual norms’.³⁴

Gender transformative interventions aim to accomplish the following tasks:

1. Raise awareness about unhealthy gender norms;
2. Question the costs of adhering to these norms; and
3. Replace unhealthy, inequitable gender norms with redefined healthy ones.³⁵

To these ends, GAP III aims to ‘promote a transformative and intersectional approach, and will mainstream gender in all policies and actions. It aims to address structural causes of gender inequality and gender-based discrimination, including by actively engaging men and boys in challenging gender norms and stereotypes. Finally, to leave no one behind, the action plan seeks to tackle all intersecting dimensions of

²⁹ EPRS (2019). ‘Gender mainstreaming in the EU: State of play’. Plenary – January 2019.

³⁰ <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org>

³¹ EP, Resolution of 23 October 2020 on Gender Equality in EU’s foreign and security policy (2019/2167(INI)).

³² EPRS (2021). ‘Women in foreign affairs and international security: Still far from gender equality’ – March 2021.

³³ EC (2020). “EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III - An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external action”. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf

³⁴ Gupta, Geeta Rao (2000). “Gender, Sexuality, and HIV/AIDS: The What, the Why, and the How”. Washington, D.C. International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW).

³⁵ Roller et. al. (2014). “Gender Transformative Programming in Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health: Definitions, Strategies, and Resources”. Practice Matters: Act for Youth Centre of Excellence, Cornell University.

discrimination, paying specific attention for example to women with disabilities, migrant women, and discrimination based on age or sexual orientation’.³⁶

The GTA can be applied to all intervention and policy areas, by tackling the root causes of gender inequality and reshaping unequal power relations.³⁷ An expert from the Swedish Government interviewed for the purposes of this study as well as academic sources argue that applying the Gender Transformative Approach to external relations provides ground for the implementation of feminist foreign policy. “[...]in the Swedish case, the impetus is to transform patriarchal structures of gender inequality especially in conflict-affected countries”.³⁸ However, other countries (see Annex 1) might have less transformative focus in terms of mainstreaming gender in the foreign relations. They often put women in the centre of their actions by providing assistance and empowering them without challenging the gender norms within the whole society.

The EU aims at pursuing the path of transformative foreign policy and address the cause of gender inequalities, which is reflected in the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III.³⁹

Key elements of a GTA in EU external action:⁴⁰

- understanding the roots of gender inequalities;
- providing access to means and resources, which will change these norms through actively engaging the whole society (including boys and men), by forging strong partnerships and dialogue with local actors, civil society and local communities, and supporting women’s organisations;
- addressing intersectionality of gender with other forms of discrimination (e.g. indigenous peoples and persons belonging to racial/ethnic/religious minorities, forcibly displaced, migrants, economically and socially deprived women, those living in rural and coastal areas, LGBTQ people);
- following an approach based on human rights - helping every human being to exercise their human rights, participate in decisions concerning them and seek redress when their rights are violated;
- designing actions for gender equality based on a regional gender analysis and contextualising.

1.5 Description of structure

The study is divided into seven sections.

After this introductory section (**Section 1**), an overview is provided of the core international framework on gender equality and gender mainstreaming as it flows from various international conventions, treaties, declarations and action plans adopted at global and regional levels (**Section 2**).

This is followed by an analysis of the different approaches to FFP and gender sensitivity in the internal structure and processes of parliaments, as well as good practices of gender promotion through parliamentary diplomacy from selected parliaments and interparliamentary institutions. This section also develops criteria of effectiveness in gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy (**Section 3**).

³⁶ EC (2020). “EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III - An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external action”. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf

³⁷ Gupta, Geeta Rao (2000). “Gender, Sexuality, and HIV/AIDS: The What, the Why, and the How”. Washington, D.C. International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW).

³⁸ Karin Aggestam, Jacqui True, Gendering Foreign Policy: A Comparative Framework for Analysis, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Volume 16, Issue 2, April 2020, Pages 143–162. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orz026>

³⁹ EC (2020). “EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III - An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external action”. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf

⁴⁰Ibid.

The examination then moves to the EP's institutional framework of gender equality promotion, which encompasses an inquiry into the legal and policy instruments and into the political practice, drawn from the gender-oriented outputs of the committees and subcommittees, the DEG and delegations (**Section 4**).

The EP's institutional framework and political practice are then assessed in order to identify good practices and bottlenecks that hamper the effectiveness of the EP's gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy (**Section 5**).

Subsequently, we look again at the practices of other parliaments and parliamentary institutions for promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy (mapped in Section 3) in order to draw lessons and identify potential new tools which could be applicable to the EP (**Section 6**).

The study ends with a summary of the conclusions and a set of policy recommendations that present specific tools and activities that can be utilised in order to implement the objectives of the EP's October 2020 Resolution on Gender Equality in EU's Foreign and Security Policy (**Section 7**).

2 International framework of gender equality

Gender equality has been addressed in a number of international documents at both global and regional levels. In terms of their legal nature, they range from binding international treaties and conventions to non-binding but politically significant soft law instruments taking the form of declarations or action plans. The following is an overview of the key contents and achievements of this international framework.

2.1 Global instruments

The sections below focus on gender equality action at a general level as well as at the more specific level of a given policy. The latter are presented from the perspectives of gender in security, trade and environmental protection policies.

2.1.1 General global instruments

Gender equality was incorporated into international law through the adoption of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** by the UN General Assembly on 10 November 1948. While this is not a legally binding document, many of its provisions have become a part of customary international law, which is legally binding on all states as a source of international law.⁴¹ Although the Declaration does not mention the term 'gender', the framers of the Declaration recognised gender equality as 'essential'.⁴² Article 2 UDHR proclaims that everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration "without distinction of any kind", including on the basis of sex. The Declaration also mentions 'women' twice. First, its Preamble refers to the UN Charter's reaffirmation of "the equal rights of men and women". Second, Article 16 UDHR lays down that women of adult age, on the one hand, have the right to marry and found a family without any limitation due to race, nationality and religion; and that they, on the other hand, enjoy equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. Apart from these provisions, one of the main achievements of the Declaration is the use of gender-neutral language.⁴³ This Declaration has therefore sown the seed of gender equality's promotion worldwide and laid the ground on which numerous treaties on gender equality and women's rights were subsequently adopted. For the EU, the UDHR represents a very important source of inspiration. Although the EU founding treaties do not mention it explicitly, the Declaration is referred to not only in EU legislation and policy documents, but, importantly, in the EU's trade and/or framework agreements, thereby playing 'an important part in guiding EU external policies'.⁴⁴

In the 1960s, two documents joined the UDHR to form what it informally called the International Bill of Human Rights. These are the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)** and the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)**, both adopted by the UN

⁴¹ Hannum, Hurst. 'The Status of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in National and International Law', (1995/1996) 25(1&2) *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* 287-398, at 289. See also Article 38(1) of the Statute of the International Court of Justice, which recognises 'international custom, as evidence of a general practice accepted as law' as one of the four sources of international law.

⁴² Global Citizenship Commission (led by former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown), *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the 21st Century: A Living Document in a Changing World* (New York University's Global Institute for Advanced Study and Open Book Publishers, 2016), at 40.

⁴³ See the process that fed into this accomplishment in: Adami, Rebecca. *Women and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Routledge 2020). The Declaration does use some male-oriented wording—such as the reference to 'brotherhood' in Article 1 and the use of male pronouns in Articles 23 and 25 (e.g. 'himself' and 'his family')—although some view these references as a 'function of the time' rather than as a manifestation of discrimination. *Ibid.*, at 40.

⁴⁴ EPRS, 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its Relevance for the European Union' (authored by Ionel Zamfir), doc. no. PE 628.295, November 2018.

General Assembly on 16 December 1966 as multilateral treaties, with both entering into force in 1976.⁴⁵ While neither of them mentions gender, they both seek to ensure “the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all” the rights set forth in either treaty. Gender equality and non-discrimination are to be achieved through the adoption of national legislation and by the provision of an effective remedy for all violations of Covenant rights (Article 2 of both ICCPR and ICESCR).⁴⁶ In the case of the ICCPR, the fulfilment of these guarantees is monitored by the Human Rights Committee, an 18-strong independent expert body established by the Covenant as the supervising body, which can adopt general comments aimed at improving the Covenant’s implementation. One such general comment notes that unequal enjoyment of rights by women is “deeply embedded in tradition, history and culture, including religious attitudes” and the states’ parties should ensure that such attitudes should not be used to justify different gender inequalities.⁴⁷ The implementation of the ICESCR is monitored by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

During the ensuing UN Decade for Women (1976-1985), the UN General Assembly adopted a document often referred to as the International Bill of Rights for Women. On 18 December 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the **United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**,⁴⁸ which entered into force on 3 September 1981.⁴⁹ Its Preamble warns that “extensive discrimination against women” continues to exist and that such discrimination “violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, hampers the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity”. Article 1 CEDAW contains a wide definition of discrimination against women as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field”. Calling on the states’ parties to take constitutional, legislative, judicial and administrative measures to prevent such discrimination, the Convention furthermore requires that states “modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women” and “ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children” (Article 5). This particular provision has been viewed as ‘revolutionary’ for adopting a holistic approach to women’s rights that “addresses the root causes of discrimination against women”.⁵⁰ As such, CEDAW not only ensures a formal vindication of women’s legal rights, but it seeks to transform the underlying societal and public

⁴⁵ The ICCPR is accompanied by the First Optional Protocol (adopted on 16 December 1966 and entered into force on 23 March 1976), which establishes an individual communications procedure, and by the Second Optional Protocol (adopted on 15 December 1989 and entered into force on 11 July 1991), which aims to abolish the death penalty. The ICESCR is also accompanied by an Optional Protocol (10 December 2008 and entered into force on 5 May 2013), which creates individual communications and inquiry procedures.

⁴⁶ Kaye, David. ‘State Execution of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights’, (2013) 3(1) *UC Irvine Law Review* 95-126, at 100.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 28: Article 3 (The equality of rights between men and women), 29 March 2000, point 5.

⁴⁸ See a general overview of this Convention in: Mullins, Lauren Bock. ‘CEDAW: The Challenges of Enshrining Women’s Equality in International Law’, (2018) 20(3) *Public Integrity* 257-272.

⁴⁹ The CEDAW is accompanied by an Optional Protocol (adopted on 6 October 1999 and entered into force on 22 December 2000), which establishes individual complaints and inquiry procedures.

⁵⁰ Holtmaat, Rikki. ‘The CEDAW: A Holistic Approach to Women’s Equality and Freedom’, in Anne Hellum (ed.), *Women’s Human Rights: CEDAW in International, Regional and National Law* (Cambridge University Press 2013) 95-123, at 122.

sphere conditions in which such rights can be realised.⁵¹ Other duties of state parties concern women's rights in the areas of political and public life, education, employment, health care, and other areas. The implementation of CEDAW is monitored by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, currently consisting of 23 independent experts on women's rights.

When it comes to the CEDAW's status—other than Somalia, Sudan, Iran, Tonga, Niue and Holy See as the six non-signatory states – the United States and Palau are the only two countries in the world that have signed but not ratified this Convention.⁵² The Convention's ratification is also accompanied by numerous reservations and declarations.⁵³ Of relevance to gender equality are reservations targeting gender-oriented Convention provisions (e.g. Article 16 on the equality of women and men in marriage and family relations) and those seeking exemptions of a more general nature (e.g. exemption from anything in the Convention that is incompatible with Islamic Sharia; and exemptions from the general non-discrimination clause laid down in Article 2 which the CEDAW Committee outlawed as 'impermissible').⁵⁴ Curiously, a number of countries wholly or partly in Europe which the literature has variously criticised for democratic backsliding—such as Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Belarus and Russia—currently have no reservations or declarations. The CEDAW's reservations regime and its reporting process have been viewed as undercutting its effectiveness and jeopardising the Convention's integrity.⁵⁵

Regarding CEDAW's practical effects, its advantage is that it goes beyond demanding formal legal change and "mandates change in the public sphere, the private sphere, and the minds of individuals".⁵⁶ Research has found that the Convention's impacts have been most significant with respect to women's political rights, attenuated with respect to social rights, and absent with respect to economic rights.⁵⁷

Concerning the EU's relationship with CEDAW, although the EU is not a signatory, the fact that its member states are states parties enables this Convention to serve as an important source of inspiration for EU gender equality law.⁵⁸ In addition to the Convention's wider scope than EU gender equality directives, one crucial aspect where the Convention is more advantageous than EU law is its goal of improving substantive *de facto* equality of women with men.⁵⁹

With the development of the feminist movement in the 1970s, the UN organised four important global women's conferences. After the first one in Mexico in 1975 and the second one in Copenhagen in 1980, the **Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985** was important because, although it did not mention gender mainstreaming as such, it paved the way for its conceptualisation. It did so by highlighting the importance of bringing a number of issues into the 'mainstream' of society, politics and development (e.g. the sharing of domestic responsibilities and inclusion in decision-making processes).⁶⁰

⁵¹ Roth, Brad R. 'The CEDAW as a Collective Approach to Women's Rights', (2002) 24(1) *Michigan Journal of International Law* 187-226, at 192.

⁵² Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>, accessed on 4 July 2021.

⁵³ Keller, Linda M. 'The Impact of States Parties' Reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women', (2014) *Michigan State Law Review* 309-326.

⁵⁴ CEDAW Committee, 'General Recommendation No. 28 on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women', 16 December 2010, point 41.

⁵⁵ Riddle, Jennifer. 'Making CEDAW Universal: Critique of CEDAW's Reservation Regime under Article 28 and the Effectiveness of the Reporting Process', (2002) 34(3) *George Washington International Law Review* 605-638, at 636.

⁵⁶ Englehart, Neil A. and Melissa K. Miller, 'The CEDAW Effect: International Law's Impact on Women's Rights', (2014) 13(1) *Journal of Human Rights* 22-47, at 23.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, at 38.

⁵⁸ Holtmaat, Rikki and Christa Tobler, 'CEDAW and the European Union's Policy in the Field of Combating Gender Discrimination', (2005) 12(4) *Maastricht Journal of European and Comparative Law* 399-425.

⁵⁹ EP, Note 'How Could the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Be Implemented in the EU Legal Framework?' (authored by Violeta Neubauer), 2011, at 16.

⁶⁰ Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, 1986, paragraphs 59, 111 and 280.

It was on this basis that the **Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995** introduced the concept of gender mainstreaming as such. The **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPA)**, adopted at this conference, underlined the centrality of ‘mainstreaming a gender perspective’ in all areas of government action and in all policies and programmes.⁶¹ The monitoring and reviewing of the progress in achieving the objectives of the BDPA was entrusted in 1996 to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council established in 1946. Confirming earlier academic concerns about inconsistent implementation of gender mainstreaming despite widespread adoption of gender mainstreaming policies,⁶² this Commission noted on the occasion of 25 years of the BDPA adoption that “progress has not been fast or deep enough, that in some areas progress has been uneven, that major gaps remain and that obstacles, including structural barriers, discriminatory practices and the feminization of poverty, persist” and that “no country has fully achieved gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls [...]”.⁶³ The policy outcomes of the Beijing Conference therefore retain full relevance today.⁶⁴

UN Millennium Development Goals, adopted in 2000, envisage eight international development goals to be achieved by 2015. Goal 3 was to “promote gender equality and empower women”, particularly with respect to primary, secondary and tertiary education, wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, and proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. These were superseded by the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015 and which established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁶⁵ Goal 5 is explicitly devoted to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Its importance has recently been emphasised by the uneven impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women, the increased risk of violence against women and girls during lockdowns, the need for fairer representation of women in pandemic-related leadership roles (only 25 % in national parliaments), the uneven distribution of roles on the front lines of fighting the pandemic (some 70 % being occupied by women), and the assumption of additional household burdens by women during the pandemic.⁶⁶ That said, the improvement of the position of women is in various ways further addressed by a number of other SDGs. Existing research confirms the importance of a holistic approach to gender equality promotion via SDGs that duly takes into account the socio-cultural context of any given country and ensures the active inclusion of women’s organisations by governmental actors.⁶⁷ Despite significant progress, formal instruments have proven to be insufficient, because even Nordic countries, which are commonly lauded as good achievers on gender equality, have been experiencing “stubbornly high gender wage gaps and a continued lack of women in senior management positions”.⁶⁸

The UN General Assembly decided to establish the **UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)** on 2 July 2010,⁶⁹ thereby merging into a single body four agencies and offices: the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the

⁶¹ See this wording being used in paragraphs 79, 123, 141, 187, 189, 202, 252, 273, 292 and 320 thereof.

⁶² Moser, Caroline and Annalise Moser, ‘Gender Mainstreaming Since Beijing: A Review of Success and Limitations in International Institutions’, (2005) 13(2) *Gender & Development* 11-22.

⁶³ CSW, Political Declaration on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, 9 March 2020, point 6.

⁶⁴ Esquivel, Valeria and Corina Rodríguez Enríquez, ‘The Beijing Platform for Action Charted a Future We Still Need to Bring up: Building Feminist Economic Policy’, (2020) 28 *Gender & Development* 281-298.

⁶⁵ See generally essays in: Leach, Melissa (ed.), *Gender Equality and Sustainable Development* (Routledge 2016); Esquivel, Valeria and Caroline Sweetman (eds), Special Issue ‘Sustainable Development Goals’, (2016) 24(1) *Gender & Development*.

⁶⁶ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ‘Goal 5’, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>, accessed on 6 July 2021.

⁶⁷ See in this respect: Kim, Eun Mee. ‘Gender and the Sustainable Development Goals’, (2017) 17(2) *Global Social Policy* 239-244; Dhar, Suneeta. ‘Gender and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)’, (2018) 25(1) *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 47-78.

⁶⁸ Queisser, Monika. ‘Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals’, in Patrick Love (ed.) *Debate the Issues: New Approaches to Economic Challenges* (OECD 2016) 87-90, at 88.

⁶⁹ Resolution 64/289 of 2 July 2010.

Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women. UN Women have provided helpful definitions, such as on gender equality:

“equality between women and men refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development”.⁷⁰

Gender mainstreaming is defined as a:

“globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities – policy development, research, advocacy/ dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects”.⁷¹

UN Women’s key roles are to: support UN intergovernmental bodies (primarily the CSW); assist UN member states in implementing gender equality standards (above all the CEDAW, the BDPA and the SDGs) through technical and financial support and cooperation with civil society; and promote accountability through the monitoring of progress. UN Women is particularly effective in supporting greater women’s leadership and representation in parliaments and local governments, contributing to the passage of laws and policies (e.g. in El Salvador, Mexico and Moldova) that mandate the incorporation of gender-specific commitments across governance processes.⁷²

The international instruments and bodies surveyed above are important for EP parliamentary diplomacy because they carry legal and political weight in international relations and, as such, can be utilised by EP bodies as leverage in their diplomatic activities. EP resolutions regularly rely on international documents to demonstrate wide global consensus on the significance of gender equality and EP committees, subcommittees and delegations can and do invoke them in missions abroad. These instruments underline the necessity for parliamentary diplomacy to be gender-sensitive not only by setting formal legal and political aims, but also by endeavouring to eliminate the socio-cultural root causes of all forms of discrimination of women. To achieve this, as UN Women stresses, the mobilisation of male MEPs in gender mainstreaming in EP external relations is critical.

2.1.2 Policy-specific global instruments

2.1.2.1 Women, Peace and Security

In this policy field, **UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) of 31 October 2000**, along with its nine follow-up resolutions,⁷³ is the key global instrument for women’s empowerment and protection in the context of armed conflict, such as war, terrorism, or violent extremism. Together, these resolutions form the core of the WPS agenda.

⁷⁰ UN Women, ‘Concepts and Definitions’, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>, accessed on 6 July 2021.

⁷¹ UN Women, ‘Gender Mainstreaming’, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/gendermainstreaming.htm>, accessed on 6 July 2021.

⁷² UN Women, ‘Parliaments and Local Governance’, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/parliaments-and-local-governance>, accessed on 6 July 2021.

⁷³ Resolutions 1820 (19 June 2008); 1888 (30 September 2009); 1889 (5 October 2009); 1960 (16 December 2010); 2106 (24 June 2013); 2122 (18 October 2013); 2242 (13 October 2015); 2467 (23 April 2019); and 2493 (29 October 2019).

Among other things, Resolution 1325 demands: an increased representation of women in conflict-related decision-making processes at national, regional and international levels; the appointment of more women as special representatives and envoys; the inclusion of a gender perspective in peace operations, agreements and missions; better training on the specific needs of women and their involvement in peace operations; the need to respect relevant international conventions; the need to prevent gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict; and the need to improve prosecution for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The UN Secretary General's 2020 report on WPS demonstrates several important trends.⁷⁴ On the one hand, we witness incremental improvements: in the number of peace agreements with gender equality provisions (from 14 to 22 % between 1995 and 2019); in the share of military and police personnel (from 3 % and 10 % respectively in 2015 to 5.4 % and 15.1 % in 2020); in the share of women parliamentarians in countries with legislated quotas (23 %) compared to those without such quotas (10.8 %); in the number of UN member states that have implemented the WPS agenda into national action plans (85 member states compared to 53 in 2015 and 19 in 2010); in the percentage of Security Council resolutions with explicit references to WPS issues (a rise from 15 % in the first five years of the 1325 Resolution to approximately 70 % in 2017-2019); and in the increase of gender-focused bilateral aid committed to conflict-affected countries and in overall military spending. On the other hand, as shown by the data for the period between 1992 and 2019, women still very rarely act as negotiators (13 %), mediators (6 %) and signatories (6 %) in the world's major peace processes. Between 2015 and 2019, the UN verified 102 killings of women human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists in 26 conflict-affected countries. Furthermore, only 30 % of the said increased military expenditure is allocated to disarmament, while bilateral aid to women's organisations has stagnated. One could therefore conclude that women peacebuilders are in equal measure "the heart and soul of the 1325 agenda, and [...] a missing piece of contemporary peacemaking".⁷⁵

The global WPS agenda is advanced through a **UN-EU Strategic Partnership on Peacekeeping and Crisis Management**. This partnership began by means of two joint declarations, adopted in 2003 and 2007, but was only formalised as a strategic partnership in March 2015 and reinforced in July 2018 by means of two EEAS documents.⁷⁶ While neither document mentions gender or women's rights, the latest progress reports on UN-EU priorities show that gender and women's participation in peace operations are indeed part of the different action plans.⁷⁷

In the EU, the inclusion of women in international peace and security agendas was facilitated by the decision taken in 2015 by the then EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, to create a new post – the EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender – whose first and only holder thus far has been Ms Mara Marinaki. The EU actively engages with the WPS agenda through a strategic approach adopted in November 2018,⁷⁸ and an action plan launched in July 2019.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Women, Peace and Security, doc. no. S/2020/946, 25 September 2020, at 3-4.

⁷⁵ Anderlini, Sanam Naraghi. 'Recognizing Women Peacebuilders: Critical Actors in Effective Peacemaking', *Report for the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security*, October 2020, at 24.

⁷⁶ EEAS, 'Strengthening the UN-EU Strategic Partnership on Peacekeeping and Crisis Management: Priorities 2015-2018', doc. no. EEAS 458/15 of 23 March 2015; European External Action Service, 'Reinforcing the UN-EU Strategic Partnership on Peace Operations and Crisis Management: Priorities 2019-2021', doc. no. EEAS(2018) 781 of 9 July 2018.

⁷⁷ EEAS, 'First Progress Report-Implementation of the 2019-2021 EU-UN priorities on peace operations and crisis management', doc. no. EEAS(2019)542 of 15 May 2019; EEAS, 'Second Progress Report on the 2019-2021 EU-UN priorities on peace operations and crisis management', doc. no. EEAS(2019)1335 of 18 December 2019.

⁷⁸ Council of the EU, Council Conclusions, Annex 'EEAS - EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security 2018', doc. no. 15086/18, 10 December 2018, at 6.

⁷⁹ Council of the EU, 'EEAS - EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) 2019-2024', doc. no. 11031/19 and EEAS(2019)747, 5 July 2019.

2.1.2.2 Trade

Concerning the link between international trade and gender equality,⁸⁰ the potential advantages of trade liberalisation, include the facts that the stimulation of competition makes discrimination more costly, and that trade-induced technological advancement can make labour less physically intensive, thus increasing opportunities for women.⁸¹ The disadvantages, conversely, are that trade liberalisation can lead to worsening working conditions for women despite more jobs, and that lower tariffs can lead to lower social spending that would otherwise benefit women. In this respect, the **Joint Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment**, which was signed by 118 members and observers of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at the Ministerial Conference held in Buenos Aires in December 2017, is significant in two salient ways. First, it represents a broad global acknowledgment of the importance of inclusive trade policies and of incorporating a gender perspective in promoting economic growth, achieving sustainable socio-economic development and contributing to women’s economic empowerment. Second, it commits the signatories to collaboration in ensuring that trade and development policies are more gender-responsive and to the organisation of a series of thematic seminars. This is to be accomplished above all through wide-ranging exchange of gender-focused information on: (a) the experiences with policies and programmes to encourage women’s participation in national and international economies; (b) best practice for conducting gender-based analysis and monitoring of trade policies; and (c) methods and procedures for collecting gender-disaggregated data.

The 2020 report on this Declaration identifies the EU’s approach to trade agreements as good practice. To exemplify such good practice, the report states that “the gender component of the sustainability impact assessment of the EU–Australia FTA is one of the first examples of the analysis extending beyond women as employees to cover women as workers, entrepreneurs, traders and consumers”.⁸² Yet recent scholarship stresses that the EU’s approach still tends to view women predominantly as economic actors, and that addressing this issue would help to achieve a more compelling transformation in the Union’s foreign trade agenda.⁸³

2.1.2.3 Environment

As the principal global instrument on climate change, the **Paris Agreement** was adopted on 12 December 2015 at the 21st session of the Conference of Parties (COP21) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and entered into force on 4 November 2016. This is a legally binding international treaty, with “many non-binding elements”.⁸⁴

The Paris Agreement addresses gender in two main ways.

⁸⁰ See further: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank and the World Trade Organization, *Women and Trade: The Role of Trade In Promoting Gender Equality* (IBRD & WTO 2020); Young, Zoe Pflaeger. ‘The Gender Dynamics of Trade’, in Juanita Elias and Adrienne Roberts (eds), *Handbook on the International Political Economy of Gender* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2018) 456–469; McGill, Eugenia. ‘Trade and Gender’, in Macrory, Patrick F.J. et al. (eds) *The World Trade Organization: Legal, Economic and Political Analysis* (Springer 2005), 2282–2330; Tran-Nguyen, Anh-Nga and Americo Beviglia Zampetti, *Trade and Gender: Opportunities and Challenges for Developing Countries* (UNCTAD 2004).

⁸¹ Pieters, Janneke. ‘Trade Liberalization and Gender Inequality: Can Free-Trade Policies Help to Reduce Gender Inequalities in Employment and Wages?’, (2018) *IZA World of Labor* 1–11, available at <https://wol.iza.org/articles/trade-liberalization-and-gender-inequality/long>.

⁸² International Trade Centre, *Delivering on the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment* (ITCE Geneva 2020), at 31.

⁸³ García, Maria. ‘Trade Policy’, in Gabriele Abels et al. (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and EU Politics* (Routledge 2021) 278–289.

⁸⁴ Bodansky, Daniel. ‘The Paris Climate Change Agreement: A New Hope?’, (2016) 110(2) *American Journal of International Law* 288–319, at 290.

The first is a general proclamation in the Preamble that when taking action to address climate change, the Parties should “respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on [...] gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity”.

The second refers to substantive requirements within: (a) the process of Parties’ adaptation to the adverse impacts of climate change and their action to achieve climate resilience (Article 7(5)); and (b) the process of climate capacity-building in the least developed developing countries (Article 11(2)). Both follow a similar regulatory pattern, requiring action to be not only country-driven, participatory and mindful of national, subnational and local concerns, but also “gender-responsive”.

Apart from this, gender and differential impact on women, otherwise well-documented by scholars,⁸⁵ are not addressed in the context of nationally determined contributions (Article 4). This is a significant gap because, even though non-binding, these contributions form the core tool for implementing the objectives of the Agreement. Gender-sensitive action on climate change therefore largely hinges on the willingness of national authorities. This is to some extent attributable to insufficient representation of women in the negotiations on the Agreement. To wit, although the participation of women as delegates at COPs has increased from 7 % to 35 % at COP21, literature shows that “very few of the women in national delegations are being awarded leadership positions”, such that “only 10 per cent of Delegation Heads were women”.⁸⁶

With 195 original signatories and 191 Parties at the time of writing this study, only Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Turkey and Yemen have not ratified this Agreement. Notably, following the United States’ withdrawal under the Trump Administration,⁸⁷ the Biden Administration re-joined the Agreement on 20 January 2021. The EU and all of its member states are parties to the Agreement. The Paris Agreement explicitly prohibits reservations (Article 27).

Advancement of the gender dimension of climate change has also taken place alongside the Paris Agreement.⁸⁸ Activities that began in 2014 within the framework of the so-called Lima Work Programme on Gender resulted, among other things, in the adoption in 2017 of a Gender Action Plan with five priority areas.⁸⁹ Following a review, the COP25 held in Madrid from 2-15 December 2019 decided to encourage, but not compel, the appointment of national gender focal points for climate negotiations, implementation and monitoring.⁹⁰

With respect to parliamentary diplomacy, the sector-specific commitments to gender equality presented above serve to remind MEPs and staff that differential policy impacts on women should be at the forefront not only of their scrutiny work within the EP, but also of their dialogues with representatives from partner countries and regions. Developing a greater awareness that gender equality is integral to all EU external policies can contribute to more effective gender mainstreaming in parliamentary diplomatic contexts.

⁸⁵ Nagel, Joane. *Gender and Climate Change: Impacts, Science, Policy* (Routledge 2015).

⁸⁶ Mitchell, Taylor. ‘Women in Paris–The Inclusion of Gender Considerations in the Negotiation and Text of the Paris Agreement’, (2017) 1 *New Zealand Women’s Law Journal* 113-141, at 126-127.

⁸⁷ Urpelainen, Johannes and Thijs van de Graaf, ‘United States Non-Cooperation and the Paris Agreement’, (2018) 18(7) *Climate Policy* 839-851.

⁸⁸ See the full range of this action at: UNFCCC, ‘Gender and Climate Change–Documents’, <https://unfccc.int/topics/gender/resources/documentation-on-gender-and-climate-change>, accessed on 10 July 2021.

⁸⁹ Decision 3/CP.23, adopted by the COP23 held in Bonn from 6-18 November 2017. The five priority areas are: 1) Capacity-building, knowledge-sharing and communication; 2) Gender balance, participation and women’s leadership; 3) Coherence; 4) Gender-responsive implementation and means of implementation; and 5) Monitoring and reporting.

⁹⁰ Decision 3/CP.25, ‘Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and Its Gender Action Plan’, paragraph 11.

2.2 Regional instruments

The most significant regional instrument addressing gender equality is the **Council of Europe (CoE) Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)**.⁹¹ The Convention was signed in Istanbul on 11 May 2011 and entered into force on 1 August 2014. Besides protecting women against all forms of violence in public and private settings, the Convention aims to contribute to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and to the promotion of substantive equality between women and men, including by empowering women.

To begin with, the Convention provides definitions of the two key concepts mentioned in its title. It defines “violence against women” as “a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”. For its part, “domestic violence” captures “all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim”.

The goals of the Convention are to be achieved through national constitutional and legislative measures aimed at ensuring prevention,⁹² protection and support, and substantive and procedural legal guarantees. The Convention also establishes a mechanism for monitoring implementation, which is performed by a Group of experts on action against violence against women and domestic violence (GREVIO), composed of 10 to 15 members. Under Article 70 of the Convention, national parliaments shall be invited to participate in monitoring implementation and shall to this end receive GREVIO’s reports from their governments, while PACE shall be invited to regularly take stock of the Convention’s implementation. As our interviews have shown, the involvement of parliamentary institutions in this manner can help to put gender equality on political agendas and can contribute to both peer learning and peer pressure between parliaments and states.

When it comes to the Convention’s status, at the time of writing of the study (July 2021), a total of 35 states have ratified or acceded to the Convention.⁹³ The Convention’s host, Turkey, was both the first country to ratify it and the first and so far the only country to withdraw from it, which was carried out by means of denunciation on 20 March 2021 and which became effective from 1 July 2021. The EU signed the Convention on 13 June 2017, but has not yet ratified it.⁹⁴ Of the EU member states, all of which have signed the Convention, only Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia have not ratified it. Poland announced its intention to withdraw from the Convention in July 2020 over the government’s concerns that the Convention unduly interferes with child education and family relations.⁹⁵ Even in member states which have ratified the Convention, problems with implementation can be identified. In France, for

⁹¹ See generally: Niemi, Johanna et al. (eds) *International Law and Violence Against Women: Europe and the Istanbul Convention* (Routledge 2020); McQuigg, Ronagh. *The Istanbul Convention, Domestic Violence and Human Rights* (Routledge 2017).

⁹² See more on this aspect in: Grans, Lisa. ‘The Istanbul Convention and the Positive Obligation to Prevent Violence’, (2018) 18(1) *Human Rights Law Review* 133–155.

⁹³ CoE, ‘Chart of Signatures and Ratifications of Treaty 210’, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210/signatures?module=signatures-by-treaty&treaty=210>, accessed on 10 July 2021.

⁹⁴ See further: De Vido, Sara. ‘The Ratification of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention by the EU: A Step Forward in the Protection of Women from Violence in the European Legal System’, (2017) 9(2) *European Journal of Legal Studies* 69-102.

⁹⁵ While a bill called “Yes to Family, No to Gender” was sent to relevant parliamentary committees for examination in late March 2021, the withdrawal process has not been completed during the period of writing this study. Amiel, Sandrine, ‘Istanbul Convention: Poland moves a step closer to quitting domestic violence treaty’, *EuroNews*, 1 April 2021, <https://www.euronews.com/2021/04/01/istanbul-convention-poland-moves-a-step-closer-to-quitting-domestic-violence-treaty>, accessed on 10 July 2021.

instance, despite significant enhancements through the adoption in 2014 of the Real Gender Equality Act,⁹⁶ “a fully gendered approach continues to meet resistance”.⁹⁷ Furthermore, a total of 15 EU member states have entered reservations.⁹⁸ Of non-EU CoE states, the United Kingdom has signed but not ratified the Convention, while only Azerbaijan and Russia have neither signed nor ratified the Convention. The Convention enables non-CoE states to accede to the Convention, but none has yet done so.

EU accession to the Istanbul Convention was the object of several EP resolutions.⁹⁹ In one of them, MEPs expressed concern over the limited scope of the proposed Union’s accession.¹⁰⁰ This is because the Council decided to split into two decisions what is usually a single decision authorising the Commission to sign an international agreement on behalf of the Union. As a result, the Commission signed the Convention only “with regard to matters related to judicial cooperation in criminal matters” and “with regard to asylum and non-refoulement”.¹⁰¹ A case before the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), initiated by the EP, is currently pending on this.¹⁰² Other EP resolutions have contributed to the debate on the Istanbul Convention.

Another noteworthy regional instrument on gender equality is the **Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Belém do Pará Convention)**, which was adopted in Belém do Pará in Brazil in 1994 under the aegis of the Organisation of American States (OAS), an international organisation of 35 states from North and South America. This Convention enshrines the right of every woman to freedom from violence in both public and private spheres (Article 3), which is defined as encompassing, among other things, women’s rights to be “free from all forms of discrimination” and “to be valued and educated free of stereotyped patterns of behaviour and social and cultural practices based on concepts of inferiority or subordination” (Article 6). The Convention also specifies the Parties’ duties to pursue policies and undertake measures and programmes so as to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women, including through awareness promotion, modification of socio-cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, provision of various forms of support, education and training, and other means (Articles 7-9). To ensure implementation, the Convention establishes a mechanism of national reporting on the measures adopted to the OAS Inter-American Commission of Women. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights can also issue advisory opinions on the interpretation of the Convention, while individuals and non-governmental entities may lodge petitions before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights against violations by a State Party. When it comes to the

⁹⁶ French Parliament, Loi n° 2014-873 du 4 août 2014 pour l'égalité réelle entre les femmes et les hommes.

⁹⁷ Allwood, Gill. ‘Gender-based violence against women in contemporary France: domestic violence and forced marriage policy since the Istanbul Convention’, (2016) 24(4) *Modern & Contemporary France* 377-394, at 391.

⁹⁸ These are Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Sweden.

⁹⁹ EP, Resolution of 12 September 2017 on the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion, by the European Union, of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, doc. no. P8_TA(2017)0329.

¹⁰⁰ EP, Resolution of 12 September 2017 on the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion, by the European Union, of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, doc. no. P8_TA(2017)0329.

¹⁰¹ Council Decision (EU) 2017/865 of 11 May 2017 on the signing, on behalf of the European Union, of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence with regard to matters related to judicial cooperation in criminal matters, [2017] OJ L 131/11; Council Decision (EU) 2017/866 of 11 May 2017 on the signing, on behalf of the European Union, of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence with regard to asylum and non-refoulement, [2017] OJ L 131/13.

¹⁰² Samoilova, Elizaveta. ‘The Practices of ‘Splitting’ and ‘Common Accord’ Under Scrutiny: The European Parliament’s Request for an Opinion of the European Court of Justice on the Istanbul Convention’, (2020) 45(4) *Review of Central and East European Law* 472-486.

Convention's status, of the 35 OAS states, only the United States and Canada have neither signed nor ratified this Convention.¹⁰³

Despite progressive language, it has been argued that the Belém do Pará Convention ignores the socio-cultural context prevalent in Latin American states and that it has thus been “practically ineffective for shaping Latin American laws”; instead, it has been advised that its amendment should be modelled on the Istanbul Convention so as to expand the definitions used and create stronger guarantees and stricter implementation review procedures.¹⁰⁴ The fact that the Istanbul Convention is more advanced but uses some of the terminology from the Belém do Pará Convention without citing it in its Preamble, further highlights the importance of interregional dialogue and coordination between the drafters, implementers and overseers of different international human rights instruments.

In parliamentary diplomacy, regional gender equality instruments could be used as important reference points both in EP pronouncements on regional affairs in the partner countries and regions (e.g. in plenary resolutions or delegation communiqués), but also in interparliamentary meetings (e.g. bilateral meetings and meetings of multilateral assemblies). They could also be used to ensure context-specific diplomatic action, demonstrating awareness of regional efforts and responsiveness to the particular circumstances of the region and the countries concerned.

2.3 Conclusion

The above survey of a selection of the most salient international instruments on gender equality and gender mainstreaming from general and policy-specific perspectives shows that gender issues are increasingly being placed on global decision-making agendas. From discrimination to gender-based violence, from security to trade and environment, from political to economic, social and cultural dimensions, the overall position of women and girls is improving, and this is a positive and welcome development.

The survey, however, also shows the continuing relevance of the statement made by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres on the occasion of International Women's Day in 2018, that achieving gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment is “the unfinished business of our time, and the greatest human rights challenge in our world”.¹⁰⁵ Progress in implementing global gender equality commitments has been slow and uneven. Gaps remain not only with respect to the implementation of agreements, but also in terms of political commitment. This can be illustrated by US non-ratification of the CEDAW and the Belém do Pará Convention, the opposition to the Istanbul Convention by conservative political forces in several eastern European states, and the lack of EU ratification of the latter over four years after signing it.

Moreover, while some of the instruments surveyed mention parliaments as relevant agents in achieving the goals agreed (e.g. the Istanbul Convention), most of them pay insufficient attention to the contribution that parliaments can make to promoting gender equality and to supporting progress on the various facets identified above. Despite this, the formulation of international standards of gender equality, their proclamation, acceptance and wide reference in national action plans and programmes, demonstrates their utility.

As such, international gender equality instruments provide critical guidance for parliamentary diplomacy by setting policy objectives, indicating the means of achieving them, establishing processes for the monitoring of their implementation, highlighting the socio-cultural consequences of ignoring them, and

¹⁰³ OAS, <http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/signs/a-61.html>, accessed on 10 July 2020.

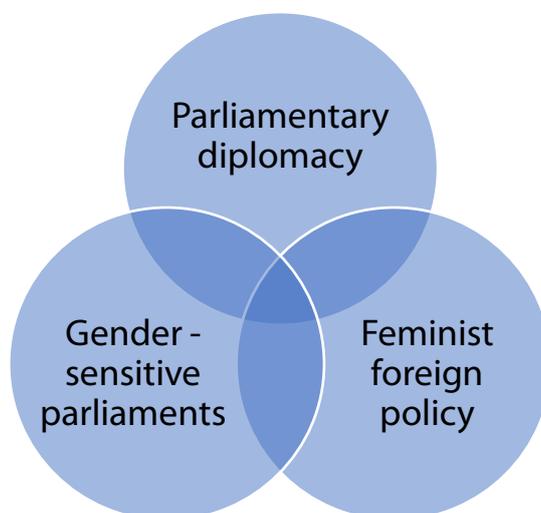
¹⁰⁴ Kimelblatt, Meredith. 'Reducing Harmful Effects of Machismo Culture on Latin American Domestic Violence Laws: Amending the Convention of Belém do Pará to Resemble the Istanbul Convention', (2016) 49(2) *George Washington International Law Review* 405-440, at 409-410.

¹⁰⁵ UN Women, 'The UN Secretary-General's Message on International Women's Day', <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/3/statement-un-sg-iwd>, accessed on 10 July 2021.

emphasising the significance of gender-sensitive conduct in international relations. These instruments, however, are not omnipotent. Their utility in parliamentary diplomacy is dependent on the political will in the partner country or region to cooperate with institutions of global governance, the capacity of institutions to uphold international commitments where there is such a will, the nature of the local cultures and traditions, and the EU's leverage in such a country or region.

3 Mechanisms and approaches for promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy

Gender equality in the external relations of parliaments is a complex concept at the crossroads of feminist foreign policy, gender-sensitive parliaments and parliamentary diplomacy.



Feminist foreign policy, although performed by governments, constitutes an important point of reference and source of inspiration for parliaments, interparliamentary institutions and all organisations aiming at promoting gender equality through external actions. Countries such as Sweden, Norway, France or Canada offer different examples of applying a gender perspective in government's external relations, and treating gender equality as an important aspect of their foreign affairs. The Swedish government applies the Gender Transformative Approach by analysing each foreign policy action from the gender perspective, while others like Norway or Canada focus on specific areas of external relations such as peace and security, international aid or trade.

According to representatives of the governments pursuing feminist foreign policy, as well as representatives of international organisations supporting parliaments in gender-sensitive scrutiny, interviewed for the purposes of this study, one of the main requirements of effective diplomacy is authenticity. Ensuring that the values the country or international institution is promoting are in line with its own laws and actions is key to being able to successfully encourage others to adopt them. Otherwise, allegations of hypocrisy and duplicity might arise and, according to experts, gender equality becomes "an empty marketing tool". From this point of view, a parliament aiming at promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy should first become a gender-sensitive institution.

In this section, the pillars of the existing approaches to FFP and gender sensitivity within parliaments will be presented. In a third step, this section will present good practices of gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy from selected parliaments and interparliamentary institutions. At the end, criteria of effectiveness in gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy will be provided.

3.1 Existing approaches to feminist foreign policy

In 2014, Sweden became the first country to launch a feminist foreign policy. The institutionalisation of this new concept has been a true game changer, which opened space at state level to question the *status quo*

of foreign policy¹⁰⁶. The four 'Rs' approach - rights, representation, resources and reality - became a founding framework of the more inclusive foreign policy. **Sweden** was followed by other pioneers in introducing gender lenses to external actions, namely **Norway**, with its foreign and development policy for gender equality. Five main areas of action (education, politics, economy, gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health) set the framework for Norway's international gender equality efforts. **Canada**, with its Feminist International Assistance Policy, concentrates on gender mainstreaming in Official Development Assistance (ODA), while **France**, with its feminist diplomacy, focuses on advocating gender equality in international forums (for a presentation of approaches listed, please see Annex 1 - Gender equality in governments' external actions). Sweden, Norway, Canada and France, have inspired other countries to include gender mainstreaming principles in various elements of their foreign policies. **Mexico**¹⁰⁷ announced its FFP in 2020, being the first country of the Global South to pursue that path. Despite existing criticism of the authenticity of these endeavours, taking into account the status of women living in Mexico, the government is working on conceptualising the policy. **Luxembourg**¹⁰⁸ has adopted a so-called '3D' approach to its FFP by focusing on diplomacy, development and defence. **Cyprus**¹⁰⁹ has committed to gender mainstreaming in foreign policy thanks to the strong leadership of Nikos Christodoulides in that regard. In 2021, **Spain** released its Feminist Foreign Policy¹¹⁰ with a calendar of actions to be taken in 2021. Main focus areas for Spanish external relations in terms of gender equality are women, peace and security, violence against women and girls, human rights of women and girls, participation of women in decision making, economic justice and the empowerment of women.

The new gender transformative approach to external relations has also been adopted at the EU level. The overarching strategy of the EU presented in the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III) includes the following five pillars:¹¹¹

- **85 % of all new actions throughout external relations will contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment by 2025:** all external assistance across all sectors, including infrastructure, digital, energy, agriculture and blended funds, etc. should integrate a gender perspective and support gender equality.
- **Shared strategic vision and close cooperation with Member States and partners at multilateral, regional and country level:** jointly stepping up implementation of Gender Action Plan (GAP) III in each partner country and region, in close cooperation with partner governments, civil society, the private sector and other key stakeholders.

¹⁰⁶ CFFP, 'Feminist foreign policy – imperative for a more secure and just world', available at <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/journal/2019/2/16/feminist-foreign-policy-imperative-for-a-more-secure-and-just-world>, accessed on 26 September 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Government of Mexico, Press release 15 'Mexico Adopts Feminist Foreign Policy', available at <https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/mexico-adopts-feminist-foreign-policy?idiom=en>, accessed on 9 November 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Foreign Policy Address presented by Mr Jean Asselborn Minister of Foreign and European Affairs to the Luxembourg Parliament on 13th March 2019, available at https://maee.gouvernement.lu/content/dam/gouv_mae/minist%C3%A8re/d%C3%A9clarations-de-politique-%C3%A9trang%C3%A8re/2019/EN-Declaration-de-politique-etrangere-2019.pdf, accessed on 26 June 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus, Article by FM Christodoulides on the occasion of International Women's Day, available at <https://mfa.gov.cy/interviews/2021/03/08/fm-christodoulides-article-international-womens-day-2021/>, accessed on 9 November 2021.

¹¹⁰ Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación (2021), *Spain's Feminist Foreign Policy. Promoting Gender Equality in Spain's External Action*, available at http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/es/SalaDePrensa/Multimedia/Publicaciones/Documents/2021_02_POLITICA%20EXTERIOR%20FEMINISTA_ENG.pdf, accessed on 26 June 2021.

¹¹¹ EC (2020). "EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III - An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action", available at: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf, accessed on 26 June 2021.

- **Focusing on key areas of engagement:** ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence; promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights; strengthening economic and social rights and the empowerment of girls and women; advancing equal participation and leadership; implementing the WPS agenda, addressing challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and the digital transformation.
- **Leading by example – gender-responsive and gender-balanced leadership:** leadership buy-in, investing in knowledge, resources and pooling action with EU Member States.
- **Quantitative, qualitative, and inclusive monitoring system** to increase public accountability, ensure transparency and access to information and achieve better EU outreach on the impact of its work worldwide.

According to experts interviewed for the purposes of this study, the essence of FFP lies in the question of power structures, that is, who is responsible for developing policies and who are the beneficiaries of the laws and policies adopted. It is about asking oneself new questions and, consequently, looking for new solutions to problems that have persisted in societies for ages. This Gender Transformative Approach is also reflected in the GAP III.

Based on the analysis of the EU policy framework toward gender mainstreaming in external action and the approaches of the four “leaders” in promoting gender equality through external actions (Annex 1 - Gender equality in governments’ external actions: Sweden, Norway, Canada, France) three principal domains of the FFP framework can be identified:¹¹²

1. Foreign and national security policies dimensions¹¹³

- *Prevention:* mainstream a gender equality perspective into all conflict prevention activities and strategies, develop effective gender-sensitive early warning mechanisms and institutions, strengthen efforts to prevent violence against women, including various forms of gender-based violence, and fight against impunity on gender-based and sexual violence.
- *Participation:* promote and support women's active and meaningful participation in all peace processes as well as their representation in formal and informal decision-making at all levels; improve partnership and networking with local and international women's rights groups and organisations; recruit and appoint women to senior positions.
- *Protection:* strengthen and amplify efforts to secure the safety, physical or mental health, wellbeing, economic security and/or dignity of women and girls; promote and safeguard human rights of women and mainstream a gender perspective into legal and institutional reforms.
- *Relief and Recovery:* promote women's equal access to aid distribution mechanisms and services, including those dealing with the specific needs of women and girls, in all relief recovery efforts.

¹¹² Government of Sweden. “Handbook Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy”. Available at: <https://www.government.se/reports/2018/08/handbook-swedens-feminist-foreign-policy/>, accessed on 26 June 2021.

¹¹³ Council of the EU (2010). “Indicators for the Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security”. Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11948-2010-INIT/en/pdf>, accessed on 26 June 2021.

2. Development cooperation dimensions¹¹⁴

- *Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls*: efforts to reduce sexual and gender-based violence, to strengthen women's organisations and movements that advance women's rights, to improve governments' capacity to provide services to women and girls and to improve gender analysis.
- *Human Dignity*: support access to quality health care, nutrition and education, and principled, timely, needs-based humanitarian assistance that better addresses the particular needs and potential of women and girls.
- *Growth that works for everyone*: increase women's access to economic opportunities and resources. This will help women and girls achieve the economic independence they need to take control of their lives.
- *Environment and Climate Action*: support government planning and initiatives to mitigate and adapt to climate change, advance women's leadership and decision making and create economic opportunities for women in clean energy.
- *Inclusive Governance*: work to end gender discrimination by promoting and protecting human rights, advancing the rule of law and building stronger institutions; encouraging greater political participation by women and girls.

3. Trade and promotion policy dimensions¹¹⁵

- *Gender equality in trade agreements*: Gender analysis of trade agreements, gender and market access, greater role of gender experts.
- *Gender-responsive standards*: Gender mainstreaming in standards development
- *Gender-balanced representation in promotion activities*: More women trade commissioners, gender-balanced promotion delegations.
- *Gender equality, trade and work in developing countries*: Gender mainstreaming in trade-related development cooperation, better working conditions and greater influence.
- *Gender statistics*: Systematic collection of gender-disaggregated data.

The gender equality perspective has long been present in development cooperation as well as in matters of peace and security. Nonetheless, this has not been the case in certain elements of so-called 'traditional' foreign policy, particularly trade policy, which presents one of the innovative elements through which the FFP approach can make a difference.

3.2 Approaches to gender sensitive parliaments

Gender equality in parliaments has long been understood mostly in terms of the descriptive representation of women (the number of women elected). The first attempts to legally establish a certain proportion of female and male representatives in legislative bodies were implemented already in the 1950s in communist countries like Pakistan, later in the 1970s in Bangladesh and later on in other countries from the Soviet bloc.¹¹⁶ On the other side of the Berlin Wall, from the 1970s, Scandinavian countries were also

¹¹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Canada (2017). "Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy". Available at: <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/iap2-eng.pdf>, accessed on 26 June 2021.

¹¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden (2019). "Feminist Trade Policy", available at: <https://www.government.se/4af8f8/contentassets/34acefd857de4032ad103f932866e7bb/feminist-trade-policy.pdf>, accessed on 26 June 2021.

¹¹⁶ Dahlerup D. (2006), ed. *Women, Quotas and Politics*. London and New York: Routledge.

implementing soft quotas in political parties that could help advance women's representation in elected bodies. At the time, the actual number of women in parliament was considered the ultimate indicator of the level of gender equality in politics in the country.

Since the 1990s and the promotion of the gender mainstreaming concept (see: Introduction), the purely numerical representation of women in parliaments has no longer been the main indicator of the level of gender equality. Discussions on how to translate descriptive into substantive representation have been raised among scholars and practitioners.¹¹⁷ The notion that gender equality requires not only fixing the numbers has been expressed strongly in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The groundbreaking research on parliaments' role in fostering gender equality carried out by IPU between 2010 and 2012 resulted in the introduction of a new concept to the debate over gender equality in legislature, namely 'gender-sensitive parliaments'.¹¹⁸ According to this new approach, a gender-sensitive parliament is "a parliament that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and in its work. Gender-sensitive parliaments remove the barriers to women's full participation and offer a positive example or model to society at large."¹¹⁹ The idea proposed by the IPU shifted the paradigm and put the outcomes of parliamentary work in the spotlight in analysing how parliaments are performing in terms of gender equality, rather than the equal representation of both sexes. In essence, gender-sensitive parliaments empower women not only by giving them a place at the table but by including their point of view in decision making. Ultimately, the numbers still matter, but not for the sake of statistics. A larger proportion of women in parliament provides a framework for implementing gender-sensitive changes and, at the same time, might be an important outcome of successful gender-sensitive reforms.

The IPU designed a self-assessment toolkit on evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments, basing it on the assumption that the change must be brought about by the parliaments themselves. It has been followed by other international organisations and interparliamentary institutions offering tools and action plans aimed at gender mainstreaming in legislatures (for a presentation of the selected approaches, please see Annex 2 - Gender equality in parliaments). Their analysis led to the selection of the following areas, in which gender equality in parliaments might be examined:

1. **ENTRY into the PARLIAMENT:** analysing the electoral process for MPs and the recruitment of parliamentary staff from the gender perspective.
2. **PARTICIPATION in PARLIAMENTARY BODIES:** gender distribution in the main parliamentary bodies and gender distribution among technical/administrative staff vs. professional staff.
3. **WORK-LIFE BALANCE:** work-life balance policies available for MPs and parliamentary employees, including reconciliation of work and family life – e.g. enabling childcare and care for other dependents like seniors, people with disabilities, etc.
4. **ANTI-DISCRIMINATION and NON-VIOLENCE:** mechanisms against discrimination and Violence Against Women In Politics (VAWIP) in parliament.
5. **PARLIAMENT PERFORMANCE:** gender perspective during plenary sessions and meetings of other parliamentary bodies such as delegations and committees, as well as documents prepared by MPs and parliamentary staff

¹¹⁷ Wängnerud L., *Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation*. The Annual Review of Political Sciences, 2009; Beckwith K., *Numbers and Newness: The Descriptive and Substantive Representation of Women*, Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de science politique Vol. 40, No. 1 (Mar., 2007).

¹¹⁸ Palmieri S. (2012), *Gender-Sensitive Parliaments. A Global Review of Good Practices*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, available at <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2016-07/gender-sensitive-parliaments>, accessed on 3 July 2021.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

6. **LEGISLATION:** analysis of the laws enacted by the parliament and gender-related topics which are not taken into account in the parliamentary work.
7. **FINANCIAL SCRUTINY:** gender analysis of the financial plans of the government, the budget spending and the effectiveness of the outcomes of the spending.
8. **OVERSIGHT:** holding the government to account for its actions and monitoring the quality of its work in terms of gender equality.
9. **SPACE:** gender analysis of the real and virtual space of the parliament – infrastructure, buildings, social media, etc.
10. **CSOs INVOLVEMENT:** regular cooperation with civil society actors working in the field of gender equality and women's rights.

3.3 Gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy - good practices from selected parliaments and interparliamentary institutions

Taking a wider understanding of the concept of parliamentary diplomacy, as indicated in section 1.2, various activities can be identified which national parliaments and interparliamentary institutions undertake to promote gender equality values and catalyse socio-cultural transformation in third countries. The elements making up parliamentary diplomacy, namely parliamentary scrutiny, the conduct of autonomous diplomatic relations by parliaments, and the establishment of parliamentary organs of regional and global organisations, are also complemented by additional aspects such as awareness raising and capacity building. The latter presents an increasingly relevant workstream of parliaments and parliamentary institutions, involving both Members of Parliament (MPs) and staff in peer-to-peer exchanges, with a focus on supporting parliamentary democracy.

The research has shown that currently parliaments are performing different activities aimed at promoting gender equality in external relations, yet they are not that well established in parliamentary practice as are the tools for enhancing gender sensitivity internally. Furthermore, FFP approaches, still pursued by very few governments, do not include parliaments to a great extent in their implementation. It does not mean, though, that parliaments and interparliamentary institutions are not active in supporting gender equality abroad and in third countries. For now, the practices are rather dispersed and often driven by individual parliaments or even MPs committed to the topic. This is also true for international capacity building programmes promoting gender equality in parliaments, which sometimes include peer-to-peer exchanges. As the UNDP states in the Guidance Note 'Strategies and good practices in promoting gender equality outcomes in parliaments' "The analysis of reported parliamentary programming suggests that activities are currently being implemented in an ad-hoc, discrete fashion, without a comprehensive understanding of their capacity for change (impact)".¹²⁰ However, the activities of interparliamentary institutions and the visible tendency to include gender dimensions in democracy support programmes may provide elements and insights relevant for creating a comprehensive framework for promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy.

The overview of different tools and practices of gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy was prepared based on analysis of the responses gathered from 32 countries to the ECPRD

¹²⁰ UNDP (2016) The Guidance Note "Strategies and good practices in promoting gender equality outcomes in parliaments", available at https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/GUIDANCE%20NOTE%20Strategies%20and%20good%20practices%20in%20promoting%20gender%20equality%20outcomes%20in%20parliaments_web.pdf, accessed on 20 September 2021.

Request No. 4607 on Gender Equality in Parliamentary Diplomacy¹²¹, desk research of the parliamentary actions in the countries which are leaders in the field of FFP (as presented in section 3.1), and interviews with selected representatives of parliaments outside the EU (North Macedonia, Canada), as well as interparliamentary institutions (IPU, PACE, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) and INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership¹²². Some good practices supporting transformation of gender norms through activities performed within parliaments were also included, although they do not fall specifically into the parliamentary diplomacy domain. Those activities, implemented by international organisations such as the OSCE or UNDP, were covered by the analysis in order to present some interesting tools for promoting gender equality within the parliamentary context. It is not an exhaustive list of practices performed by parliaments and interparliamentary institutions all over the world in promoting gender equality in external relations, but covers comprehensively different dimensions of parliamentary diplomacy and illustrates concrete tools used by parliaments which are at the forefront of feminist foreign policy.

The structure of the presentation is based on the internal and external dimension of the practices analysed, resulting from the purposes of activities described. The internal dimension is understood as all activities connected with the functioning of the parliamentary bodies and activities undertaken internally, aimed at enabling parliaments to engage in gender equality promotion in external relations. The external dimension, on the other hand, encompasses those practices whose implementation to some extent depends on the involvement of actors that are external to the Parliament. Examples of activities performed by interparliamentary institutions that either influence parliamentary practices (e.g. by obliging diverse composition of delegations) or perform parliamentary diplomacy themselves through projects or events are also mentioned.

3.3.1 Internal dimension

3.3.1.1 Gender specific objectives or obligations in the rules and procedures of parliaments or interparliamentary institutions

Promoting certain values abroad requires being able to demonstrate them in actions at home. Usually, that is achieved through ensuring equal representation of women and men, as well as including the gender dimension in the performance of parliamentary bodies. The latter is a very complex issue, and is connected with overall endeavours to become more gender sensitive in internal actions. As for the representation aspect, the usual practice followed by parliaments is soft (customary) or hard (regulated) quotas.

Ensuring gender balance in the (inter)parliamentary bodies

The representation of women in the parliamentary bodies interacting with external stakeholders is extremely important to ensure that certain topics important from the women's perspective will be raised during discussions, as well as to authenticate the message transmitted through gender equality promotion.

The rules concerning composition of delegations or other relevant bodies are adopted not only in parliaments. The interparliamentary institutions also have their own requirements regarding composition

¹²¹ The request was sent in January 2021 by the European Parliament through the Network of parliaments participating in the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD), inquiring about existing structures for conducting parliamentary diplomacy, rules on promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy, other official mechanisms strategies or bodies as well as processes under way to promote gender, and potential bottlenecks to enhancing gender in parliamentary diplomacy. The responses received are available to the parliaments participating in the ECPRD but are not public. They were shared with the authors of this study for the specific research task assigned.

¹²² INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership is a parliamentary project funded by the EU and implemented by International IDEA, which aims to build capacity of parliaments in partner countries. The EP together with IPU and EEAS are also partners of this initiative. See more: <https://www.inter-pares.eu/en/who-we-are>

of delegations from the gender perspective. In 2017, **NATO Parliamentary Assembly**, through the revision of the **RoP** (“[d]elegations are strongly encouraged to seek gender diversity” (RoP, Article 1), signalled its commitment to aiming towards a more representative gender balance, without imposing rigid rules. The Assembly’s approach is therefore mostly based on raising awareness and encouraging incremental change.¹²³

On the other hand, IPU presents a different approach, with much stronger stipulations. **The Statutes and Rules of the IPU** says that “Any delegation that for two consecutive sessions of the Assembly is composed exclusively of parliamentarians of the same sex shall automatically be reduced by one person”.¹²⁴ Providing a sanction to the provision regarding gender balance composition of parliamentary bodies strengthens the level of compliance. Since the introduction of specific measures, the proportion of women tends to be at around 30 %, at times reaching nearly 33 % (32.9 % at the October 2016 Assembly).¹²⁵

Some Parliaments have customary RoP in regard to gender balance in the delegations. In the Knesset, **delegations representing the Israel Parliament overseas are customarily composed of both male and female members, and heads of friendship groups also include both male and female MPs.**¹²⁶ However, adoption of specific provisions within the RoP of certain parliamentary bodies is also the case in some parliaments. The delegations of the Portuguese Parliament, according to Article 2 of the Resolution of the Assembleia da República no. 142/2015, need to ensure a minimum representation of one-third of each gender.¹²⁷

In the **Croatian Parliament the European Affairs Committee** has adopted its **own RoP**, which include a provision on the proportional representation of parliamentary parties and equal representation of both genders at the COSAC (Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the EU Member States) plenary meetings.¹²⁸

Some parliaments (Lower House of the French Parliament, Moldovan Parliament) are paying special attention to gender balance in the friendship groups that travel to the countries concerned.¹²⁹

Ensuring a gender perspective in the functioning of the (inter)parliamentary bodies

Including gender objectives in the RoP of parliamentary bodies is one of the strategies of gender-sensitive parliaments (see: Annex 2 - Gender equality in parliaments). Sweden, which scored highest among EU Member States in the EIGE Gender-sensitive Parliaments Assessment¹³⁰, follows the policy in which **all of the parliamentary committees are responsible for considering gender equality issues within their respective areas of responsibility**, including the Committee of Foreign Affairs. Gender equality issues that do not belong within any specific committee’s areas of responsibility are referred to the Committee on the Labour Market, which also informs international delegations, upon request, of current gender

¹²³ See more: NATO – PA, ‘Gender Balance in 2020’, available at <https://nato-pa.foleon.com/review-of-the-assemblys-consideration-of-gender-in-2020-duplicate-1/review-of-the-assemblys-consideration-of-gender-in-2020/gender-balance-in-2020/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹²⁴ Statutes of the Inter-parliamentary Union as for May 2021, available at <https://www.ipu.org/about-ipu/structure-and-governance/executive-committee/gender-partnership-group>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹²⁵ IPU, ‘Women in delegations to statutory sessions’, available at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/dlqtns.htm>, accessed on 26 June 2021.

¹²⁶ Response of the Israeli Parliament to ECPRD Request No. 4607 Gender Equality in Parliamentary Diplomacy (2021)

¹²⁷ Portuguese Parliament, Resolução da Assembleia da República n.º 142/2015

¹²⁸ Art 15 Rules of Procedure of the European Affairs Committee of the Croatian Parliament adopted on 28th July 2020.

¹²⁹ Responses of the Lower House of the French Parliament and Moldovan Parliament to ECPRD Request No. 4607 Gender Equality in Parliamentary Diplomacy (2021)

¹³⁰ EIGE, ‘Gender-sensitive Parliaments’, available at <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-sensitive-parliaments/assessments/overview>, accessed on 26 June 2021.

equality issues.¹³¹ It goes in line with the Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) that requires incorporating a gender perspective across all policy areas.

The GTA is also manifested in approaches aiming to include a gender dimension in the regulatory impact assessment of draft laws presented in parliaments, which is supported by the OSCE ODHIR Self-Assessment Tool on Gender Sensitive Legislation.¹³²

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly has an interesting practice aimed at ensuring a gender perspective in its performance.¹³³ It **supports the participation of women** in the broader defence world through **the choice of guest speakers invited to its meetings**. Quality is naturally the primary criterion for selecting these experts, but efforts are being made to favour female over male speakers with equivalent levels of expertise. The Secretary General's **regular reports to the Standing Committee on future Assembly activities and subjects routinely include a section related to the coverage of gender and security**, and the Standing Committee provides ongoing guidance through an annual review of progress towards gender mainstreaming and towards a more representative gender balance in the NATO PA.¹³⁴ This procedure has greatly helped the progressive mainstreaming of gender into the work of the Committees and other Assembly bodies.

3.3.1.2 Gender Equality Groups or Committees within parliaments or interparliamentary institutions

Promoting gender equality in international relations is facilitated in various parliaments through specific groups and committees devoted to gender equality or women's rights. Gender-focused parliamentary bodies have been categorised in the literature into three main types: (1) standing parliamentary committees, constituted under formal standing orders; (2) cross-party or intra-party women's caucuses, constituted more informally by women parliamentarians; and (3) issue-based parliamentary groups.¹³⁵

The case of the Swedish Parliament is noteworthy, due to the fact stated above that all parliamentary bodies are obliged to take into consideration gender aspects in their activities. In addition, a special Speaker's Gender Equality Group led by the First Deputy Speaker (Chair) and the Second Deputy Speaker (Deputy Chair) functions within the Riksdag. The group provides information about its work internationally, including travel abroad by delegations, meetings and seminars, in order to inspire other parliaments to work actively with gender equality issues, which is the key aspect of parliamentary diplomacy.¹³⁶ It does not fall into any of the three standard types of gender-focused parliamentary bodies, which might allow for a more flexible agenda. Although the primary focus of the Group is to promote gender equality internally within the Parliament, it also meets with foreign delegations with an interest in gender equality policies in Sweden. For example, in November 2015 the Speaker was invited to Westminster to give a

¹³¹ UNDP (2016) The Guidance Note "Strategies and good practices in promoting gender equality outcomes in parliaments", available at https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/GUIDANCE%20NOTE%20Strategies%20and%20good%20practices%20in%20promoting%20gender%20equality%20outcomes%20in%20parliaments_web.pdf, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹³² OSCE ODHIR (2017) Making Laws Work for Women and Men: a Practical Guide to Gender Sensitive Legislation, available at <https://www.osce.org/odihr/327836>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹³³ NATO-PA, 'Gender and Security', available at <https://www.nato-pa.int/content/gender-and-security>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹³⁴ NATO PA (2020) Review of the Assembly's Consideration of Gender in 2020, available at <https://nato-pa.foleon.com/review-of-the-assemblys-consideration-of-gender-in-2020-duplicate-1/review-of-the-assemblys-consideration-of-gender-in-2020/welcome/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹³⁵ Lenita Freidenvall & Josefina Erikson (2020) *The speaker's gender equality group in the Swedish parliament – a toothless tiger?*, Politics, Groups, and Identities, 8:3, 627-636.

¹³⁶ Response of the Swedish Parliament to ECPRD Request No. 4607 Gender Equality in Parliamentary Diplomacy (2021)

presentation, and the Group has also organised seminars for Nordic colleagues on approaches to gender-sensitivity in the parliament.¹³⁷

Standing parliamentary committees

The Cortes Generales follow the path of standing committee embedded in the rules and procedures of the Parliament. In **both Chambers of the Spanish Parliament** the promotion of equality and of women's rights is carried out primarily by the **Equality Committees**. The Committees are the bodies responsible for monitoring the government's policies' impact on women's rights and equal opportunities, ensuring the proper application of provisions and legal acts enacted in the field. Although the Equality Committees are not traditional actors of parliamentary diplomacy, they exercise influence at the international level by acting as key interlocutors during visits by foreign delegations (parliamentarians and civil servants alike) when these are related to the issues of equality and women's rights. They also contribute to international reflection and awareness raising through the information in the reports they publish and the approval of plans and strategies in the field.¹³⁸

Women's caucuses

The **Slovenia Women Parliamentarians Club** constitutes an example of a women's caucus that has international outreach. It has been set up as a form of inter-party cooperation of female members of the National Assembly, which is also involved in the international activities of the National Assembly.¹³⁹

In **North Macedonia the Parliamentary Women's Club** is active in cooperating with relevant stakeholders from other countries, for example through a recent meeting with a delegation from Tajikistan comprised of 15 young leaders-champions of gender issues.¹⁴⁰ Such direct exchanges between parliamentary women's groups can be a good way of strengthening the promotion of gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy.

Women's caucuses and groups of women parliamentarians are active in the field of promoting gender equality at the international level mostly within interparliamentary organisations, where women have greater opportunity to collaborate. Those organisations, such as IPU or PACE, require a certain proportion of delegation members to be women, which reinforces their representation in terms of numbers and allows for more active contribution to the performance of interparliamentary institutions (see above).

The IPU's Forum of Women Parliamentarians is a unique entity that for more than 30 years has provided women MPs a global platform aimed at increasing their influence on international decision-making. The Forum meets at every IPU Assembly.¹⁴¹ It is supported by the Bureau of Women Parliamentarians. The Bureau organises the work of the Forum and guides the work of the Gender Partnership Group, which is responsible for IPU's ground-breaking work on promoting Gender-Sensitive Parliaments all over the globe (for more information see Annex 2 - Gender equality in parliaments).

¹³⁷ Lenita Freidenvall & Josefina Erikson (2020) *The speaker's gender equality group in the Swedish parliament – a toothless tiger?*, Politics, Groups, and Identities, 8:3, 627-636.

¹³⁸ Response of the Spanish Parliament to ECPRD Request No. 4607 Gender Equality in Parliamentary Diplomacy (2021)

¹³⁹ See more: Parliament of Slovenia, Women's parliamentary clubs, available at <https://www.dz-rs.si/wps/portal/en/Home/pos/WPCLub>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁴⁰ The following issues were discussed: the reasons for forming the Club and its mission, the role of the Club, the advantages and disadvantages of quotas for the less-represented sex, and the stereotypes that women face in politics. Young leaders from Tajikistan presented the project that the OSCE implemented in their country for strengthening women's rights. They stressed that despite the small number of women MPs in their parliament, an Alliance of Women MPs has been formed and that they are working on amending laws in the direction of achieving greater gender equality.

¹⁴¹ See more: IPU, Forum of Women Parliamentarians, available at <https://www.ipu.org/about-ipu/structure-and-governance/governing-council/forum-women-parliamentarians>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

Another example of an interparliamentary women's caucus is the **Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians** (CWP), which pursues the following goals:

- maximising the role of women parliamentarians;
- building the capacity of women parliamentarians;
- advocating for mentoring and knowledge-sharing amongst women parliamentarians and;
- proactively encouraging women parliamentarians to take a central role in gender mainstreaming at all levels of decision making.¹⁴²

CWP works on a regional basis, with each of the nine regions of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association coordinating programmes, conferences and meetings among its legislatures. A comprehensive educational framework for women parliamentarians, a platform to network, and sharing good practices are the key outputs of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, crucial for strengthening female leadership across parliaments. Another important aspect of CWP's performance is communication and outreach at the international level designed to advocate for women's and girls' rights.

Issue-based interparliamentary groups

In the framework of the research on selected national parliaments, no parliamentary group devoted solely to the issue of promoting gender equality in diplomacy has been identified. However, at the interparliamentary level a group devoted specifically to one aspect of women's rights has been identified. The **Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence** functioning within the **PACE** brings together parliamentarians from the national delegations to the PACE, as well as observers and partners for democracy. It is a unique group connecting stakeholders from outside the interparliamentary institution, which shows its added value in promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy.

The Network has a very clear goal to actively engage parliamentarians at all levels throughout Europe and beyond, to raise awareness about violence against women as a serious violation of human rights and to initiate, encourage and promote legislative and policy changes to end gender-based violence. This focus is also clearly observed in general activities of PACE's diplomacy, e.g. the role of Parliamentary Assembly in the Council of Europe Neighbourhood Partnership with Tunisia 2018-2021:

“Close relationships between members of the ARP [the Tunisian Assembly of the Representatives of the People] and the PACE have been forged on issues relating to the national legislative agenda, such as freedom of expression, efforts to combat violence against women and trafficking in human beings, and the protection of children's rights.”¹⁴³

According to the PACE representative interviewed for the purposes of this study those activities have a clearly positive outcome. On 24 April 2020, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe responded favourably to Tunisia's official request to be invited to accede to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Tunisia is the first country of the MENA region which was invited to accede to the Convention, which makes this invitation a milestone in terms of promoting gender equality in the Middle East and North Africa, with a strong role played by the PACE in achieving it.

¹⁴² Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (2020) *Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians. Strategic Plan 2020-22*, available at <https://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/agora-documents/Commonwealth%20Women%20Parliamentarians%20-%20Strategic%20Plan%202020-2022.pdf>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁴³ Council of Europe (2018), *Neighbourhood Partnership with Tunisia 2018-2021*, available at <https://rm.coe.int/prems-119218-gbr-1501-neighbourhood-partnership-with-tunisia-2018-2021/16808e4515> accessed on 20 September 2021.

3.3.1.3 Providing gender expertise to MPs and parliamentary officials

Seminars

In order to be able to promote gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy MPs and parliamentary officials need to be aware of gender-related issues that should be tackled in relations with outside parliaments or representatives of other countries. This can be done through active participation in conferences organised by international organisations on gender in the global context, such as the participation of Canadian delegates in the OSCE **Webinar: Gendered Impacts of COVID-19**¹⁴⁴, or participation of members of the African Parliaments (inter alia Kenya, Rwanda) in the series of webinars **Parliamentarians' Action for Gender Equality and Food Security as a Response to COVID-19** organised by **International Institute for Sustainable Development**, which aimed at raising awareness and strengthening knowledge on gender inequalities, land property rights, and the interlinkages with rural poverty and food insecurity.¹⁴⁵

Reports

Parliaments and parliamentary committees are also publishing reports on the most pressing topics for gender equality in external actions. The **UK Parliament** is active in issuing informative reports on the **effectiveness of UK AID**,¹⁴⁶ **sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector**,¹⁴⁷ or **gender dimensions in the fashion industry**.¹⁴⁸ The gender dimension is also mentioned within the reports issued by the **Select Committee on International Relations and Defence**, such as '**2nd Report of Session 2019–21. The UK and Afghanistan**'.¹⁴⁹ Such reports provide not only important information on gender equality in external relations, but are also proof of the commitment of various parliamentary committees (International Development, Environmental Audit, International Relations and Defence) to gender equality abroad.

Roadmaps and Handbooks

Roadmaps or Handbooks allowing the setting of strategic objectives around gender equality in external action, planning activities and ways to monitor their impact were identified by interviewees as very useful in providing expertise to MPs and parliamentary officials.

The **IPU** published **Recommendations for parliamentarians** in one of the founding areas for feminist foreign policy, namely **WPS**. To mark the 15th anniversary of Resolution 1325 at the 133rd IPU Assembly in Geneva, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians put forward a series of recommendations that provide a roadmap for parliamentarians to promote the agenda on WPS.¹⁵⁰ Recommendations include speeding up

¹⁴⁴See more: Parliament of Canada, Canadian Delegation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (SECO), available at <https://www.parl.ca/diplomacy/en/associations/seco/activities-and-reports?pageNumber=2>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁴⁵ See more: IISD, Webinar 'Parliamentarians Action #3 | Protecting and Promoting Women's Land Rights in the Face of COVID-19 and Beyond', available at <https://www.iisd.org/events/parliamentarians-action-3-protecting-and-promoting-womens-land-rights-face-covid-19-and>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁴⁶ House of Commons, International Development Committee (2020) *Fourth Report - Effectiveness of UK aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger*, available at <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/140/effectiveness-of-uk-aid/publications/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁴⁷ House of Commons, International Development Committee (2021) *Seventh Report - Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries*, available at <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/428/sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-in-the-aid-sector-next-steps/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁴⁸ House of Commons, Environmental Audit Committee (2019), *Fixing Fashion: clothing consumption and sustainability*, available at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmenvaud/1952/1952.pdf>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁴⁹ House of Lords, Select Committee on International Relations and Defence (2021), *2nd Report of Session 2019–21. The UK and Afghanistan*, available at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5801/ldselect/ldintrel/208/208.pdf>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁵⁰ See more: IPU, 'Women, peace and security', available at <https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/gender-equality/womens-rights/women-peace-and-security>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

the adoption of National Action Plans on 1325; increasing the participation and leadership of women in parliaments, particularly in work relating to peace and security; and ensuring that 15 per cent of peace and security funding is dedicated to gender equality and the protection of women and girls from violence.

The same topic was raised by the **UNDP** in 2019 in its **Global Handbook Parliaments as Partners supporting the WPS Agenda**¹⁵¹. The publication consolidates the lessons learned from the UNDP's Global Project on Parliaments and Civil Society as Partners Supporting the WPS Agenda and complements them with international best practice and evidence on the ways in which parliaments can support women's participation in peacebuilding and security. It highlights the:

- law making role of parliaments in progressing the WPS agenda, including gender budgeting;
- oversight activities performed by the Committees, individual MPs or political groups and individual oversight bodies reporting to parliament;
- representative role of parliament;
- role of cross-party groups, including women's caucuses.

Not directed to parliamentarians, yet addressing the topic of WPS, the '**Toolkit with actionable proposals for OSCE mediation actors, the Chairmanship, participating States, and Executive Structures on how to increase women's inclusion in official negotiation processes in the OSCE area**' is a good example of how to tackle the gender dimensions in external relations.¹⁵² It includes "Key questions", "Checklist" and "Gender mainstreaming charts" with a focus on integrating gender perspectives into the issues under negotiation, and gender analysis. Such an approach makes the publications more actionable and ready-to-use on the ground.

An interesting practice connected more to gender-sensitive parliaments than promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy, yet very actionable and ready-to-be-used in various policy contexts, is the **UNDP** publication '**Parliaments and Gender Equality. Gender mainstreaming in legislatures**'.¹⁵³ It includes a Question guide for diagnosing capacities for gender mainstreaming in the legislative branch and Guide for goals and actions, which helps to set priorities and design concrete activities in the legislative context.

In 2019 the **PACE** published a '**Handbook for parliamentarians on the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention**'.¹⁵⁴ It includes, among other useful tools, a checklist for parliamentarians on how to support the Istanbul Convention, as well as clear instructions on how parliamentarians can promote ratification of the Convention and later help to monitor its implementation.

¹⁵¹ UNDP (2019) *A Global Handbook Parliaments as Partners supporting the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*, available at <https://www.undp.org/publications/parliament-partners-supporting-women-peace-and-security-agenda>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁵² OSCE (2019) *Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace Processes*, available at <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/5/440735.pdf> accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁵³ UNDP (2013) *Parliaments and Gender Equality: Gender Mainstreaming in Legislatures*, available at <https://www.undp.org/publications/parliaments-and-gender-equality-gender-mainstreaming-legislatures>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁵⁴ PACE (2019) *A Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, available at <http://www.assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/EGA/WomenFFViolence/2019/2019-HandbookIstanbulConvention-EN.pdf>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

3.3.2 External dimension

3.3.2.1 Mechanisms to scrutinise and influence governmental actions

Many parliaments and parliamentary institutions use their power to scrutinise and influence governmental action, which is considered a core element of parliamentary diplomacy, to promote gender equality abroad.

In the **French Senate, the delegation for women's rights and equal opportunities between men and women** contributes to the reflection on international gender issues through information reports. For example, the report of 23 January 2019 on **child marriage and teenage pregnancies**¹⁵⁵ provides detailed information on the situation of girls at the global level, presenting the main violations of girls' rights and ways of combatting them at the international level. In the conclusions it provides recommendations, directed also at French foreign service. A comprehensive '**Report on behalf of the delegation for women's rights and equal opportunities between men and women on gender equality as an issue of official development assistance**' was released in 2021, which examines in detail one of the key aspects of foreign feminist policy in France (see more: Annex 1 - Gender equality in governments' external actions).¹⁵⁶ This document, published by the Senate, concludes with specific recommendations, including budgetary ones, on how ODA should be designed in order to achieve the primary goal of promoting gender equality in third countries.

Establishing a set of milestones to be achieved by the government in the field of gender mainstreaming in foreign policy might be a powerful tool for parliamentary diplomacy. Further monitoring and evaluation are required to analyse the impact of the French Senate's activities in that regard.

Interparliamentary institutions are also using reports as a tool to influence governments' agenda in specific areas with regard to gender equality. As 2020 marked the 20th anniversary of the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on WPS, the **NATO Parliamentary Assembly** released a draft **general report** that takes stock of the progress achieved in advancing the implementation of the resolution in the Euro-Atlantic area and beyond, and identifies remaining challenges. As such, it offers an overview of developments related to the four main pillars of the WPS agenda over the past two decades.¹⁵⁷ It also provides recommendations and states that the "implementation of Resolution 1325 – and more broadly the WPS agenda – should not be only at the top of the international community's agenda when the anniversary of its adoption is celebrated, but rather be a constant preoccupation for policymakers in all aspects of their work".¹⁵⁸

Parliaments may also engage governmental bodies in gender equality issues in external relations through formal meetings. The International Development Committee of the **UK House of Commons** organised an **oral evidence session on humanitarian crises monitoring**, with special emphasis on the coronavirus in

¹⁵⁵ French Senate (2019) Denounce to put an end to it, child marriage and teenage pregnancies: a decisive issue for girls' rights everywhere, available at https://www.senat.fr/rap/r18-262/r18-262_mono.html#toc174

¹⁵⁶ French Senate (2021) Report on behalf of the delegation for women's rights and equal opportunities between men and women on gender equality as an issue of official development assistance, available at <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r20-550/r20-5501.pdf>

¹⁵⁷ See more: NATO-PA, 2020 - General Report - Advancing The Women, Peace And Security Agenda, available at <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/027-cds-20-e-rev1-advancing-women-peace-and-security-agenda-revised-draft-report-ulla>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁵⁸ Schmidt U. (General Rapporteur), Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, NATO PA (2020), <https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=/sites/default/files/2020-11/027%20CDS%2020%20E%20rev.2%20fin%20%20-%20ADVANCING%20THE%20WOMEN%20PEACE%20AND%20SECURITY%20AGENDA%20%281%29.pdf>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

developing countries and its impact on women and girls.¹⁵⁹ The meeting was attended by the executive representative Director of Policy at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the topics discussed included the gender dimension of COVID-19 impact in developing countries.

3.3.2.2 Standards' setting

Interparliamentary initiatives also have potential to create regional standards in the field of gender equality. An example is the **SADC – Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum**, a regional inter-parliamentary body composed of MPs from SADC Member State national parliaments, representing over 3,500 parliamentarians in the SADC Region. The parliaments' members of SADC are in the process of developing a **Model Law on GBV**¹⁶⁰. While non-binding, the model law will be able to serve as a legislative yardstick for SADC states to assist them in developing and enacting national laws on GBV, or revise or reform the existing ones. This tool can assist member states in meeting their international, continental and regional commitments concerning human rights and gender equality.

3.3.2.3 Events and conferences addressing gender equality organised within parliaments or interparliamentary institutions

Awareness raising through organisation of events that allow participants to reflect upon and discuss certain aspects of gender equality is one of the most commonly-used tools in promoting democratic values and human rights.

Events engaging men

Men are still a majority in parliaments globally (74.2 %¹⁶¹). Therefore, special attention must be paid to events that are targeting men either through the topic or event concept. Only then it will be possible to make a real change and challenge the existing power structures, which is fundamental to the Gender Transformative Approach.

Showing how gender stereotypes may have a negative impact not only on women but also men, and that gender equality should be a common goal regardless of gender, was one of the aims of a meeting held in the Knesset in March 2017, devoted to the subject of parental leave for fathers. It followed an exhibition prepared by the Swedish Embassy in Israel. Using unconventional tools (photo exhibition) to bring attention to the problem is a good practice used by the Swedish government in exercising FFP – **the exhibition "Swedish Dads"**¹⁶² was presented in dozens of countries all over the world by Swedish Embassies and promotes one of the flagship gender equality policies, namely parental leave.

A distinctive approach was also taken by Icelandic male champions (Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson and Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson, respectively Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister at that time) who designed the concept of **Barbershop** events. The first of these was held in January 2015 in the UN New York Headquarters: a two-day high-level event, which focused on initiatives that aim to support non-sexist male attitudes and behaviours between men. Bringing men to discussions on gender equality is

¹⁵⁹ See more: UK Parliament, 'Formal meeting (oral evidence session): Humanitarian crises monitoring: coronavirus in developing countries: secondary impacts', available at <https://committees.parliament.uk/event/2834/formal-meeting-oral-evidence-session/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁶⁰ See more: SADC, 'SADC Model Law on Gender Based Violence', available at <https://gbv.sadcpf.org/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁶¹ IPU (September 2021) Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments, available at <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁶² See more: Swedish Institute, 'Swedish Dads photo exhibition', available at <https://si.se/en/events-projects/swedish-dads-photo-exhibition/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

crucial to achieve change and therefore the Barbershop movement became part of the HeForShe UN campaign.¹⁶³

While these two examples do not fall into the concept of parliamentary diplomacy, such events can be organised in parliaments all over the world and their use could be promoted through parliamentary diplomacy. The Barbershop toolbox with ready-to-apply concepts of events (leadership sessions, workshops, but also 'pop-up' photobooths) provides concise advice on how to run them in one's own organisation, workplace, or community.¹⁶⁴ For example, in April 2018 a Barbershop conference was organised in the Council of Europe, gathering members of the Parliamentary Assembly, Ambassadors of the 47 member states to the Council of Europe and Judges of the European Court of Human Rights.

Events gathering women

A second important type of event in the parliamentary context is one which brings together women political leaders and undermines the concept of so-called 'old-boys-networks', indicated in the research as one of the key barriers to women's political participation.¹⁶⁵ Empowering women parliamentarians through networking events can translate into more active promotion of a gender-progressive agenda in various areas of policy action, including external relations.¹⁶⁶

The **Women Leaders Global Forum** (WLGf) that gathered some 400 female leaders from more than 100 countries for meetings in Reykjavik from 26 to 28 November 2018 is an example of such an initiative. The event was arranged by the Women Political Leaders (WPL) network as well as the Icelandic Government and the Althing, Iceland's parliament. The gathering previously had been for politicians only, but female leaders from all sectors were invited for the first time. As part of the forum, separate meetings are held for women politicians. MPs and ministers discuss issues important to the expansion of women's influence in society.¹⁶⁷

An example of smaller events gathering women organised by parliaments is a meeting organised in the Knesset to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. **All female foreign ambassadors** that served in Israel at the time were invited. A number of ambassadors came to the Knesset to exchange information on the means of dealing with violence in their countries. In addition, an exhibition organised by the Slovenian Embassy to Israel was presented on this occasion.¹⁶⁸

A high-profile event exclusively for women parliamentarians is **the annual Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament**, organised by the IPU. The Summit provides women in the highest decision-making positions of parliament with a forum in which to exchange ideas and experiences that are of interest to their national and international agendas. At the 13th Summit, organised in September 2021, ways and

¹⁶³ See more: HeForShe, 'The Barbershop Toolbox', available at <https://www.heforshe.org/en/barbershop>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁶⁴ See more: HeForShe (2017), report 'Barbershop Toolbox, Choose your tool', available at https://www.heforshe.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/toolbox_choose_your_tool_v2.pdf, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁶⁵ Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. "Women as Political Leaders Worldwide: Cultural Barriers and Opportunities." *Women and Elective Office, 2nd edition*. Ed. Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox. Oxford University Press, 2005

¹⁶⁶ Lucina di Meo, *Women's Political Networks*, Wilson Centre, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/womens_political_networks_complete_guide.pdf [access: 20.09.2021]

¹⁶⁷ See more: Reykjavik Global Forum, 'Our story', available at <https://reykjavikforum.global/about/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁶⁸ See more: The Communist Party of Israel, article 'Eliminate Violence against Women! Haifa, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv to Rally', available at <https://maki.org.il/en/?p=16831>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

means of preserving and consolidating women's achievements and furthering progress in a gender-responsive recovery agenda, leaving no woman and no girl behind, were identified.¹⁶⁹

Given its mandate and focus on strengthening regional cooperation, the OSCE organises events bringing women parliamentarians from specific countries to exchange good practices and share knowledge. As an example of an **event organised in cooperation with a parliament**, an online conference organised by the Parliament of Montenegro, OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE Mission to Montenegro and other OSCE field operations in South-East Europe, can be named. 'The Role of Parliaments in Advancing Gender Equality and Women in Politics in South-East Europe' was part of extensive efforts by OSCE to support the Montenegro Parliament in aligning national legislation with the international requirements for gender equality, and to assist the country towards a more just and prosperous society.¹⁷⁰

Events tackling women's issues

Last but not least, one of the tools for promoting gender equality by parliaments is events directly addressing the most pressing issues from the perspective of women's rights. In terms of parliamentary diplomacy, the events are often designed in the form of peer-to-peer exchange between parliamentarians, that are described further in this section. However, national parliaments also organise regional conferences from time to time, especially in the regions they have more interest in.

The Spanish Parliament has been actively engaged in several activities destined to enhance the gender perspective through parliamentary diplomacy. As an example, on March 9, 2021, the virtual seminar '**Women and Parliament in Constitutional Spain**' was organised by the Spanish Congress of Deputies and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), within the framework of the Plan INTERCOONECTA (to foster Spanish Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean). The objective of the webinar was to raise awareness about the work done within the Spanish Parliament to contribute to gender equality, while also focusing on the existing gaps and social challenges Latin American parliaments face on the matter.¹⁷¹

In terms of organising bigger events engaging MPs from many countries at the global level to discuss gender equality topics, the interparliamentary institutions are the leaders.

It is important to make the topic as relevant and current as possible, to bring societal and media attention to the outcomes of the discussion. That is why the IPU organised in 2021 events around **post-COVID-19 recovery**, such as an Inter-parliamentary Dialogue on gender-responsive recovery post-COVID-19.¹⁷² According to IPU, parliaments and their members are in a unique position to exercise political will and contribute gender-responsive action to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, as well as to drive a gender-responsive post-pandemic recovery. Another example is the Seventh IPU **Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians**, where discussions around the gender dimension of the impact of COVID-19 on girls also took place.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ See more: IPU, 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament 2021, available at <https://www.ipu.org/event/13th-summit-women-speakers-parliament-2021#event-sub-page-documents/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁷⁰ See more: OSCE, OSCE Mission to Montenegro co-organized online regional conference of women parliamentarians, available at <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-montenegro/489827>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁷¹ See more: AECID, Webinario Mujer y Parlamento en la España Constitucional, available at <https://www.aecid.org.uy/?p=4332>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁷² See more: IPU, Inter-parliamentary Dialogue on gender-responsive recovery post-COVID-19, available at <https://www.ipu.org/event/inter-parliamentary-dialogue-gender-responsive-recovery-post-covid-19#event-sub-page-23409/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁷³ See more: IPU, 2021 Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians, available at <https://www.ipu.org/event/2021-global-conference-young-parliamentarians> [access: 20.09.2021]

As for the PACE, it has a clear focus on combating VAW in its parliamentary diplomacy, however in 2021 PACE positioned it in the broader context of the **Gender Dimension of Foreign Policy in the Response to COVID-19**.¹⁷⁴ In June 2021 a webinar took place, during which the problem of the prevalence and devastating impact of domestic violence in the COVID crisis, the absence of essential services, and increasing efforts to curtail women's rights, including sexual, reproductive and health rights, were discussed.

Violence against women, being one of the most horrifying examples of gender inequality, occurring all over the globe, is one of the topics often discussed in parliamentary fora. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, together with the OSCE/ODIHR and the OSCE Secretariat's Gender Issues Programme, explored **innovative legislative approaches to prevent and combat violence against women** during an event organised in May 2021. OSCE parliamentarians were joined by OSCE delegates from participating States and Partners for Co-operation, for an exchange of good practices and lessons learned. Experts from the OSCE Secretariat and ODIHR presented OSCE tools and resources, including ODIHR's support for law-making processes and developing legal reviews of legislation on violence against women, and the OSCE Secretariat's guide on 'How to Use Survey Data to Prevent and Combat Violence against Women and Girls'.¹⁷⁵

Parliaments and interparliamentary institutions tend to organise events to **celebrate the adoption of certain laws and documents that have had a tremendous role in advancing women's rights**. That is the case with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly webinar UNSCR 1325: Allied legislators reiterate commitment to mainstreaming gender in peace and security, organised back in October 2020, ahead of the **20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on WPS**. The aim of such events is to assess the progress made, as well as remaining challenges.¹⁷⁶

A similar idea was behind the conference held under the theme 'The role of the parliament in achieving gender equality in the context of the **Beijing +20 process**'¹⁷⁷, organised in Bishkek in May 2015. OSCE parliamentarians led by Kyrgyzstan's Roza Aknazarova joined government and parliamentary leaders and representatives of international organisations and civil society, calling for improvements in women's rights and opportunities, exchanging experiences and best practices and discussing how to fully harness the power of legislatures to help achieve gender equality. One of the key recommendations to emerge from the conference was the necessity for parliaments to increasingly focus on their oversight functions, helping to close the gap between legislative aims and implementation, which often lags behind.

3.3.2.4 Support women candidates and MPs outreach with constituencies

Parliamentary democracy support actions in third countries often tackle the electoral process and capacity-building for political leaders. With regard to gender equality promotion, enhancing the proportion of women parliamentarians, as well as support for female politicians, have been identified as good practices.

¹⁷⁴ See more: CoE, The Gender Dimension of foreign policy, available at <http://www.assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/EGA/WomenFFViolence/2020/20200611-GenderDimensionForeignPolicy-EN.pdf>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁷⁵ See more: OSCE, OSCE parliamentarians, delegations discuss evidence-based lawmaking to prevent and combat violence against women, available at <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/487030>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁷⁶ See more: NATO-PA, UNSCR 1325: Allied legislators reiterate commitment to mainstreaming gender in peace and security <https://www.nato-pa.int/news/unscr-1325-allied-legislators-reiterate-commitment-mainstreaming-gender-peace-and-security>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁷⁷ See more: OSCE-PA, On gender equality, time to harness the power of parliaments, say OSCE PA members in Kyrgyzstan, available at <https://www.oscepa.org/ru/novosti-i-multimedia/press-relizy/press-2015/kyrgyzstan-press-release>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

The French Senate together with the German Bundesrat, Belgian Senate, Polish Senate, Romanian Senate and Portuguese Parliament in 2021 launched a programme of **institutional twinning** called ‘Support to the Chamber of Councillors of Morocco’ that puts emphasis on the involvement and role of women in parliamentary action.¹⁷⁸

The **PACE** organised in July 2021 a **seminar ‘Women in politics: how to progress towards equality?’** during which Moroccan parliamentarians could exchange views with their counterparts from the PACE Equality Committee and international experts on the need and importance of increasing women's involvement in political life.¹⁷⁹ As PACE has a primary focus on combatting violence against women, also in terms of women parliamentarians, this topic was raised in connection with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. **A campaign featuring the hashtag label #NotInMyParliament** was launched in 2018 to counter sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments.¹⁸⁰ Support for women parliamentarians in this very sensitive area became the new approach of various interparliamentary organisations, which are also using innovative tools to raise awareness around it.

ParlAmericas,¹⁸¹ an independent institution promoting parliamentary diplomacy in the Americas and gathering 35 parliaments, has launched a **video project** called **‘Mapping Gender-Based Political Harassment: Parliamentarians speak out.’** This interactive space features testimonies of parliamentarians from across the Americas and the Caribbean on the topic of political harassment and violence.¹⁸²

The IPU published in 2018 a **ground-breaking report ‘Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians in Europe’**,¹⁸³ that shed light on a very disturbing phenomenon taking place in parliaments all over the world. IPU is also supporting women parliamentarians by facilitating global exchanges between women MPs through the **iKNOWPolitics virtual network**.¹⁸⁴ At the country level, the IPU supports women's access to and influence in parliaments, including through the establishment and functioning of women's parliamentary caucuses. These have proven to be a valuable means for women to amplify their voices in male-dominated parliaments.

Strengthening women's political leadership is one of main aims in the work with parliaments all around the globe, to secure the gender perspective in their outputs. Without women leaders, the parliamentary agenda will not be gender balanced. Therefore, **ParlAmericas** has launched a project aiming at **strengthening the sustainability of women's organisations** and their delivery of programming,

¹⁷⁸ See more: French Senate, ‘Mai et juin 2021. Programme européen d'appui à la Chambre des Conseillers du Maroc : lancement et premières activités’, available at https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwis5u3U0dHzAhUImBQKHV6bDfwQFnoECAIQAAQ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.senat.fr%2Ffileadmin%2Ffichiers%2Fimages%2Frelations_internationales%2FCooperation_interparlementaire%2Fcomptes-rendus-pdf%2FACTU_MAROC.pdf&usq=AOvVaw336BrGJVde43Kv7Z7Xks6S accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁷⁹ See more: CoE, Morocco: PACE organises a seminar on gender equality in politics <https://pace.coe.int/en/news/8386/morocco-pace-organises-a-seminar-on-gender-equality-in-politics>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁸⁰ See more: CoE, PACE #NotInMyParliament initiative, <https://pace.coe.int/en/pages/not-in-my-parliament>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁸¹ See more: ParlAmericas, available at <https://www.parlAmericas.org/es/new-home.aspx>

¹⁸² See more: ParAmericas, Mapping Gender-Based Political Violence, available at <https://www.parlAmericas.org/en/gender-equality/political-harassment-map.aspx>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁸³ IPU (2018) *Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians in Europe* <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁸⁴ See more: iknowpolitics, I know my rights iKNOW Politics, available at <https://www.iknowpolitics.org/en>, accessed on 20 September 2021

including with national parliaments, to build environments **that enable women's political leadership**.¹⁸⁵ Among project activities, workshops to encourage and support female electoral candidates, leadership initiatives with young women, and facilitation of knowledge exchanges and meetings can be named. The project is supported by the Government of Canada as a part of their FFP agenda (see more: Annex 1 - Gender equality in governments' external actions).

According to the Gender Transformative Approach, in order to implement successful support activities for women, a good understanding of the local context and socio-cultural limitations for female political participation is needed. The ParlAmericas partnered in the project with the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership and National Forum of Women in Political Parties in Panama, to be able to design activities most relevant for the target group.

3.3.2.5 Capacity building and peer-to-peer exchange

Among capacity building activities in the area of gender equality in external relations, training for women in political leadership play an important role, as has been stated above. Such initiatives are not necessarily implemented by parliaments or interparliamentary institutions, yet the fact that they are addressing gender gaps in political representation provides some ideas for promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy. For example, in 2019 the **OSCE Programme Office** trained more than 200 women leaders from all seven provinces of Kyrgyzstan. An intensive **three-day School of Leadership** covered international standards on women's political participation, national electoral legislation, processes and procedures, pre-election campaigning and public speaking.¹⁸⁶

However, the capacity building activities should not engage only women parliamentarians. Gender-sensitive training is available to all parliamentarians regardless of sex, however it is a challenge to promote it among men. **INTER PARES** is very active in that field by offering gender-sensitive law making and oversight workshops to parliamentarians from the partner countries.

The **Gender-sensitive Law-making and Oversight Workshop** took place virtually in June 2021, and was organised in **collaboration with a local Malaysian organisation ENGENDER** - a social enterprise that aims to advance the empowerment of women and gender equality. More than 35 participants, including 12 MPs, took part in this three-day workshop that focused on strengthening the Malaysian Parliament's capacity to conduct gender-sensitive scrutiny, emphasised the role of parliamentary committees and talked about the significance of mainstreaming gender into parliamentary work.¹⁸⁷

To make their work in this field even more impactful **INTER PARES** is planning to release **an e-learning course on the role of parliaments in achieving gender equality**. This course is produced by international gender expert Dr Sonia Palmieri and will support parliamentary staff in understanding and fulfilling the obligations established by the international normative frameworks on gender-sensitive parliaments.

Such workshop and training activities proved successful on the ground. A good example might be a **workshop on gender-sensitive scrutiny** organised in 2021 by **INTER PARES** with **members of the Bhutan National Assembly and National Council**. In Bhutan, there is a legal requirement to be literate to

¹⁸⁵ See more: ParlAmericas, Women's Political Leadership Project, available at <https://www.parlAmericas.org/en/gender-equality/womens-political-leadership.aspx>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁸⁶ See more: OSCE, "Be courageous!" How women in Kyrgyzstan are bringing a fresh perspective to local politics, available at <https://www.osce.org/programme-office-in-bishkek/457834>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁸⁷ See more: INTER-PARES, Gender-sensitive Law-making and Oversight Workshop with the Dewan Rakyat, available at <https://www.inter-pares.eu/en/news/gender-sensitive-law-making-and-oversight-workshop-dewan-rakyat>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

stand for election in local government, which involves passing a 'functional literacy test'.¹⁸⁸ While on the surface this provision applies to everyone regardless of their gender (i.e. it is seemingly 'gender-neutral'), just 57 % of women aged 15 and over are literate, compared with 75 % of men. In the over 65s, only 9 % of women and 36 % of men are literate.¹⁸⁹

Research from 2018 cited the low level of awareness among women of the test, and a lack of confidence to take it, as key reasons for the low representation of women in local government.¹⁹⁰ The workshop on gender-sensitive scrutiny allowed the assessment of the 2009 law from a gender perspective in anticipation of the introduction of a new local government bill.¹⁹¹ Various solutions to the multi-faceted problem of low women's representation were proposed by the members, such as: targeted literacy programmes for women (particularly older women), ensuring that literacy tests are accessible to women and promoted among them, making literacy part of the training for local government representatives, or removing the legal requirement for the test altogether. Other provisions of the Act were also found to be indirectly discriminatory, such as there being no minimum notice for calling a session, alongside provision for the removal of members who miss more than two consecutive sessions. Members concluded that this could indirectly discriminate against women, as they are more likely to be primary caregivers and so less able to attend sessions at short notice.

If possible, training for MPs and parliamentary officials should be organised or co-hosted by the parliaments to increase the turnout and engagement, especially of male parliamentarians, in line with the GTA assumption that men should be involved in bringing the change. This was the case with an intensive training in Georgia. The Gender Equality Council of the Parliament organised in 2017 **a six-day tailored session on gender budgeting practices and the gender perspective of the policy and law-making process**, in partnership with UNDP, NDI, Government of Sweden, UK Government and the USAID Georgia Good Governance Initiative. The training introduced the methodology used to examine how specific policies and laws may affect the male and female population, and how these policies could be used to advance the gender equality agenda of the country. Gender budgeting sessions with the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) aimed to advance the gender budgeting experience in Georgia and discuss ways for constructing budgets in line with the principles of equality.¹⁹²

Peer-to-peer exchanges based on mutual learning and capacity building between parliamentarians were indicated by the experts as the most effective tools to foster cooperation between parliaments. The INTER PARES project (**EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments**) as such is based on this approach.¹⁹³ Among various activities funded by the EU and deployed in partnership with EU MS parliaments as well as the EP, IPU and EEAS, a dedicated workshop on how peer-to-peer exchange programmes can contribute effectively to gender equality was organised in October 2019 in Belgium. This **Workshop on Gender Strategies for Parliamentary Development Programmes** convened parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and development practitioners to brainstorm on the best ways to facilitate exchange between parliaments all over the world. The experiences shared showed that no

¹⁸⁸ Government of Bhutan, The local Government Act of Bhutan 2009, available at <https://www.mohca.gov.bt/download/LGAct2018Final.pdf>, section 21, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁸⁹ UNESCO, Education and literacy rates, available at <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/bt>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁹⁰ Sharma, Manu & Zangmo, Dupthup (2018) *The Participation of Women in Local Government in Bhutan: A Study of Sarpang District*, International Journal of Economic Research, 14, 673-680. accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁹¹ National Assembly of Bhutan (2021) *Parliamentarians led by Hon'ble Speaker attends workshop on Gender Scrutiny of Legislation, Policy and the Budget*, accessed on 9 April 2021.

¹⁹² See more: UNDP, Ensuring Gender Equality in Budgets and Laws, available at <https://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2017/07/14/georgian-parliament-takes-part-in-a-six-day-training-marathon-to-ensure-gender-equality-in-budgets-and-laws.html>, access 9 April 2021.

¹⁹³ See more: INTER-PARES <https://www.inter-pares.eu/en>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

parliament has perfected gender mainstreaming, which gives all partners involved an opportunity for dialogue and mutual learning in developing and testing innovative approaches through the INTER PARES partnerships.¹⁹⁴

3.3.2.6 Autonomous diplomatic relations

Promotion of good practices in terms of advancement of gender equality is often done by individual MPs while holding **speeches during conferences or seminars**, but also at the level of **interparliamentary meetings or friendship groups**. The Knesset raises the issue of equal treatment of women and men on various occasions – at parliamentary conferences or through friendship groups (e.g. sharing Israel's experiences on the issue of prevention of violence against women with the members of the Parliament of Ecuador).¹⁹⁵

At the Webinar for Southeast Asia on Armed Violence Prevention organised by the ASEAN Inter-parliamentary Assembly on approaching the problem of violence related to the illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons through the lenses of the WPS agenda and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Senator Ravalia explained that the Senate of Canada strives to integrate diverse perspectives in its policy recommendations. In particular, he noted that the Senate has almost achieved gender parity between men and women.¹⁹⁶

During the XXIII Mexico–Canada Interparliamentary Meeting in Mexico City, Canadian and Mexican delegates underscored that achieving gender equality and empowering women are critical global objectives, and are part of the UN SDGs. They exchanged information about recent developments in their respective countries and legislatures regarding this equality and empowerment, including Mexico's near-parity in both legislative chambers, and Canada's historically high proportion of female representation in Parliament and Cabinet with gender parity. In addition, they discussed the impact of these developments on the legislative culture, the advantages and disadvantages of various methods for supporting women's participation in politics, government initiatives promoting gender-based analysis to improve public policy, the importance of enhanced support for female entrepreneurs, and ongoing challenges relating to personal violence.¹⁹⁷

The French Senate organised an exchange with the Polish Women's Rights Centre and Polish Senators on the situation of women's rights in Poland and the legislation on domestic violence, which took place virtually in June 2021. The exchange tackled the issue of the Istanbul Convention and various legislative provisions that could be introduced in order to more effectively combat GBV.¹⁹⁸

Another important tool for promotion of gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy is **parliamentary visits**. For example, the Storting's Presidium visited Japan in 2016 to meet with Japanese

¹⁹⁴ See more: INTER-PARES, Workshop on Gender Strategies for Parliamentary Development Programmes, available at <https://www.inter-pares.eu/en/events/workshop-gender-strategies-parliamentary-development-programmes>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁹⁵ Response of the Israeli Parliament to ECPRD Request No. 4607 Gender Equality in Parliamentary Diplomacy (2021)

¹⁹⁶ See more: AIPA, Webinar For Southeast Asia On Armed Violence Prevention, available at <https://aipasecretariat.org/webinar-for-southeast-asia-on-armed-violence-prevention/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁹⁷ See more: Parliament of Canada, 'Participation of the Honourable Anthony Rota, M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons, and the Honourable Patricia Bovey, Senator, on behalf of the Honourable George J. Furey, Q.C., Speaker of the Senate, and a Parliamentary Delegation, to the XXIII Mexico–Canada Interparliamentary Meeting in Mexico City, Mexico', <https://www.parl.ca/diplomacy/en/speakers/activities-and-reports/summary/10733192>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

¹⁹⁸ See more: French Senate, 'Comptes Rendus De La Delegation Aux Droits Des Femmes', http://www.senat.fr/compte-rendu-commissions/20210607/ddf_2021_06_09_pologne.html, accessed on 20 September 2021.

legislators and discuss issues related to gender equality.¹⁹⁹ On its visit to the Japanese Diet, the Presidium of the Norwegian Parliament was received by Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tadamori Oshima. In addition to emphasising a desire to deepen the good relations between Norway and Japan, he also focused particularly on the poor representation of women in politics. In connection with the Presidium's official visit to Japan, President of the Storting, Olemic Thommessen, accompanied by almost the entire Presidium, lunched with the Japanese Diet's cross-party group working to promote gender equality issues.

Representatives of parliamentary bodies are also visiting other countries to attend conferences and events focusing on certain aspect of women's rights and to foster gender equality abroad. From January 28 to February 4, 2017, the President of the Delegation for women's rights and equal opportunities between men and women in the French National Assembly, Catherine Coutelle, travelled to New Delhi, India, to participate in the second international symposium against the sexual exploitation of women and girls.²⁰⁰

3.3.2.7 Gender audits

Gender audits in parliaments are either initiated internally by the MPs or parliamentary staff and performed with the assistance of an institution in possession of adequate methodology (IPU, EIGE, UNDP) or are funded and promoted by the international community (foreign governments, international CSOs, international institutions, etc.). Parliaments as such do not perform these kinds of activities abroad, however they might require such actions from governments in the form of recommendations, or encourage partner parliaments to initiate such audits.

A **Gender Audit** performed jointly by the **Swedish Government and UNDP** in the **Parliament of the Republic of Moldova** in 2015 is an excellent example of cooperation between a government implementing a foreign feminist policy and the international organisation promoting gender equality within parliaments.²⁰¹ Above all, it shows the involvement of the local parliament, through extensive levels of consultations, questionnaires and interviews performed with MPs and parliamentary staff. The external actors provided tools, which were later used by local stakeholders within the parliament. Such an approach increases the chance of implementation of the recommendations elaborated.

In order to ensure that gender audit and its results will make a difference in the institution where it is performed, engagement on the audited side is required. A good example of such partner cooperation is the self-assessment on gender sensitivity conducted during 2019 jointly by the **Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia** and the **OSCE Mission in Skopje**, looking into all aspects of the parliament's regulatory framework, practices and performance.²⁰² Again, an international organisation provided the tools, which were applied by the local parliament. As a result of the self-assessment, a narrative interpretation report was prepared, providing MPs and the parliament management with concrete recommendations on how to further improve the current situation. The report was presented to the Assembly in July 2019 and was recognised as a call for action. This resulted in the adoption of a comprehensive Plan of Activities on Gender Sensitivity for 2020 and 2021, adopted by the Assembly's Committee for Equal Opportunities in January 2020. The entire process has been supervised and led by the Assembly's Secretary General, who is a woman for the second time in parliamentary history in North Macedonia.

¹⁹⁹ See more: Norwegian Parliament, 'Storting's Presidium visits Japan', available at <https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/About-the-Storting/News-archive/Front-page-news/2015-2016/stortings-presidium-visits-japan/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²⁰⁰ See more: CAP, report 'Las Girl First', available at <https://lastgirlfirst.mystrikingly.com/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²⁰¹ De Bulte S., Gender Audit of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova: Towards Fostering a More Gender Sensitive Institution, Swedish Government, UNDP 2015.

²⁰² See more: OSCE, OSCE Mission to Skopje supports efforts to make parliament of North Macedonia and the region more gender sensitive, <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-skopje/424235>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

3.3.2.8 Cooperation with local actors (CSOs, National Human Rights Institutions, etc.)

Gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy may also be understood as assisting in transformation towards more gender-sensitive institutions and policy frameworks. Close cooperation with local partners to understand the socio-cultural context is an important element of a gender transformative approach. Such endeavours are made by international organisations in cooperation with local CSOs and national parliaments. Trusted partners on the ground understanding the local ecosystem and gender norms are especially important when applying the gender transformative approach, which is designed to address the roots of gender inequalities which often have a cultural background.

A UNDP project, run in parallel in 4 countries across the world (Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka), aimed at **enhancing the role of parliaments and parliamentarians (women and men) in advancing the WPS Agenda** was implemented in cooperation with local NGOs. In the Kyrgyz Republic, together with Innovative Solutions Inc., they provided the services to support the empowerment of Parliament in implementation of the National Agenda on WPS. It also promoted parliamentary efforts to support implementation of the SDGs, namely SDG-5 on gender equality and SDG-16 on governance, rule of law and peacebuilding.²⁰³

As a result, two Road Maps for Parliament were developed. Firstly, one to help MPs to move forward the WPS agenda to ensure the participation of women in preserving peace and security. Secondly, one to enhance gender sensitivity of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic was developed to help MPs to consider gender sensitivity in structure, procedures and in culture of this particular legislative institution. In total 135 participants, including 35 men, attended training and workshops dedicated to gender expertise and on the development and institutionalisation of monitoring tools on the WPS Agenda. MPs, parliament staff, representatives of government agencies, representatives of local councils and heads of local governments, representatives of women's NGOs and activists, as well as media representatives, enhanced their capacity.²⁰⁴

In 2019 the **Westminster Foundation for Democracy** launched the **HUGEN project**.²⁰⁵ HUGEN stands for **human rights and gender network**. The project aims to support Western Balkans parliaments in reaching international standards for human rights and gender equality. The project has the following milestones:

- Creation of a network of parliamentary committees from eight parliaments;
- Development of ways for regional parliaments to cooperate on human rights and gender issues in the Western Balkans region;
- Delivery of training resources for conducting and improving committee oversight practices;
- Delivery of training resources for establishing post-legislative scrutiny mechanisms and gender law audit practices;

²⁰³ See more: UNDP, Enhancing the role of parliaments and parliamentarians (women and men) in advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, <https://www.kg.undp.org/content/kyrgyzstan/en/home/projects/enhancing-the-role-of-parliaments-and-parliamentarians--women-an.html>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²⁰⁴ UNDP (2019) Parliaments and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda Case Study: KYRGYZSTAN, available at https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiF98eq59HzAhXaAWMBHSqcBw0QFnoECAIQAO&url=https%3A%2F%2Freliefweb.int%2Fsites%2Freliefweb.int%2Ffiles%2Fresources%2FParliaments_and_the_Women_Peace_and_Security_Agenda_-_Case_Study_-_Kyrgyzstan.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2WP98XE0qYi7xfGx7yN5Vn, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²⁰⁵ See more: WFD (2019), 'Strengthening human rights and gender equality in the Western Balkans' <https://www.wfd.org/2019/10/08/strengthening-human-rights-and-gender-equality-in-the-western-balkans/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

- Running a training programme for MPs and parliamentary staff to build capacity for parliamentary oversight and monitoring the implementation of gender laws and human rights;
- Conducting audits of gender laws and human rights policies and sharing case studies and best practices among the network participants and with a wider audience.

The project is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, within the framework of their feminist foreign policy. It draws together 15 human rights and gender equality committees from eight parliaments and six national human rights institutions (NHRIs). The participation of NHRIs is crucial for the project as they are valuable partners for parliaments in supporting their work on gender equality and enhancing their oversight capacities.²⁰⁶

Recently the IPU has announced it will receive an additional two million Canadian dollars in funding to support its gender equality work in parliament. The three-year project, **Gender Equality in Politics**, is designed to support the IPU's work in increasing women's political empowerment. The funding will also help strengthen the capacity of parliaments to support gender equality at a national level in Djibouti, Mali, Mauritania, Myanmar, Sierra Leone and Tanzania and up to five other developing countries. Such investment clearly underlines the Canadian commitment to the IPU's work in empowering women parliamentarians and creating equality of opportunity.²⁰⁷

The case of the **Australian International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill**²⁰⁸ is a good example of involvement of CSOs in drafting the documents that will be addressing legal changes in the field of gender equality in external action. On 12 May 2015 the Senate referred The International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015 to the Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Legislation Committee for inquiry and report. The purpose of the Bill is to direct Commonwealth aid officials to consider the impact of any official development or humanitarian assistance in reducing gender inequality. The Bill highlights the importance of promoting gender equality in international aid, referencing Sustainable Development Goal 5 – “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. The Bill has two substantive provisions. Clause 4 creates a duty for Commonwealth aid officials to take into consideration how ODA will contribute to reducing gender inequality. Clause 5 requires the Minister for Foreign Affairs to present to each House of Parliament a report “setting out how, during the previous financial year, the Commonwealth used international aid to promote gender equality in recipient countries”. The **International Women's Development Agency**, an international NGO, submitted input to the inquiry in which the role of parliament in keeping the process transparent was stressed:

The requirement to report to Parliament will contribute to broader accountability and transparency goals, enabling the Parliament as a whole, and thus constituents across the country, to engage annually with how Australian aid is promoting gender equality in partner countries. (...) Annual parliamentary consideration may also contribute to strengthening the gender-responsiveness of the parliament, by strengthening understanding of what this requires and the benefits it delivers.²⁰⁹

CARE Australia also supported the Bill, also emphasising the transparency component:

²⁰⁶ See more: WFD, 'National Human Rights Institutions in the Western Balkans', <https://nhriwb.net/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²⁰⁷ See more: IPU, 'IPU welcomes Canadian funding to advance gender equality in parliament', <https://www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2021-07/ipu-welcomes-canadian-funding-advance-gender-equality-in-parliament>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²⁰⁸ See more: Parliament of Australia, report 'International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015', https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/Gender_Equality_Bill_2015/Report, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²⁰⁹ IWDA's Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade inquiry into International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015 (June 2015).

'This bill will increase transparency around the aid program, enabling the current and future governments, as well as the aid and development sector, to better track, learn from, and improve upon this work.'²¹⁰

Overall, 14 NGOs have submitted their supporting documents to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee of the Australian Senate. Although the project has not been passed, the critical mass of organisations uniting around the topic and keeping gender equality on the agenda of international development policy in Australia was built.

3.3.2.9 Providing statements on the situation of women's and children rights in other countries

Adopting resolutions is the most visible evidence of addressing gender equality issues by national parliaments and interparliamentary bodies. Among various examples of such initiatives, the following can be mentioned:

The **Belgian Parliament's** Committee for External Relations of the House of Representatives had adopted several resolutions on the violation of women's rights in foreign countries, in order to guide national foreign policy on that issue. It has recently tabled a **draft resolution regarding the appointment of a Special Envoy of the Belgian diplomacy for women's and children's rights**.²¹¹

The **PACE** adopted several resolutions concerning women's rights, among others on issues such as **forced marriage in Europe**²¹², **gender-based violence against refugee women**²¹³, **promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment**.²¹⁴

In November 2020 **NATO Parliamentary Assembly** adopted a resolution urging that past security policy pledges on WPS be put into action. The resolution came just after the world marked the 20th anniversary of the adoption by the UN Security Council of Resolution 1325 - a historic milestone that recognised the impact of conflict on women and girls and acknowledged their essential role in ensuring peace and security.²¹⁵

In some cases, finding political support towards women's rights issues in specific countries is difficult, and individual statements or actions taken by groups of parliamentarians may be quicker and more explicit. Therefore, in the context of promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy, actions taken by individual MPs on their own or in a group are very important.

In July 2020, following an announcement stating Poland's intention to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, the **leaders of the OSCE PA's** General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs responded quickly. Chair Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (MP, Cyprus), Vice-Chair Michael Georg Link (MP, Germany), and Rapporteur Kari Henriksen (MP, Norway) issued a statement in which they expressed their concern connected with recent developments in Poland and its possible withdrawal from

²¹⁰ CARE Australia Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade inquiry into International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015 (June 2015).

²¹¹ Response of the Belgian House of Representatives to ECPRD Request No. 4607 Gender Equality in Parliamentary Diplomacy (2021)

²¹² PACE Resolution 2233 (2018)

²¹³ PACE Resolution 2159 (2017)

²¹⁴ PACE Resolution 2274 (2019)

²¹⁵ See more: NATO-PA, 2020 - RESOLUTION 461 - FURTHERING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNSC RESO 1325 AND THE WPS AGENDA <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2020-resolution-461-furthering-implementation-unsco-reso-1325-and-wps-agenda>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

the Istanbul Convention, and stressed that gender equality is crucial for sustainable development and peace.²¹⁶

Swiss MPs are active in filing **interpellations** on women's rights abroad e.g. **on women's shelters for refugees**,²¹⁷ **gender-based development cooperation**,²¹⁸ **strengthening the fight against sexual violence in conflicts**,²¹⁹ **mass sterilizations in Peru**²²⁰ or **implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. WPS**.²²¹ They also pose questions on specific cases of violation of women's rights in other countries, such as the one on the assassination of Marielle Franco, ensuring the protection of minorities in Brazil.²²²

UK parliamentarians are signing **motions** to highlight the disturbing situation of women in different countries all over the world. In past years they raised the issue of **women's rights in Afghanistan**,²²³ **Bahrain**²²⁴ and **Saudi Arabia**.²²⁵

3.3.2.10 Communication activities

Promotion of gender equality abroad can also be performed through traditional public affairs techniques such as media relations and social campaign tools.

Press releases on violations of women's rights are issued by parliamentary press offices, for example the press release on women's rights after the Taliban return to power in Afghanistan, issued by the French Senate.²²⁶ Parliaments and interparliamentary institutions are also using social media and online tools e.g. **PACE online campaign "Not in my parliament"**, initiated by PACE President Lilian Maury-Pasquier with her own Facebook account²²⁷ or Gender Equality Toolkits (Online Portal) for parliamentarians prepared by ParlAmericas.²²⁸

²¹⁶ See more: OSCE, OSCE PA human rights leaders concerned over Poland's announced withdrawal from treaty on violence against women, <https://www.osce.org/parliamentary-assembly/458161>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²¹⁷ See more: the Swiss Parliament, interpellation 'Refuges pour femmes. Stratégie nationale', <https://www.parlament.ch/en/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20134071>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²¹⁸ See more: the Swiss Parliament, interpellation 'Coopération au développement fondée sur le sexe', <https://www.parlament.ch/en/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20143562>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²¹⁹ See more: the Swiss Parliament, interpellation 'Renforcer la lutte contre les violences sexuelles dans les conflits', <https://www.parlament.ch/en/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20183243>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²²⁰ See more: the Swiss Parliament, interpellation 'Stérilisations massives au Pérou', <https://www.parlament.ch/en/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=19993140>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²²¹ See more: the Swiss Parliament, interpellation 'Mise en oeuvre de la résolution No 1325 du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU. Femmes, paix et sécurité', <https://www.parlament.ch/en/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20043053>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²²² See more: the Swiss Parliament, interpellation 'Trois ans après l'assassinat de Marielle Franco, assurer la protection des minorités au Brésil', <https://www.parlament.ch/en/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20211023>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²²³ See more: UK Parliament, 'Women's rights in Afghanistan', <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/58831>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²²⁴ See more: UK Parliament, 'Women's Rights In Bahrain', <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/49930>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²²⁵ See more: UK Parliament, 'Women's Rights In Saudi Arabia', <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/51827>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²²⁶ See more: French Senate, 'Retour des talibans au pouvoir : un coup terrible porté aux droits des femmes en Afghanistan', <http://www.senat.fr/presse/cp20210823.html>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²²⁷ See more: CoE PACE, Not In My Parliament - ending sexual abuse in parliament, <https://www.facebook.com/NotInMyParliament/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²²⁸ See more: ParlTools, 'Gender Equality Tools for Parliamentarians in the Caribbean', <https://parlgendertools.org/en/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

New media are also used as a tool to promote women parliamentarians. **Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians** released a **series of short videos** offering an insight into the lives and work of women in elected office across the Commonwealth to mark (and tag) **#InternationalWomensDay**.²²⁹

One of the powerful social campaign tools are awards. The competitive element, combined with recognition of best projects, leaders, and initiatives create a great story to be told. Such Awards are given by OSCE and NATO PA.

OSCE Gender Equality Champions: Every year the OSCE Secretary General presents Gender Equality Champion awards recognising exceptional achievements by OSCE leaders, individual women and men, teams or projects promoting gender equality. OSCE Gender Equality Champions are nominated early in the year and the awards are presented on or around International Women's Day on March 8.²³⁰ Leadership buy-in is an important condition for the gender transformative actions.

Women for Peace and Security Award 2021: The award, presented for the first time in 2021 by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, with the purpose of honouring a woman who has demonstrated, in the context of political, diplomatic, military, associative and/or academic functions, a particular and recognised commitment to:

- equal participation of women and men in the field of peace and security.
- the prevention of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence and the protection of women in conflict situations.
- and/or the mainstreaming of women's needs and perspectives into relief and recovery initiatives in post-conflict countries.²³¹

3.4 Effectiveness in gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the promotion of gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy is a complex concept and process, situated at the crossroads of feminist foreign policy, gender-sensitive parliaments and parliamentary diplomacy. Its effectiveness depends not only on the country's specific situation and approach adopted, but also on regional and global trends in terms of the equality of women and men, respect for women's and girls' rights, as well as a general approach towards all minorities' rights (in line with the assumption that all forms of discrimination are based on the same structures and, as a consequence, are interconnected). We have been facing a strong gender backlash all around the world in the recent years,²³² with considerable pushback against women's rights and the growing power of transnational movements opposing the so-called 'gender ideology'. As several experts stated, if the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action took place in 2021 instead of 1995, it would definitely be less ambitious and progressive. This disquieting phenomenon may have a twofold influence on the promotion of gender equality in parliaments' external relations: on the one hand, aspects of gender issues have become controversial in various countries, and this fact has to be taken into consideration when promoting gender equality in these countries and selecting priorities that are to be achieved; on the other hand, it is clear that if countries do not put counteracting this gender backlash at the top of their political agendas, in a few years we might have lost a significant part of the progress achieved since 1995.

²²⁹ Find the full video series at: Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, www.cpahq.org/cpahq/iwd, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²³⁰ See more: OSCE, Gender Champion Award, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/gender/480832>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²³¹ See more: NATO-PA, 'Women for Peace and Security Award 2021', <https://www.nato-pa.int/content/women-peace-and-security-award-2021>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²³² UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 'Gender Equality and Gender Backlash', available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/GenderEqualityandBacklash.aspx>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

From the point of view of the EP, this situation also raises the question of how to effectively promote gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy and remain authentic while, at the same time, facing the problem of severe gender backlash in some of its member states.

Interviews conducted with the stakeholders from the second pool of interviewees (external dimension) were aimed at understanding what are the factors that can increase effectiveness of the activities aimed at promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy (success factors) and what are the factors that can hinder them (barriers). The UNDP Guidance Note 'Strategies and good practices in promoting gender equality outcomes in parliaments' has also been used as a source of insights into how to assess the quality and effectiveness of gender equality-focused parliamentary assistance. Among them, the following are especially important in the context of this study:

- designing a framework for promotion of gender equality in parliamentary assistance rather than deploying isolated projects and activities;
- providing a comprehensive resource mobilisation strategy and tool kit at the global level to avoid dispersed financing and uneven split of resources;
- facilitating peer-to-peer exchange between MPs and parliamentary staff rather than only providing access to learning materials;
- expanding the pool of experts knowledgeable both in gender issues and parliamentary practice;
- involving women parliamentarians on the ground and stronger engagement with local CSOs.

Based on the responses from 11 experts and practitioners, the analysis of literature regarding feminist foreign policy²³³ and promotion of gender equality by parliamentary institutions²³⁴, as well as analysis of the practices identified in the section 3.3, the following success factors and barriers were identified.

3.4.1 Success factors

Effective promotion of gender equality values requires continuous **leadership** coming from the highest political and administrative levels, that has a real impact and shapes the daily work of the entire institution. This is related to another important concept in this respect, namely that of **ownership**: the process of gender mainstreaming of the parliament and the further inclusion of gender equality principles in foreign relations depends on political will and the clear communication of this strategy as official. At the same time, however, this top-down approach must be combined with a bottom-up one – one that involves transferring gender equality into the area of the normal functioning of an institution, getting all administration staff involved in the project. The promotion of gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy requires a more holistic approach with a clear indication of what can be expected from parliamentary assistance on gender equality²³⁵. Therefore, it seems essential to start the process by **questioning the status quo of how policies promoting gender equality are designed** within the parliament, and using ideas that everyone knows and can refer to in order to demystify the concept. This first step can lead to a snowballing of creativity of the people implementing this new strategy. It seems

²³³ Thompson L., Clement R., Defining Feminist Foreign Policy, 2019, International Center for Research on Women, <https://www.icrw.org/publications/defining-feminist-foreign-policy/>, accessed on 20 September 2021; Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy. "A feminist foreign policy", available at <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²³⁴ UNDP (2016) The Guidance Note "Strategies and good practices in promoting gender equality outcomes in parliaments", https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/GUIDANCE%20NOTE%20Strategies%20and%20good%20practices%20in%20promoting%20gender%20equality%20outcomes%20in%20parliaments_web.pdf, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²³⁵ UNDP (2016) The Guidance Note "Strategies and good practices in promoting gender equality outcomes in parliaments", https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/GUIDANCE%20NOTE%20Strategies%20and%20good%20practices%20in%20promoting%20gender%20equality%20outcomes%20in%20parliaments_web.pdf, accessed on 20 September 2021.

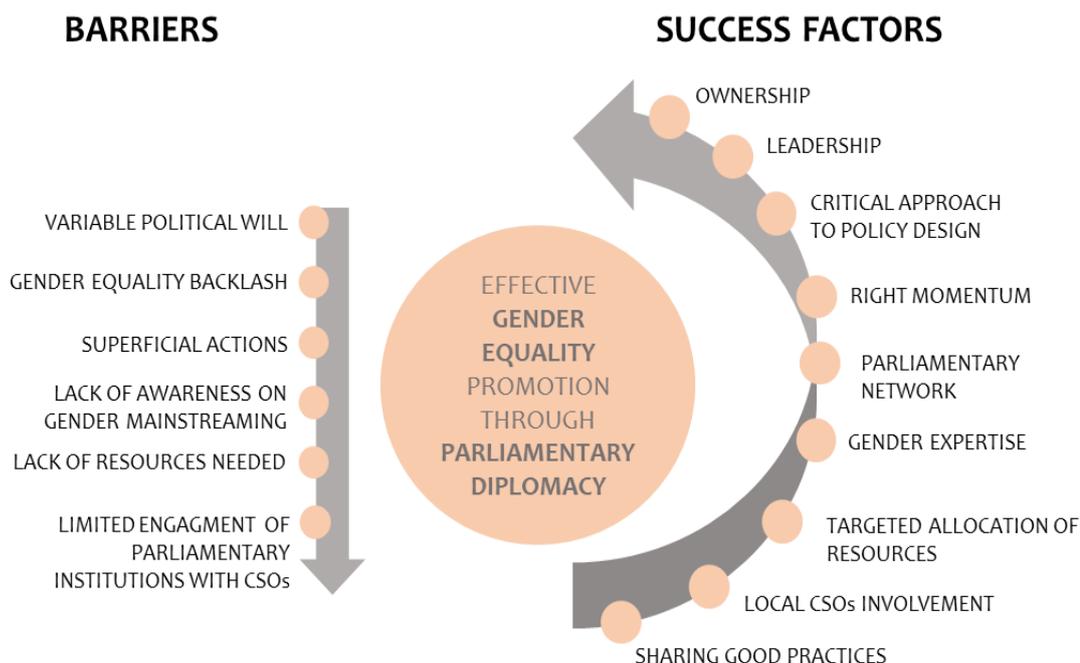
essential to make everyone responsible for the process and hold everyone accountable for its implementation. In the words of one expert, “it should be easy to do and hard to avoid”.

The experience of various countries proves that the so-called **momentum** factor is crucial for the effective inclusion of gender-equality principles in parliamentary diplomacy. There are certain moments in which countries show higher levels of involvement in this process because of the novelty effect (for example, higher levels of engagement in those countries which have recently started adopting the strategy) or because of other goals that might be linked to it (for example, as part of the EU pre-accession strategy). Also, experts consider building a community around the topic – namely, a **parliamentary network** – an essential component, one that is still lacking in the majority of countries.²³⁶ The above-described practices show that Women’s Caucuses are often leading efforts towards promoting gender equality in parliamentary diplomacy. Therefore, it can be said that the existence of active Women Parliamentarians’ Clubs considerably increases the effectiveness of gender equality promotion in external relations.

At this point, it should be emphasised that gender equality is a very specific and specialised field of knowledge, the implementation of which requires the involvement of gender experts with a concrete list of responsibilities and a concrete budget, and whose activity must bring specific results measured by predefined key performance indicators (KPIs). Without solid **gender expertise** and the ability to transmit it through all parliamentary bodies it is hard to build commitment and a strategy for achieving equality between women and men, both internally and in external action. As can be read in the UNDP Guidance Note: “The pool of experts who can be deployed on gender equality parliamentary assistance projects should be expanded”.²³⁷ It is difficult to overestimate the element of **allocation of resources** in this context. This refers to support that might bring NGOs and international organisations into the picture. The latter may provide experts, logistical and organisational skills as well as other forms of help, both in the process of conducting a gender audit and in preparing a gender action plan for a parliament. National NGOs are the best source of knowledge and data on the country, which is why **local CSOs’ involvement** is crucial to designing relevant actions that may bring real change on the ground. They can also act as mediators between parliaments or between a local parliament and an international organisation providing expertise to the process of gender mainstreaming. Involving women from partnering countries is especially important since it has proved to bring effectiveness and recognition to the process of promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy. It comes down to listening to women’s needs and the problems they encounter and, consequently, proposing solutions adapted to the specific context. Promotion of the values described should take the form of presenting **good practices** in achieving wellbeing for everyone and not imposing concrete solutions, because this is exactly the main goal of promoting gender equality in external relations.

²³⁶ According to IPU database, Women’s Caucuses are present in 87 parliaments all over the world. IPU Database of Women’s Caucuses: <http://w3.ipu.org/en/>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

²³⁷ UNDP (2016) The Guidance Note “Strategies and good practices in promoting gender equality outcomes in parliaments”, https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/GUIDANCE%20NOTE%20Strategies%20and%20good%20practices%20in%20promoting%20gender%20equality%20outcomes%20in%20parliaments_web.pdf, accessed on 20 September 2021.



3.4.2 Barriers

The main barrier to the successful promotion of gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy – a factor named by all the experts interviewed for the purposes of this study – is the **non-recognition of the problem and variable political will** among parliamentary leaders; this aspect is essential, as has been already stated, in order to impact the whole functioning of the parliament as an institution and, as a consequence, to shape its external relations. The strong **gender-equality backlash** experienced in many countries all around the globe negatively influences the readiness of various leaders, especially male ones, to include the promotion of gender equality among the priorities of their political agendas. On the one hand, strong opposition to these values in the form of combatting the so-called ‘gender ideology’ might be observed in certain countries, while on the other hand, not perceiving gender equality as an important element of the political agenda can lead to **fake actions** which do not bring any substantial change. The latter is mainly the result of the lack of will for taking proactive gender initiatives, especially on the part of male political leaders, as well as a **lack of awareness** among MPs and parliamentary staff on how to mainstream gender equality in the parliamentary agenda. It is also combined with the lack of awareness of the fact that gender mainstreaming is needed the most where the so-called ‘hard power’ is held and, consequently, where introducing gender equality values is the hardest because it challenges existing power structures. As has already been mentioned, gender equality is a specialised field of knowledge which requires expertise and a dedicated budget for its implementation. The **lack of resources** for the promotion of gender equality is another obstacle mentioned by all the experts. This refers not only to resources for specific parliamentary staff, but also for dedicated research and data collection. The role of civil society, listed as a crucial success factor for the effective promotion of gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy, is also an important issue to include in the list of barriers. Various experts taking part in this study highlighted the need to engage local CSOs, especially those from third countries, in parliamentary efforts towards promoting gender equality. Interviewees state that currently there is still **room for improvement** at the level of **CSO-parliamentarian engagement**. The same conclusion can be drawn from the analysis of practices presented in section 3.3., where only a few included active involvement of local non-governmental organisations.

The global pandemic has brought additional obstacles to the advancement of gender equality in various parts of the world. The impact of a crisis is never gender neutral and the pandemic’s impact on women and

girls has been especially severe.²³⁸ Already existing gaps have grown wider, and the effects of COVID-19 are still difficult to estimate. However, as the experts stated, this situation may also be seen as an opportunity in terms of gender equality – an opportunity for a more sustainable reconstruction process including a strong gender perspective.

Based on the research performed with external stakeholders, desk research including literature on promotion of gender equality in external action, analysis of practices gathered in section 3.3., and success factors and barriers identified within the project, the following criteria for assessing the effectiveness in gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy were developed:

1. AUTHENTICITY

Guaranteeing that the actions are in line with one's internal rules and principles, which avoids tokenism.

The questions to be answered when assessing this criterion:

- Has our parliament/parliamentary body achieved objectives we want another parliament to reach?
- Is our parliament/parliamentary body working in line with principles against which it is holding the executive branch accountable?
- Are all people involved in the process aware of the gender objectives standing behind the action?
- Which best practices of our parliament/parliamentary body might be promoted outside within this action?

2. CO-CREATION

Ensuring that the actions are consulted on with people who will be implementing them, and that it is not about preaching but maintaining dialogue with other countries while sharing good practices and experience.

The questions to be answered when assessing this criterion:

- Have all key external stakeholders been engaged in designing the action/tools?
- Was there enough room for all parties to share their ideas and experiences around the topic covered by the action/tools?
- What good practices from the state and non-state actors involved in the process might be used to enhance the implementation of the action proposed by our parliament/parliamentary body?
- How will feedback be gathered from the stakeholders implementing the action/using the tools?

3. CONTEXTUALISATION

Being context-specific when designing tools for gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy – challenges look different in different parts of the world and, in order to be transformative, one always has to look at what is most transformative in a specific context.

The questions to be answered when assessing this criterion:

- Are the actions/tools proposed feasible in the socio-cultural milieu of the country/region where they will be implemented?

²³⁸ See more: UN WOMEN, 'From insights to action: Gender equality in the wake of COVID-19', <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

- Were any local CSOs consulted in the process of designing the actions?
- Were experts specialising in gender and the situation in the region consulted at the time of launching the diplomatic action?
- How will this action work in the local context of gender dynamics?

4. PRAGMATISM

Being aware of what approaches are possible in certain contexts and, consequently, being pragmatic when planning concrete intervention. A step in the right direction, even a small one, is always better than deciding not to include gender equality issues in parliamentary diplomacy at all.

The questions to be answered when assessing this criterion:

- Does this action tackle the most pressing gender issue in the country/region to be implemented?
- Does the action require a lot of engagement of local stakeholders? Is it easy to avoid?
- Were enough resources (human, financial, infrastructure) allocated to perform the action or produce a tool? Were the best results achieved with those resources?
- How will the monitoring and evaluation of the action/tool look and how much effort will it require from the parliament/parliamentary body and potential counterparts (if involved in implementing the action)?

5. JOINT VENTURE

Bearing in mind that promoting gender equality, both within a concrete institution and in external relations, requires support from many actors: it is a **JOINT VENTURE** of the whole institution, where everybody should be involved in order to achieve real results.

The questions to be answered when assessing this criterion:

- Do all people involved in the process possess the gender knowledge required to be able to implement the action correctly?
- Have all necessary internal stakeholders been engaged in designing the action/tool?
- Is everybody involved in the diplomatic action in the particular country/region aware of the endeavours to promote gender equality, and are they contributing to them to certain extent?

The criteria identified above will be utilised in Sections 4 and 5 to evaluate the EP's institutional framework and political practice in the area of gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy. This will be done by highlighting how a particular practice does or does not adhere to these criteria, thereby demonstrating its advantages and/or disadvantages as well as the potential scope for improvement. The criteria also inform our policy recommendations. While the criteria are not referenced in each policy recommendation, they are indeed explicitly mentioned to add weight to the proposal being made.

4 Institutional framework and political practice of gender equality promotion through EP parliamentary diplomacy

This section addresses the first objective of the study, aiming to answer the question of the nature, content and functioning of the current institutional framework for gender equality promotion through EP parliamentary diplomacy.

The following subsections present the institutional framework (subsection 4.1) laid down in formal legal documents adopted by the EP as a whole (e.g. the RoP) and in more policy-oriented documents adopted by the competent bodies within the EP (e.g. implementing provisions, gender action plans and roadmaps). The focus of the analysis then shifts to the pronouncements and activities (e.g. resolutions, missions, public events, external expertise) of the key EP bodies relevant for the conduct of parliamentary diplomacy (subsection 4.2): standing committees and subcommittees in charge of gender equality and external policies (FEMM, AFET, SEDE, DROI, DEVE and INTA); the DEG; and inter-parliamentary delegations. Since the primary focus of the present study is on inter-parliamentary delegations, the empirical material on the committees, subcommittees and the DEG which is of direct relevance to the case studies is presented in the subsection on the delegations (within the parts devoted to the case studies). This is done in order to demonstrate the complementarity between the activities of the different EP bodies in line with the criterion of joint venture. Other important gender equality actors within the EP are also mentioned in order to provide context, because although their work predominantly concentrates on gender equality promotion in internal EU affairs, this can be highly relevant for external relations. These actors are the GMN, gathering MEPs who have been appointed by each committee/subcommittee to focus on gender mainstreaming, and the High Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity (HLG), which is chaired by the EP Vice-President for gender equality and diversity and whose key tasks have been to support equal gender representation in the EP administration and to lead the drafting of the EP's gender action plan and roadmap (see below 1.1.3)..

4.1 Legal and policy framework

4.1.1 Rules of procedure

The overview below outlines two aspects of the EP's RoP²³⁹ which are particularly relevant to this study: one concerns the contexts in which the RoP mentions gender (A) and the other the manner in which EP inter-parliamentary delegations and their activities are regulated (B). These aspects are outlined below.

4.1.1.1 Gender

The RoP mention gender in six contexts: five times in general and once with respect to delegations.

First, Rule 15(2) RoP requires "an overall fair representation of political views, as well as gender and geographical balance" to be ensured when electing the President, Vice-Presidents and Quaestors of the EP.

Second, Rule 213 RoP demands that diversity be reflected in the composition of each committee's bureau. Particularly, "it shall not be permissible to have an all male or all female bureau, or for all of the Vice-Chairs to come from the same Member State".

Third, Rule 239 RoP addresses gender mainstreaming as follows: "The Bureau shall adopt a gender action plan aimed at incorporating a gender perspective in all Parliament's activities, at all levels and all stages. The gender action plan shall be monitored bi-annually and reviewed at least every five years".

²³⁹ EP, Rules of Procedure, 9th parliamentary term, January 2021.

Fourth, Annex VI RoP, which regulates the powers and responsibilities of standing committees, refers to gender and women's rights in relation to the competences of FEMM.

Fifth, gender is also mentioned in Article 1(2) of the Annex 7 RoP, which regulates the approval of the European Commission and monitoring of commitments made during the hearings. This requires that, during this approval procedure, "Parliament shall have particular regard to gender balance".

Delegations

In Rules 223-225 RoP, which address inter-parliamentary delegations, gender is one of the relevant factors in their establishment. Parliament as a whole decides on the setting up of delegations, their nature and the number of members in light of the delegations' duties. Parliament acts on a proposal from the Conference of Presidents, which is composed of the EP President and chairs of political groups.²⁴⁰ Members of delegations are appointed by political groups and the non-attached MEPs for the duration of the parliamentary term. Importantly, it is explicitly required in Rule 223(2) RoP that in appointing delegation members:

"The political groups shall ensure as far as possible that Member States, political views and *gender* are fairly represented. It shall not be permissible for more than one third of the members of a delegation to have the same nationality. [...]"²⁴¹

Furthermore, Rule 223 RoP, read in conjunction with Rule 213 RoP, requires that "[t]he diversity of Parliament must be reflected in the composition of the bureau" of each delegation and that "it shall not be permissible to have an all male or all female bureau or for all of the Vice-Chairs to come from the same Member State".

Rule 223(6) RoP also establishes the duty of delegation chairs to "regularly report back to the committee responsible for foreign affairs on the activities of the delegation". This creates a strong formal relationship between delegations and the AFET committee. Rule 223(7) establishes mutual hearing rights between delegations and all standing committees. Specifically, delegation chairs "shall be given an opportunity to be heard by a committee when an item on the agenda touches on the delegation's area of responsibility". Similarly, committee chairs and rapporteurs have the right to be heard by a delegation where one of the latter's meetings addresses issues of interest to the committee.

The provisions of Rule 224 RoP enable the establishment of joint parliamentary committees (JPCs) with the parliaments of states which are associated or negotiating accession to the Union. The general responsibilities of the JPCs are defined by the Parliament in accordance with the EU agreements with the third countries concerned. The procedures of the JPCs are governed by these agreements, which they must be based on the principle of parity between the EP's and the partner country's delegation. JPCs "may formulate recommendations for the parliaments involved", and where this is done, these recommendations "shall be referred to the committee responsible", which itself "shall put forward proposals on the action to be taken". JPCs have their own RoP, which, on the EP's side, must be approved by the Bureau of the EP.

Finally, the RoP envisage cooperation between the EP and the PACE, the arrangements for which are to be decided between the EP's Conference of Presidents and the competent authorities of PACE. In particular, Rule 225(1) RoP specifies that "Parliament's bodies, and in particular its committees, shall cooperate with their counterparts at the PACE in fields of mutual interest, with the aim in particular of improving the efficiency of their work and avoiding duplication of effort". The RoP therefore place specific emphasis on

²⁴⁰ One representative of the non-attached MEPs has a non-voting seat on the Conference of Presidents.

²⁴¹ Emphasis added.

inter-committee cooperation in EP-PACE relations. EP-PACE cooperation was established in 2011 in the form of the Joint Informal Body pursuant to a 2010 EP resolution to this effect.²⁴² The two parliamentary institutions focus on the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights and on the modalities of the EP's future participation in the sessions of PACE.²⁴³ The strengthening of this bilateral relationship was further emphasised at a hearing organised by the PACE Political Affairs Committee in March 2021.²⁴⁴

4.1.2 Conference of Presidents decisions

The closer operation of delegations is regulated by means of implementing provisions adopted in the form of decisions adopted by the Conference of Presidents of the EP.²⁴⁵ Two such decisions are particularly relevant for parliamentary diplomacy: one which regulates delegations and missions abroad, and another which regulates DEG activities. While neither decision addresses gender, the latter is encompassed in both decisions by the values of human rights and democracy. However, gender equality should be singled out as a standalone value to give it greater prominence and facilitate gender mainstreaming in parliamentary diplomacy. It is insufficient to say that gender equality falls under broader EU values, as even Article 2 TEU distinguishes "equality" as a value separate from "human rights" and "democracy", and lists "equality between women and men" as a value common to the member states. Explicitly mentioning gender equality in these decisions would help to further the authenticity principle in parliamentary diplomacy.

4.1.2.1 Implementing provisions on delegations and missions abroad²⁴⁶

Referred to as "the Bible of the delegations" by one of the interviewees, the 2015 Decision on delegations and missions abroad lays down the principles, powers and overall functioning of delegations.

Regarding the *principles*, the delegations' key objective is to "maintain and develop Parliament's international contacts and contribute to enhancing the role and visibility of the EU in the world" (Article 3(1)), while aiming to foster "wherever possible and appropriate, the parliamentary dimension of international relations" (Article 3(3)). The former highlights that EP parliamentary diplomacy is not an entirely autonomous activity, but that it pursues the wider goal of increasing the profile of the entire EU abroad. In doing so, the EP should not only enhance contacts with the parliaments of the EU's traditional partners, but also contribute to the promotion of founding EU values in third countries. While delegations are invited to closely cooperate with all relevant EP bodies, their link with committees is emphasised by obliging delegations to make a "valuable contribution" to the work of standing committees through the provision, in the form of letters of all relevant information that results from inter-parliamentary meetings (Article 3(5)).

The standing delegations' powers (Article 4) focus on gathering and systematically providing material to committees and EP bodies on:

²⁴² EP, Resolution of 19 May 2010 on the institutional aspects of the accession of the European Union to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, doc. no. P7_TA(2010)0184, point 34.

²⁴³ Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe–European Parliament Joint Informal Body, 'Synopsis of the meeting held in Paris on 15 June 2011', doc. no. AS/Bur/AH EP PACE (2011) 04, 17 June 2011. See also: Gragl, Paul. 'Agreement on the Accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights', in Steve Peers et al. (eds), *The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights: A Commentary* (Hart Publishing 2014) 1727-1824, at 1800.

²⁴⁴ PACE, 'Closer relations PACE/EP: the parliamentary contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe', 30 March 2021, <https://pace.coe.int/en/news/8236/closer-relations-between-pace-and-the-european-parliament-the-parliamentary-contribution-to-the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe->, accessed on 24 July 2021.

²⁴⁵ Rule 223(5) RoP.

²⁴⁶ Conference of Presidents, Decision on the implementing provisions governing the work of delegations and missions outside the European Union, doc. no. PE 422.560/CPG, 29 October 2015.

- the state of bilateral inter-parliamentary relations;
- human rights, the protection of minorities and the promotion of democratic values, in the general context of EU policy in this area and in accordance with the positions adopted by Parliament;
- the state of bilateral political, economic, financial and social relations;
- the assessment of international agreements concluded between the EU and third countries;
- the external aspects of Union policies on the internal market;
- democratic scrutiny of the implementation of the EU's external funding instruments, including the assessment of the effectiveness, by virtue of their impact on the ground, of Union projects funded from the Union budget;
- the implementation of recommendations made in the course of election observation missions, in close cooperation with the parliamentary committees responsible. The standing inter-parliamentary delegations shall also make their expertise available to election observation missions.

This list provides a solid basis for delegations' engagement in parliamentary diplomacy as it concerns both internal and external aspects of EU action. In particular, the scrutiny of EU international agreements and of the implementation of EU-funded projects abroad could enable delegations to further gender equality in international relations. The fact that many EU international agreements and EU funding instruments include gender-related provisions gives the Union a high degree of leverage in the partner countries or regions.

Delegations should furthermore contribute to the attainment of the EP's political and legislative priorities and represent the positions adopted by the plenary (e.g. in resolutions). The delegations should also take into account the political positions of the committees, which the latter should provide in the form of letters when requested by delegation chairs (Article 19(1)). Joint meetings of committees and delegations are 'strongly encouraged' in order to intensify cooperation on legislative and political files, exchange expertise and ensure the best use of resources (Article 19(5)). The provisions on synergies between delegations and other EP bodies help to implement the principles of joint venture and authenticity in the conduct of parliamentary diplomacy.

All inter-parliamentary meetings require authorisation (Articles 7-8) from the Conference of Presidents, based on a six-month programme covering all standing delegations. The programme is drafted by the Conference of Delegation Chairs, in which the chairs of AFET, DEVE and INTA committees may participate (Article 20(2)). There is a limitation to one inter-parliamentary meeting per delegation per year, unless an EU international agreement or the rules of an IPI stipulate otherwise. The programme should be based on an 'issue-oriented agenda', thereby enabling delegations to include gender equality as an important action point in a specific region. Committee rapporteur(s) should systematically be invited to participate in delegation missions outside the Parliament's places of work (Article 12(3)). Other than authorised MEPs, only approved officials of the EP Secretariat and officially notified members of staff of each of the political groups represented on the delegation, may join a mission abroad (Article 13). MEPs' assistants are not allowed to accompany a delegation, while officials of other EU institutions or agencies may do so if the delegation chair agrees.

The Conference of Presidents may authorise *ad hoc* missions by both delegations and committees in order to respond to major political or legislative events (Articles 5(3) and 21).

If it becomes necessary to act urgently, Rule 144(1) RoP states that "a committee, an inter-parliamentary delegation, a political group or MEPs reaching at least the low threshold may ask the President in writing for a debate to be held on an urgent case of a breach of human rights, democracy and the rule of law". This

debate may result in the adoption of urgency resolution, which can be particularly important for defending women's rights.

With respect to media relations (Article 15), only the delegation chair is entitled to sign joint statements and participate in press conferences, making sure not to contradict the views expressed in EP resolutions. Delegation chairs may only speak for the delegation and not for the entire Parliament.

Following inter-parliamentary meetings (Article 18), delegation chairs are obliged, within one month, to submit a report to the chairs of AFET, DEVE and any other committee or subcommittee concerned, along with a supplementary oral statement where needed. Importantly, the Decision enables such reports to outline proposals for follow-up action which the delegation considers appropriate. In addition, delegation chairs may be invited to give a statement to the Plenary on the outcome of an inter-parliamentary meeting. These reporting requirements are of an ex post nature. It would be advantageous to foresee a right for delegations to issue publicly available 'delegation reports', which would be unrelated to post-mission reporting. These delegation reports would be officially submitted to committees and subcommittees and feed into their debates, thus helping to stimulate delegations' ex ante involvement, increase their institutional status, and contribute to greater joint venture in EP parliamentary diplomacy.²⁴⁷

4.1.2.2 Implementing provisions on DEG activities²⁴⁸

The Decision specifies that the EP's DEG²⁴⁹ is responsible for election observation and democracy support. Democracy support encompasses four types of activity (Article 1):

- pre-election activities and the continued follow-up of elections observed;
- support for parliamentary democracy, including capacity-building for the members and staff of third country parliaments;
- activities in connection with the Sakharov Prize Network and human rights-related actions; and
- parliamentary mediation, facilitation and dialogue activities.

Democracy support activities are implemented in accordance with an annual work programme, which requires endorsement by the Conference of Presidents (Article 2). This programme should focus on maximum six priority countries and regions and a limited number of thematic activities concerning the Sakharov Prize and the Sakharov Prize Network, human rights, mediation and dialogue, and pre-election and post-election activities. A lead MEP is appointed for each priority country or region, and one may also be appointed for the thematic activities. Outgoing missions, the organisation of high-level conferences to be held on the EP's premises, mandates for MEPs to act as envoys or mediators, and the establishment of a Jean Monnet dialogue with a third country can be authorised by the Conference of Presidents on request by the DEG Co-Chairs.²⁵⁰

Of particular importance for this study are the three non-electoral components of the DEG activities.

The **capacity-building activities** (Article 4) with third country parliaments primarily focus on parliamentarians and staff from neighbourhood and pre-accession countries, with a particular emphasis

²⁴⁷ We do not envisage a right for delegations to adopt 'own-initiative reports' that could lead to the adoption of resolutions because this would require resources which delegations do not possess and because the adoption of such reports could lead to inconsistencies with the reports adopted by committees and subcommittees.

²⁴⁸ Conference of Presidents, Decision on the implementing provisions on democracy support and election observation activities, doc. no. PE 422.562/CPG, 7 February 2019.

²⁴⁹ The DEG is composed of 15 members: EP Vice-President(s) with responsibilities linked to the mandate of the Group and the Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) as ex officio members; the Chairs of the AFET and DEVE committees as Co-Chairs of the Group; the Chair of the Conference of Delegation Chairs; and the remaining members as decided by the Conference of Presidents taking into account the need to reflect the composition of the Parliament.

²⁵⁰ The request can be an urgent in the case of the latter two requests.

on the Western Balkans. These activities include study visits, fellowships, conferences and seminars aimed at exchanging parliamentary best practice. Regarding **human rights** (Article 5), the DEG supports and monitors numerous actions (e.g. awareness raising events, helping human rights defenders, capacity-building activities for parliaments and civil society) and coordinates the Sakharov Prize Network.

Activities concerning **mediation, facilitation and dialogue** (Article 6) aim to prevent conflict, develop a political culture of dialogue and foster consensus-building. These activities include supporting MEPs envoys or mediators, training third country parliamentarians, and organising the Young Political Leaders programme and Jean Monnet Dialogues for peace and democracy. The latter Dialogues seek to facilitate discussions among the political stakeholders of a third country through preparatory activities, focused meetings, and follow-up, enabling the participants to build consensus and resolve concrete issues.

The DEG activities are core to parliamentary diplomacy. They complement the diplomatic work of committees, subcommittees and delegations by adopting a hands-on approach to capacity-building and training, by helping the EP to act as a moral advocate abroad, and by supporting human rights activism and women's political empowerment. Cooperation with MPs, political parties, and civil society representatives abroad contributes to advancing the principle of co-creation in EP parliamentary diplomacy.

4.1.3 EP Gender Action Plan and Roadmap

In July 2020, the EP Bureau adopted a Parliament-wide Gender Action Plan²⁵¹ and in April 2021 a Roadmap for its implementation, based on proposals by the EP's High-Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity, chaired by Vice-President Papadimoulis.²⁵² Although neither document is publicly available, their contents are extensively presented in an European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) Study.²⁵³ This subsection focuses on the roadmap because it provides concrete action points, and aims to summarise only those that are aimed at improving the gender dimension of parliamentary diplomacy.

The Roadmap foresees two sets of milestones, one for 2021 and another for 2022. The milestones address both the political and administrative structures of the Parliament.²⁵⁴

The milestones are accompanied by progress monitoring indicators through which to measure their attainment. These indicators mostly rely on statistical analysis (e.g. absolute numbers and proportions of different activities), gender distribution of roles (e.g. in internal EP bodies), and the completion of the tasks set (e.g. the production of reports, recommendations or guidelines).

In terms of contents, the Roadmap's milestones broadly address three key issues: membership, expertise and intra-institutional collaboration.

Membership milestones require that, when appointing the leadership of committees and delegations, candidates from both genders should be considered early on in the constitutive process in order to improve gender balance in these roles as well as to avoid gender equality being perceived as an afterthought or as a matter of tokenism. In this regard, committees and delegations are to provide annual statistics on gender balance, including in their secretariats, and include them in their gender action plans.

Expertise milestones state that, when organising hearings, conferences and workshops, committees and delegations should ensure that panels are gender-balanced and include gender equality experts to the extent that this is possible. They should also prepare yearly reports on the composition of such panels and

²⁵¹ EP Bureau, doc. no. PE 650.297/BUR (internal).

²⁵² EP Bureau, doc. no. PE 658.028/BUR, PE 692.028/BUR (internal).

²⁵³ EPRS, Study 'Gender Mainstreaming in the European Parliament', doc. no. PE 694.216, September 2021.

²⁵⁴ The milestones to be achieved by EP administrative structures do not specifically address parliamentary diplomacy, although some administrative aspects are covered by the milestones addressed at EP political structures.

on the gender balance of the authors of the documents produced, disaggregated by policy area. Similarly, where external expertise is requested by committees and delegations, DGs are to ensure that a fair proportion of the authors of such expertise are of the under-represented gender. DGs are furthermore tasked with coordinating trainings for MEPs and staff in gender mainstreaming in legislative, non-legislative and budgetary procedures.

Intra-institutional collaboration milestones call for greater interaction and cooperation between committees, delegations and their secretariats, on the one hand, and specialised gender equality actors within the EP (GMN, HLG and FEMM), on the other hand. The latter actors are invited to provide guidance, review existing practices, and propose solutions for improvement regarding the imbalances identified. The GMN, for instance, is requested to deepen collaboration with committee and delegation secretariats in terms of proposing gender equality initiatives, setting and exchanging benchmarks for best practices, and monitoring progress. Guides for gender budgeting ought to be developed by the relevant committees (BUDG, CONT and FEMM), including an annual gender impact assessment of the EU budget. DGs are requested to explore ways to increase the visibility of EP activities on gender issues, including not only legislative work but also events organised by committees and delegations.

In relation to progress monitoring indicators, three are specifically relevant for parliamentary diplomacy: a) the proportion of members, APAs, group staff, and staff in committee and delegation secretariats who have completed training on gender mainstreaming; (b) gender distribution among full and substitute members, chairs, bureau members, coordinators, and rapporteurs in committees and delegations, as well as in missions; and (c) gender distribution among authors of external expertise requested by committees and delegations.

4.2 Political practice of gender equality promotion through institutional bodies of the EP

4.2.1 Gender equality promotion through standing committees and subcommittees

Standing committees and subcommittees of the EP provide a multifarious contribution to gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy: (a) adopting reports, opinions and motions for resolutions; (b) raising awareness through committee debates and statements; (c) sending missions abroad beyond the EU (physically but also virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic); (d) organising joint committee meetings with counterparts from third country parliaments (inter-parliamentary committee meetings) and joint meetings of EP committees and EP delegations (intra-EP joint meetings); and (e) coordinating and overseeing the work of delegations. All committees and subcommittees in charge of external relations have gender action plans, which define measures to mainstream women's rights and gender equality issues throughout their activities.²⁵⁵ While no implementation reports are publicly available, some gender focal points have been active on monitoring the Plan and collecting data, as was the case in DROI in the 8th legislature.

In cooperation with the delegations, the committees also use their legislative, budgetary and scrutiny functions to promote the mainstreaming of gender equality in the external financing instruments. This has again become visible in the EP position on the Global Europe Instrument²⁵⁶. This dimension will not be

²⁵⁵ FEMM, 'Gender Mainstreaming', available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/gender-mainstreaming/product-details/20160602CDT00721>, accessed on 25 October 2021.

²⁵⁶ EP, Legislative Observatory, 'Neighbourhood, development and international cooperation instrument 2021-2027' (2018/0243(COD)), available at [https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2018/0243\(COD\)&l=en](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2018/0243(COD)&l=en), accessed on 9 November 2021

further analysed here, not least because much of the scrutiny work of external financing instruments is taking place in camera. Gender mainstreaming in the work of the external relations committees is also ensured by FEMM through amendments to relevant reports, which, according to a previous study, have been taken over by AFET to a significant extent.²⁵⁷

The following subsections focus on two aspects. First, we present the most significant contributions of EP committees and subcommittees to gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy. Although adopted by the plenary, EP resolutions are presented here because, other than those initiated by political groups, they are often rooted in reports and opinions by a lead or associated committee. This way of presentation also helps to link the gender-focused EP resolutions in the area of EU external relations with the competence remit of the committees and subcommittees studied. The committees and subcommittees analysed below are FEMM, AFET, SEDE, DROI, DEVE and INTA. Activities and missions relevant to the three case studies (Saudi Arabia, Serbia, EuroLat) are analysed in the next section, so as to demonstrate complementarity between the work of committees and delegations in the spirit of joint venture. Second, we provide the data on the gender composition of the meetings held by committees and subcommittees in charge of external relations in the previous legislative term (2014-2019).

4.2.1.1 FEMM

Set up in 1984, FEMM is critical to gender equality promotion and gender mainstreaming across EP activities and policy areas. While FEMM's principal focus is on intra-EU affairs, the RoP (Annex VI.XIX) entrusts the committee with two externally-facing tasks: "the promotion of women's rights in third countries" and "the follow-up and implementation of international agreements and conventions involving the rights of women". While the former task is fulfilled by numerous missions exemplified below, a salient recent example of the latter task is illustrated by the joint press statement by Chairs of FEMM and LIBE strongly condemning Poland's intention to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention.²⁵⁸

FEMM's work has had a significant impact on parliamentary diplomacy through the initiation of politically influential **resolutions**. One recognisable category of FEMM-led resolutions is those on gender mainstreaming. In 2003, one such resolution broke new ground by setting in motion a number of important developments.²⁵⁹

First, it called for the establishment of a High-Level Group on Gender Equality. This was accomplished in 2004, when the EP Bureau created this Group as one of its working groups.²⁶⁰ The Group was expanded in 2007 to include diversity. The **High-Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity** is chaired by the EP Vice-President with responsibilities for gender equality and diversity, and closely cooperates with the Conference of Presidents, the Conference of Committee Chairs, the Conference of Delegation Chairs and the Chair of FEMM.²⁶¹

Second, it brought externally-focused activities of the EP under the gender mainstreaming umbrella by requiring a gender perspective to be integrated into the work of committees and delegations. In addition, gender balance was to be achieved by increasing the representation of women on EP governing bodies, specifically mentioning the bureaus of committees and delegations and the composition of delegations and missions abroad (e.g. election observation missions).

Third, it devised guidelines for the concrete implementation of gender mainstreaming commitments in the work of committees and delegations. Each committee and delegation was to: *appoint* a member

²⁵⁷ EP, Study 'Updating of the Study on Gender Mainstreaming in Committees and Delegations of the European Parliament', doc. No. PE 608.850, December 2018, at 42.

²⁵⁸ Press release, 'Poland's planned withdrawal from Istanbul Convention criticised by leading MEPs', 30 July 2020.

²⁵⁹ EP, Resolution of 13 March 2003 on gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament, doc no. P5_TA(2003)0098.

²⁶⁰ EP Bureau, Minutes of the meeting of Wednesday, 25 February 2004, doc no. PE-5/BUR/PV/2004-04, at 8.

²⁶¹ EP, Study 'Gender Mainstreaming in Committees and Delegations of the European Parliament', March 2014, at 37.

responsible for gender mainstreaming (hereinafter: gender focal points); *prioritise* areas or subjects where gender mainstreaming could be relevant; perform an *annual assessment* of the activities in the field of gender mainstreaming; and receive *assistance* in these tasks from secretariat members who have received appropriate training.

Fourth, it underlined the importance of political parties in realising gender mainstreaming, and called for a discussion on the mainstreaming of gender in political groups.

As a direct consequence of this Resolution, each committee was to appoint one of its members to be responsible for gender mainstreaming. Since 2009, these designated members have begun meeting in the form of a newly created **GMN**, which is led by the chair of FEMM. Although the GMN was initially composed of committee chairs and vice-chairs, the Network nowadays gathers members whom each committee appoints regardless of their status within the committee. During the 8th legislative term, delegations started appointing their own members responsible for gender mainstreaming (known as gender focal points), but they are not part of the GMN as such. Instead, the FEMM chair invites the Conference of Delegation Chairs to appoint one member and one substitute member to represent all of the EP's inter-parliamentary delegations. While all committees have thus far appointed their gender focal points, several delegations are yet to do so.²⁶² Yet, the delegations' gender focal points and the GMN started intensifying their cooperation, as agreed between the FEMM Chair and the Chair of the Conference of Delegation Chairs in September 2020,²⁶³ and as evidenced by their joint meeting of 15 March 2021, organised by means of remote participation. A separate GMN was created for administrators in committee secretariats.

Following the gender mainstreaming resolutions of 2007,²⁶⁴ 2009,²⁶⁵ 2011²⁶⁶ and 2016,²⁶⁷ the latest such resolution was adopted in January 2019²⁶⁸ while the next one is currently in the pipeline.²⁶⁹ The 2019 resolution notes that female representation in key EP political and administrative positions remains low, and that the lack of intra-institutional coherence and coordination on gender equality persists. Importantly, while welcoming the wide adoption of gender action plans by committees, the resolution regrets their heterogeneity and lack of implementation. To address this, the MEPs called for a common gender action plan for the EP, which, as seen above, has been adopted. Another drawback identified was the absence of structured cooperation on gender mainstreaming with other institutional partners, such as the Commission, the Council and the EIGE. The MEPs also emphasised the significance of ensuring gender-balanced composition within committees and delegations. On budgeting, the resolution expresses concern that "gender equality objectives are not explicitly stated in Parliament budget documents nor taken into account at all stages of the budget process".²⁷⁰

²⁶² According to the latest available document, which is a list of members responsible for gender and diversity per delegation, compiled by the Conference of Delegation Chairs on 8 March 2021 (on file with the author), a total of nine delegations are yet to appoint their gender focal points.

²⁶³ Conference of Delegation Chairs, Minutes of the meeting of 22 September 2020, doc. no. CPDE_PV(2020)0922_1, at 2.

²⁶⁴ EP, Resolution of 18 January 2007 on gender mainstreaming in the work of the committees, doc. no. P6_TA(2007)0010. This noted that 'no committee has laid down any practical objectives for implementing a mainstreaming strategy' (Recital J).

²⁶⁵ EP, Resolution of 22 April 2009 on gender mainstreaming in the work of its committees and delegations, P6_TA(2009)0240. By this time, only four committees and subcommittees had adopted a gender action plan or a gender mainstreaming strategy (AFET, SEDE, REGI and PECH). See also: EP, Resolution of 7 May 2009 on gender mainstreaming in EU external relations and peace-building/nation-building, doc. no. P6_TA(2009)0372.

²⁶⁶ EP, Resolution of 17 November 2011 on gender mainstreaming in the work of the European Parliament, doc. no. P7_TA(2011)0515.

²⁶⁷ EP, Resolution of 8 March 2016 on gender mainstreaming in the work of the European Parliament, doc. no. P8_TA(2016)0072

²⁶⁸ EP, Resolution of 15 January 2019 on gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament, doc. no. P8_TA(2019)0010.

²⁶⁹ FEMM, Draft report on gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament—annual report 2020', doc. no. 2021/2039(INI), 22 September 2021.

²⁷⁰ Point 45 thereof.

Other FEMM-led resolutions also made significant contributions to gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy. May 2018 saw the adoption of a resolution, co-led by FEMM and DEVE, which encouraged delegations to be proactive in their work with partner countries. MEPs specifically requested delegations to “systematically enquire about gender programming, the results of gender analysis, and work on promoting gender equality as well as women’s empowerment, and to include meetings with women’s organisations in their mission programmes”.²⁷¹

FEMM’s flagship resolution, for which AFET provided an opinion, is the Resolution on gender equality in EU foreign and security policy, adopted in October 2020.²⁷² It holds that gender equality should be the guiding principle in all EU external action. This is to be achieved through a gender-transformative approach, a feminist foreign and security policy, better gender mainstreaming and an intersectional perspective. The MEPs called on the Commission to implement a values-based EU trade policy, emphasising that all EU trade and investment agreements should be gender mainstreamed, that gender impacts of such agreements should be analysed through ex ante and ex post impact assessments, and that gender chapters should be included in future agreements, taking cues from the modernised EU-Chile Association Agreement. The resolution also warns that arms exports must not be used for committing gender-based violence. Institutionally, apart from welcoming the growth of the network of gender focal points, MEPs also underlined the importance of promoting gender equality “through Parliament’s relations with third countries” and “in all activities of the delegations, including during official parliamentary meetings with third countries”.²⁷³ This shows a holistic approach to gender equality in EP parliamentary diplomacy.

Shortly thereafter, a joint approach was again demonstrated in a meeting of FEMM, AFET and DEVE on 3 December 2020 for the purposes of the presentation of GAP III by Josep Borrell, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission and Jutta Urpilainen, Commissioner for International Partnerships. The EP report and resolution on GAP III are currently being co-led by DEVE and FEMM, with AFET, INTA and BUDG acting as opinion-giving committees.²⁷⁴

In January 2021, a FEMM-initiated resolution assessing the Commission’s Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 was adopted. It stressed the need for coherence and mutual reinforcement between the EU’s internal and external policies and the importance of the EU trade, development and human rights policies in achieving progress on gender equality (e.g. in terms of education, gender-based violence and migration).²⁷⁵ The January 2021 resolution on the gender dimension of the Covid-19 crisis highlights the vulnerable position of women and girls in the context of the pandemic, especially concerning access to healthcare and education, gender-based violence, employment status, and extreme poverty and hunger.²⁷⁶ The resolution also warned that funding allocations within the Team Europe global Covid-19 recovery package should be done in a gender-sensitive way.²⁷⁷

FEMM actively undertakes *missions* abroad. In the period 2014-2019, the committee has organised 27 ad hoc missions. Of these, 17 were to EU member states, 7 to international events, and 3 to non-EU countries

²⁷¹ EP, Resolution of 31 May 2018 on the implementation of the Joint Staff Working Document (SWD(2015)0182) – Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020, doc. no. P8_TA(2018)0239, point 57.

²⁷² EP, Resolution of 23 October 2020 on Gender Equality in EU’s foreign and security policy, doc. no. P9_TA(2020)0286.

²⁷³ Point 33 thereof.

²⁷⁴ DEVE and FEMM, Draft report on the EU Gender Action Plan III, doc. no. 2021/2003(INI), 21 July 2021, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CJ07-PR-692830_EN.pdf, accessed on 25 October 2021.

²⁷⁵ EP, Resolution of 21 January 2021 on the EU Strategy for Gender Equality, doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0025.

²⁷⁶ EP, Resolution of 21 January 2021 on the gender perspective in the COVID-19 crisis and post-crisis period, doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0024.

²⁷⁷ Point 50 thereof.

unrelated to international events (Rwanda, Ukraine, and Morocco together with AFET).²⁷⁸ Key among these missions, however, are visits to annual sessions of the UN CSW, which are an ‘excellent opportunity’ for promoting the EP’s gender equality efforts, exchanging information and building cooperation with partners and stakeholders.²⁷⁹ FEMM participates in other international gatherings too, such as the Generation Equality Forum in Paris,²⁸⁰ or the joint FEMM-DEVE mission to the 25th UN International Conference on Population and Development in Nairobi,²⁸¹ which was followed up by a resolution.²⁸²

The Committee also uses other channels to stress the link between gender equality and diplomacy. As an innovative way to foster public debate, FEMM initiated the EP’s first ever **European Gender Equality Week**, which took place in October 2020.²⁸³ Except for AFET, all the committees and subcommittees in charge of external relations participated in this event. The 2021 edition is taking place in October 2021, involving AFET and other external relations committees.

The Committee also frequently requests the commissioning of **external expertise** on the topic of women and EU external relations. This has yielded numerous studies that link gender with EU external relations. Some of the most relevant among them are the studies on gender mainstreaming in committees and delegations,²⁸⁴ on gender equality in trade agreements,²⁸⁵ and on women’s role in peace processes.²⁸⁶

FEMM is also increasingly engaged in promoting gender budgeting which is relevant for the external financing instruments and the implementation of funding benchmarks set by the EU’s GAP III. In the latest exchange, which took place at a FEMM-BUDG-CONT joint meeting on 28 June 2021, the Commission outlined the progress in developing a gender budgeting methodology which was agreed between the institutions in 2020.²⁸⁷

4.2.1.2 AFET

While AFET primarily focuses on foreign affairs, it also often engages in gender mainstreaming, although this is rarely explicitly stated in the title of the committee’s documents and activities.²⁸⁸ The lower visibility of the topics of gender equality and women’s rights in the titles of some of AFET documents can be partly explained by the fact that much of AFET’s work on these topics is prepared by DROI as a subcommittee of AFET. Partly, however, this means that where committees, including AFET, engage in gender mainstreaming, they should use gender-sensitive language and wording in the related documents and statements in order to ensure greater publicity and visibility of gender as a core value informing their work.

²⁷⁸ EP, ‘Briefing on the achievements of the FEMM committee in the area of gender equality during the 2014-2019 term’, doc. no. PE 621.915, May 2019, at 10.

²⁷⁹ See for instance: EP, ‘Mission Report following the virtual mission to the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, New York, USA, 15 - 26 March 2021’, doc. no. PE691.421v01.00, 3 May 2021.

²⁸⁰ EP, ‘Mission Report following the virtual mission to the Generation Equality Forum, Paris, 30 June 2021 - 02 July 2021’, doc. no. PE696.530v02-00, 13 September 2021.

²⁸¹ Press release, ‘ICPD25: the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights is crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals’, 15 November 2019.

²⁸² EP, Resolution of 24 June 2021 on the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD25) (Nairobi Summit), doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0315

²⁸³ European Gender Equality Week, 26-29 October 2020, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/european-gender-equality-week-october-26/product-details/20201016EOT04981>, accessed on 14 July 2021.

²⁸⁴ EP, Study ‘Gender Mainstreaming in Committees and Delegations of the European Parliament’, doc. no. PE 493.051, March 2014; EP, Study ‘Updating of the Study on Gender Mainstreaming in Committees and Delegations of the European Parliament’, doc. no. PE 608.850, December 2018.

²⁸⁵ EP, Study ‘Gender Equality in Trade Agreements’, doc. no. PE 571.388, November 2016.

²⁸⁶ EP, Study ‘Women’s role in peace processes’, doc. no. PE 608.869, May 2019

²⁸⁷ FEMM, ‘Newsletter for June-July 2021’, at 3, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/238370/June-July%202021.pdf>, accessed on 9 November 2021.

²⁸⁸ For example, AFET’s activity report for 2014-2019 mentions neither gender nor women.

Gender has been mentioned in AFET-led **resolutions** in a variety of contexts, presented below with examples from two areas of external policy.

One important context relates to annual resolutions on the implementation of the CFSP, which are prepared by AFET. These resolutions show that systematic attention is indeed paid to gender equality issues. The latest such resolution, adopted in January 2021, explicitly references ‘the promotion of gender equality’ as an objective by which the EU’s foreign and security policy ‘must be guided’.²⁸⁹ More concretely, the MEPs addressed the position of women in the framework of the WPS agenda, advocating their greater participation in peace processes, including through greater presence in managerial roles (e.g. in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and within the EEAS).²⁹⁰

Another context where gender equality has been addressed concerns the EU enlargement process towards the Western Balkans and Turkey. Indeed, a Working Group on the Western Balkans has been in existence within AFET since 2005. The Working Group has organised regular meetings with civil society, academia and the UNDP. EP resolutions in this policy area can address the entire region of the Western Balkans or be country-specific. The wider, region-oriented approach is exemplified by a June 2020 resolution on the EU-Western Balkans summit.²⁹¹ This required “swifter progress towards gender equality and in tackling discrimination and ensuring social inclusion [...]”.²⁹² The MEPs also called for a “stronger legal framework to prevent and actively fight femicide and violence against women and children and other forms of domestic violence”,²⁹³ including by recalling the obligations under the Istanbul Convention. The country-specific approach is well illustrated by resolutions on the accession process of individual candidate and potential candidate countries (e.g. the opening of negotiations or the assessment of progress).

AFET also works on gender issues by adopting opinions, most recently on Gender Equality in EU’s Foreign and Security Policy (2019/2167(INI)) and on GAP III (2021/2003(INI)). By doing so, AFET adds the foreign policy perspective to the work of other committees, such as FEMM or DEVE. Relevant resolutions prepared by the subcommittees DROI and SEDE, but voted in AFET, are presented in the respective subsection below.

The Committee also organises numerous **missions** abroad. A total of 51 missions were dispatched in the 2014-2019 legislative term.²⁹⁴ These include recurrent visits to the UN General Assembly and the EU’s Inter-Parliamentary Conference on CFSP and CSDP. An example of how missions are used to address gender equality, and how delegations and committees cooperate, was the mission sent to Morocco in June 2017, led by the Vice-Chair of AFET but which also included members from DROI, FEMM and the Delegation for relations with Maghreb countries. Among other things, this mission assessed the human rights situation and women’s rights in this country (for further AFET activities see the case studies below).²⁹⁵

4.2.1.3 SEDE

In the area of security and defence, SEDE prepares **resolutions** that perform annual evaluations of the implementation of the CSDP. These have recently begun explicitly addressing gender equality. The latest

²⁸⁹ EP, Resolution of 20 January 2021 on the implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy—annual report 2020, doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0012, point 6.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, point 60.

²⁹¹ EP, Recommendation of 19 June 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans, following the 2020 summit, doc. no. P9_TA(2020)0168.

²⁹² Point (as) thereof.

²⁹³ Point (at) thereof.

²⁹⁴ AFET, Activity Report 2014-2019, at 44-46.

²⁹⁵ See: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/agenda/weekly-agenda/2017-29?event-day20170721=all>, accessed on 25 October 2021.

EP resolution on this, adopted in January 2021 called for a “meaningful gender mainstreaming in the formulation of the CSDP, notably via a better gender balance in the personnel and leadership of CSDP missions and operations and specific training of the personnel deployed”.²⁹⁶ It also welcomed the appointment of a gender adviser in all civilian CSDP missions and invited military CSDP missions to follow suit. Similarly, the EP resolution passed in January 2020 underlined the need for a “gender perspective to be mainstreamed more systematically in CSDP missions”, “the need to address gender violence as an instrument of war in conflict regions”, while underlining that “women are more adversely affected by war than men”.²⁹⁷ The necessity of greater gender mainstreaming in the EU’s CSDP action and of eliminating gender violence were also mentioned in the EP resolution adopted in December 2018.²⁹⁸ In contrast, the resolutions adopted in December 2017, November 2016 and May 2015 mentioned neither gender equality nor the position of women in situations of conflict.

Beyond this, gender was also mentioned in the context of EU-NATO cooperation. For example, a resolution adopted in June 2018 stressed “the important role of women in CSDP and NATO missions, in particular in dealing with women and children in conflict areas” and recommended that the EU and NATO “proactively promote gender diversity in their structures and operations”.²⁹⁹ Similarly, with respect to EU cooperation with the UN and the African Union, the resolution of June 2016 recommended that appropriate training and education be provided to peace-keeping operations staff, and emphasised that “the appointment of female staff and gender advisors would help overcome cultural misconceptions and reduce the occurrence of sexual violence”.³⁰⁰

SEDE also organised several *public events* of relevance to gender equality. The key one took place during the aforesaid European Gender Equality Week in October 2020 and took the form of a SEDE-hosted exchange of views on UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which is the cornerstone of WPS. The meeting was chaired by the SEDE member of the GMN and included the EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender as one of the panellists.³⁰¹ Another relevant event was the public hearing on security policies and human rights, jointly organised by SEDE and DROI in January 2019, at which the EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender was one of the speakers.³⁰²

In terms of *external expertise*, SEDE requested the commissioning of a study on women in CSDP missions.³⁰³ This highlighted the importance of women’s participation in increasing the Union’s credibility and effectiveness abroad, and noted that UN Security Council Resolution 1325 has not yet been fully implemented in either the EU or its member states. Another SEDE-requested expert analysis, which focused on the intersection between security and climate change, recommended that an early warning mechanism could investigate the ‘gendered effects’ of climate change across the whole of the conflict cycle.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁶ EP, Resolution of 20 January 2021 on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy—annual report 2020, doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0013, point 19.

²⁹⁷ EP, Resolution of 15 January 2020 on the implementation of the common security and defence policy—annual report, doc. no. P9_TA(2020)0009, points 62 and 98.

²⁹⁸ EP, Resolution of 12 December 2018 on the annual report on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy, doc. no. P8_TA(2018)0514, point 47.

²⁹⁹ EP, Resolution of 13 June 2018 on EU-NATO relations, doc. no. P8_TA(2018)0257, point 41.

³⁰⁰ EP, Resolution of 7 June 2016 on Peace Support Operations—EU engagement with the UN and the African Union’, doc. no. P8_TA(2016)0249, point 24.

³⁰¹ SEDE, Minutes of the meetings of 28 and 29 October 2020, doc. no. SEDE_PV(2020)1028_1, at 3.

³⁰² SEDE and DROI, Public Hearing ‘Security policies and human rights: difficulties and opportunities’, 23 January 2019.

³⁰³ EP, Study ‘Women in CSDP Missions’, doc. no. PE603.855, December 2017.

³⁰⁴ EP, In-Depth Analysis ‘Preparing the CSDP for the new security environment created by climate change’, doc. no. PE 653.639, June 2021, at 28.

SEDE sent 22 **missions** and ad hoc delegations in 2014-2019.³⁰⁵ Only 4 of these were to an EU member state and all others were to non-EU countries. More than one mission was sent to Ukraine, Georgia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. As mission reports are publicly available neither in the EP Public Register of Documents nor on the SEDE webpages, it was not possible to ascertain whether and, if so, in which way gender equality was part of SEDE missions abroad.

4.2.1.4 DROI

Gender equality and women's rights are central to a whole range of DROI's activities.³⁰⁶

One of the key aspects of these activities concerns collaboration on **resolutions**, which take the form of general or thematic human rights assessments and country-specific appraisals. The *general or thematic approach* is, for instance, taken by annual resolutions on human rights and democracy in the world. The EP's January 2021 resolution on this matter very extensively covers gender equality and women's rights.³⁰⁷

The *country specific approach* targets more concrete problems and allows the EP to act as a moral tribunal in an effort to protect women's rights defenders and stand for women in precarious situations. This approach is demonstrated by the EP's urgency resolutions, which are initiated by EP political groups. DROI's role in their adoption is important, however, and can range from providing factual background, ensuring follow up, discussing relevant matters in other formats (e.g. exchanges of views), and, where appropriate, setting the ground for such resolutions by dispatching missions abroad.

Notable recent examples of such resolutions include denouncements of the actions taken by Iran³⁰⁸ on the compulsory wearing of the hijab and on the activists' long prison sentences for protesting against it, and those taken by Saudi Arabia, presented in greater depth within the corresponding case study below.

However, a gendered approach to women's human rights is not consistent. This is shown by the recent resolutions on the position of the Uyghurs in the Chinese province of Xinjiang: While the December 2019 resolution lacks any reference to gender or women,³⁰⁹ that adopted in December 2020 uses the Preamble to denounce China's birth prevention measures against Uyghur women, stating that they "could meet the criteria for belonging to the worst crimes against humanity",³¹⁰ but then makes no mention of gender or women in the operative part, where the EP's positions and recommendations are given, which is puzzling given the severity of the view expressed. Additionally, neither resolution invokes the CEDAW, which China ratified in 1980. These are missed opportunities to mainstream gender through reliance on international instruments and standards.

DROI has also paid attention to intersectionality. In its May 2021 resolution on the effects of climate change on human rights, the EP stressed the amplifying effect of the climate crisis on gender inequalities, and the trend of gender-based violence against female environmental activists.³¹¹ To address this, the MEPs called for gender equality and climate justice to be mainstreamed in sustainable development policies and programmes, and called on the Union and the member states to include "transversal gender perspective

³⁰⁵ SEDE, Activity Report 2014-2019, at 53-55.

³⁰⁶ SEDE, Activity Report 2014-2019, at 12.

³⁰⁷ EP, Resolution of 20 January 2021 on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter – annual report 2019, doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0014.

³⁰⁸ EP, Resolution of 19 September 2019 on Iran, notably the situation of women's rights defenders and imprisoned EU dual nationals, doc. no. P9_TA(2019)0019; European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2020 on Iran, in particular the case of 2012 Sakharov Prize Laureate Nasrin Sotoudeh, doc. no. P9_TA(2020)0376.

³⁰⁹ EP, Resolution of 19 December 2019 on the situation of the Uyghurs in China (China Cables), doc. no. P9_TA(2019)0110.

³¹⁰ EP, Resolution of 17 December 2020 on forced labour and the situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, doc. no. P9_TA(2020)0375, recital D.

³¹¹ EP, Resolution of 19 May 2021 on the effects of climate change on human rights and the role of environmental defenders on this matter, doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0245.

in the fields of trade, cooperation, climate and external action, promoting the empowerment and participation of women in the decision-making process and recognising the specific constraints faced by girls and women".³¹² The vulnerable position of women was also mentioned in the context of migration.³¹³

Together with AFET and DEVE, DROI also assesses nominations for the **Sakharov Prize**.

In the 2014-2019 legislative term, DROI undertook a total of 33 **missions** (see for relevant examples the section on case studies).³¹⁴

DROI has furthermore acted by organising gender-oriented **hearings and exchanges of views** with stakeholders and experts. At the European Gender Equality Week, DROI held two exchanges of views in association with FEMM: one on women and sexual and reproductive rights and another with prominent female human rights voices. Other gender-focused events included: a hearing on fighting discriminatory legislation against women and girls, in particular regarding sexual violence (April 2018); an exchange of views on women and gender-based violence in Ethiopia (October 2017); two events on Afghanistan – a hearing on women's rights organised jointly with FEMM and the Delegation for relations with Afghanistan (July 2017) and an exchange of views on the situation of human rights, notably of women and girls (February 2017); an exchange of views on the occasion of the International Women's Day (March 2017); an exchange of views on the occasion of the International Day on Women Human Rights Defenders (November 2016); a joint DROI-FEMM-SEDE hearing on human rights and the situation of women in armed conflicts (October 2015); and a joint DROI-FEMM hearing on women in peace processes (February 2014).

DROI furthermore requested the commissioning of an **expert analysis** of discriminatory laws undermining women's rights.³¹⁵ This shed light on the adverse differential treatment of women and girls in countries beyond the EU.

4.2.1.5 DEVE

Reflecting the EP's importance as an actor in EU development cooperation,³¹⁶ DEVE's approach to gender equality promotion can be deduced from **resolutions** whose adoption it has led.

In a cross-cutting fashion, DEVE devoted significant attention to gender equality and women's rights.³¹⁷ Most recently, a resolution of November 2020 emphasised that "gender equality is a key principle of EU development aid",³¹⁸ that "gender equality is essential for sustainable development and that progress made in combating discrimination and violence against women and girls in partner countries should be considered as an essential aspect of aid effectiveness", while recalling that "development cooperation may have different impacts variously on girls and boys and on women and men".³¹⁹ The MEPs therefore urged the prioritisation of gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting, gender targeting and gender-

³¹² Point 20 thereof.

³¹³ EP, Resolution of 19 May 2021 on human rights protection and the EU external migration policy, doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0242.

³¹⁴ DROI, Activity Report 2014-2019, at 59-63.

³¹⁵ EP, In-Depth Analysis 'Discriminatory Laws Undermining Women's Rights', doc. no. PE 603.489, May 2020.

³¹⁶ Paul James Cardwell & Davor Jančić, 'The European Parliament and Development Cooperation: Democratic Participation in the "Low Politics" of EU External Relations', (2019) 41(3) *Journal of European Integration* 365-381.

³¹⁷ EP, Resolution of 8 October 2015 on the renewal of the EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development, doc. no. P8_TA(2015)0350.

³¹⁸ EP, Resolution of 25 November 2020 on improving development effectiveness and the efficiency of aid, doc. no. P9_TA(2020)0323, recital AB.

³¹⁹ Point 28 thereof.

disaggregated data collection.³²⁰ A 2016 resolution similarly stressed that development assistance can play an important role in catalysing gender equality promotion.³²¹

Regarding the EU's global commitments, a March 2019 resolution co-led by DEVE and ENVI analysed the Union's implementation of SDGs. The MEPs highlighted "gender equality and reproductive and maternal health as common EU-UN priorities."³²² They also stressed "the importance of addressing social and economic inequalities and promoting gender equality within the EU and worldwide".³²³ From a more region-oriented perspective, the resolution of March 2021 on EU-Africa relations emphasises that "gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment must be prioritised and mainstreamed into the partnership", particularly to end gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriages.³²⁴ The MEPs also took an intersectional approach by underlining the need to address gender equality in EU trade agreements, but also in the contexts of climate change, environmental degradation and digital transformations.³²⁵

Specific attention was also paid to the intersection between gender and health. The resolution of June 2021 warned that the Covid-19 pandemic has not only led to a rise in gender-based violence and other inequalities, but that it "has already reversed some of the progress made on gender equality over the last decades".³²⁶ The MEPs emphasised the need to include a gender perspective in the EU's Covid-19 response, for which purpose the Union's GAP III and its Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)-Global Europe should be utilised.³²⁷ Another resolution advocated tackling AIDS-related inequalities by prioritising the fight against stigma and discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence [...].³²⁸

Concerning financing as a crucial element of development cooperation, gender was underlined in several resolutions.³²⁹ The MEPs noted in a resolution of May 2015 "all development finance should be pro-poor, gender-sensitive, environmentally sound and climate-proof",³³⁰ while emphasising "gender budgeting, targeted investments in key sectors such as health and education and steps to ensure that all development finance takes full account of the situation of women and girls".³³¹ Yet, an April 2018 resolution on the main development financing instruments did not address gender equality other than in passing.³³²

Like AFET and INTA, DEVE also contributes to FEMM-led files through the adoption of opinions or by undertaking joint reports, like the abovementioned one on GAP III.

³²⁰ Point 29 thereof.

³²¹ EP, Resolution of 22 November 2016 on increasing the effectiveness of development cooperation, doc. no. P8_TA(2016)0437, point 30.

³²² EP, Resolution of 14 March 2019 on the Annual strategic report on the implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), doc. no. P8_TA(2019)0220, point 22.

³²³ Point 24 thereof.

³²⁴ EP, Resolution of 25 March 2021 on a new EU-Africa Strategy—a partnership for sustainable and inclusive development, doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0108, points 45 and 46.

³²⁵ Points 96, 106 and 141 thereof.

³²⁶ EP, Resolution of 23 June 2021 on the role of the EU's development cooperation and humanitarian assistance in addressing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, doc. no. P9_TA (2021)0308, recital C.

³²⁷ Point 40 thereof.

³²⁸ EP, Resolution of 20 May 2021 on accelerating progress and tackling inequalities towards ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, doc. no. P9_TA (2021)0250, point 7.

³²⁹ See, for example: EP, Resolution of 7 June 2016 on the EU 2015 Report on Policy Coherence for Development, doc. no. P8_TA (2016)0246, point 42.

³³⁰ EP, Resolution of 19 May 2015 on Financing for Development, doc. no. P8_TA(2015)0196, point 17.

³³¹ Point 30 thereof.

³³² EP, Resolution of 17 April 2018 on the implementation of the Development Cooperation Instrument, the Humanitarian Aid Instrument and the European Development Fund, doc. no. P8_TA(2018)0103, point 63.

DEVE has also promoted gender equality in other formats. At the **European Gender Equality Week**, DEVE organised an exchange of views with UN Women on gender equality, women's empowerment and the impact of Covid-19 on women in developing countries in 2020, and the challenges ahead. In March 2021, DEVE and FEMM co-organised a side **event** on the occasion of the 65th session of the UN CSW, which was devoted to gender equality in post-Covid-19 recovery.³³³ Furthermore, although public information on this committee's missions is incomplete, DEVE **missions** abroad sometimes address gender equality. This was the case with the *ad hoc* mission to The Gambia in December 2018, which included a roundtable with civil society representatives on gender issues, a discussion with young returnees from Libya on gender-based violence, and a visit to representatives of a project aiming to empower women in agricultural communities.³³⁴ However, mission reports from three other missions to African countries organised in 2018 (Senegal, Guinea and Central African Republic) did not mention gender or women.

4.2.1.6 INTA

As a powerful actor in EU trade policy,³³⁵ INTA has made a significant contribution to gender mainstreaming in this policy area. Regarding leadership in adopting **resolutions**, INTA has consistently drawn the Parliament's attention to gender equality and women's rights. Four INTA-led resolutions stand out for developing the request issued in a 2015 resolution that stressed "the need to integrate the gender perspective and the fight against gender violence into EU foreign policy, development cooperation policy and international trade policy [...]"³³⁶

The first and most important resolution is the March 2018 resolution on gender equality in EU trade agreements, co-led with FEMM.³³⁷ Its key claims are as follows. Stressing the need for a values-based trade policy and for the collection of gender-disaggregated data on the impacts of trade, the MEPs underlined that "trading commitments in EU agreements should never overrule human rights, women's rights or environmental protection".³³⁸ Also, the EP called for "binding measures to combat the exploitation of women in export-oriented industries, the informal economy and agriculture."³³⁹ The resolution supported the inclusion of dedicated gender and trade chapters in trade agreements and the use of these agreements to exert partners to commit to adopting gender equality laws and policies.³⁴⁰

The second notable resolution was passed in October 2020 on the implementation of the EU's Common Commercial Policy.³⁴¹ Apart from reiterating the need for gender-oriented chapters in trade agreements and gender-disaggregated data, the MEPs recommended the establishment of Trade and Gender committees within the governance structures of such agreements. The resolution highlighted as best practice in the conclusion of trade agreements three arrangements which are either agreed with Canada in the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), or which Canada is already applying in its

³³³ See: EP (2021), 'Gender equality in the Covid-19 recovery - UN CSW 65 Side event', <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/gender-equality-in-the-covid-19-recovery/product-details/20210220EOT05241>, accessed on 17 July 2021.

³³⁴ DEVE, Mission report following the ad-hoc delegation of the Committees on Development (DEVE) to The Gambia from 17-19 December 2018, doc. no. PE637.538v02-00, at 2-3 and 7.

³³⁵ See further in: Puccio, Laura. 'The European Parliament's Role in Monitoring the Implementation of EU Trade Policy', in Olivier Costa (ed.), *The European Parliament in Times of EU Crisis: Dynamics and Transformations* (Springer 2019) 387-412.

³³⁶ EP, Resolution of 9 June 2015 on the EU Strategy for equality between women and men post 2015, doc. no. P8_TA(2015)0218, point 7.

³³⁷ EP, Resolution of 13 March 2018 on gender equality in EU trade agreements, doc. no. P8_TA(2018)0066.

³³⁸ Point 1 thereof.

³³⁹ Points 15, 16 and 18 thereof.

³⁴⁰ Points 22, 25, 26, 27, 30 and 34 thereof. See further in: Monteiro, José-Antonio, 'The evolution of gender-related provisions in regional trade agreements', *WTO Staff Working Paper No. ERSD-2021-8*, 24 February 2021.

³⁴¹ EP, Resolution of 7 October 2020 on the implementation of the common commercial policy – annual report 2018, doc. no. P9_TA(2020)0252, points 77-79.

internal or external affairs. These concern: (a) adopting a scheme for the sharing of information on the methods and procedures for assessing the gender-oriented impacts of trade and appointing contact points to monitor the scheme's implementation; (b) enabling dispute settlement mechanisms to address gender issues; and (c) ensuring gender balance within Domestic Advisory Groups foreseen in CETA's chapters on Trade and Sustainable Development, Trade and Labour, and Trade and Environment.

The third resolution mentioning gender is that on the EU trade policy review adopted in November 2020.³⁴² This noted that "women receive less than two-fifths of the benefits of free and fair-trade agreements in terms of jobs generated" and stressed that "women may be disproportionately affected by the current economic crisis".³⁴³

The fourth resolution, adopted in July 2021, addressed the trade-related aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic.³⁴⁴ MEPs highlighted that the asymmetrical effects of "global value chains can disproportionately adversely impact women".³⁴⁵ They noted the importance of EU trade relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, especially given the impact of Covid-19 on women in these regions.³⁴⁶ The resolution further emphasised the need to make progress in "developing an intersectional approach to tackling the negative impact of health crises on gender equality [...]".³⁴⁷

Like AFET and DEVE, INTA also discusses gender through its opinions on FEMM-led files, like for the said report on GAP III (2021/2003(INI)).³⁴⁸

Other INTA's contributions to the theme of gender and trade include the organisation of a debate on the economic impact of Covid-19 on women in international trade during the **European Gender Equality Week** in October 2020. **Hearings** were also an important channel for discussing gender and trade. Thus, INTA and FEMM organised a joint hearing on gender equality in EU trade agreements in May 2017.³⁴⁹ A further public **hearing** was held remotely on the EU-Mercosur trade agreement in February 2021. Although this event was not devoted to the gender dimension of trade, it addressed the topics of sustainability impact assessment, the trade and sustainable development chapter, and the economic and social impacts of the agreement on businesses and workers. **Missions** organised by INTA sometimes address gender, such as those dispatched to various Latin American countries as presented below in the EuroLat case study. However, INTA's May 2018 mission to China discussed sustainable development with Chinese officials, but without any reference to gender equality.³⁵⁰

4.2.1.7 Gender composition of the meetings of the committees and subcommittees in charge of external relations

The figure below reveals the main trends concerning the gender composition of both ordinary meetings as well as missions abroad of the committees and subcommittees in charge of external relations in the

³⁴² EP, Resolution of 26 November 2020 on the EU Trade Policy Review, doc. no. P9_TA(2020)0337.

³⁴³ Point 27 thereof.

³⁴⁴ EP, Resolution of 7 July 2021 on the trade-related aspects and implications of Covid-19, doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0328.

³⁴⁵ Point 5 thereof.

³⁴⁶ Point 69 thereof.

³⁴⁷ Point 21 thereof.

³⁴⁸ INTA, Draft Opinion on the EU Gender Action Plan III, doc. no. 2021/2003(INI), 27 April 2021, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/commissions/inta/projet_avis/2021/689792/INTA_PA\(2021\)689792_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/commissions/inta/projet_avis/2021/689792/INTA_PA(2021)689792_EN.pdf), accessed on 25 October 2021.

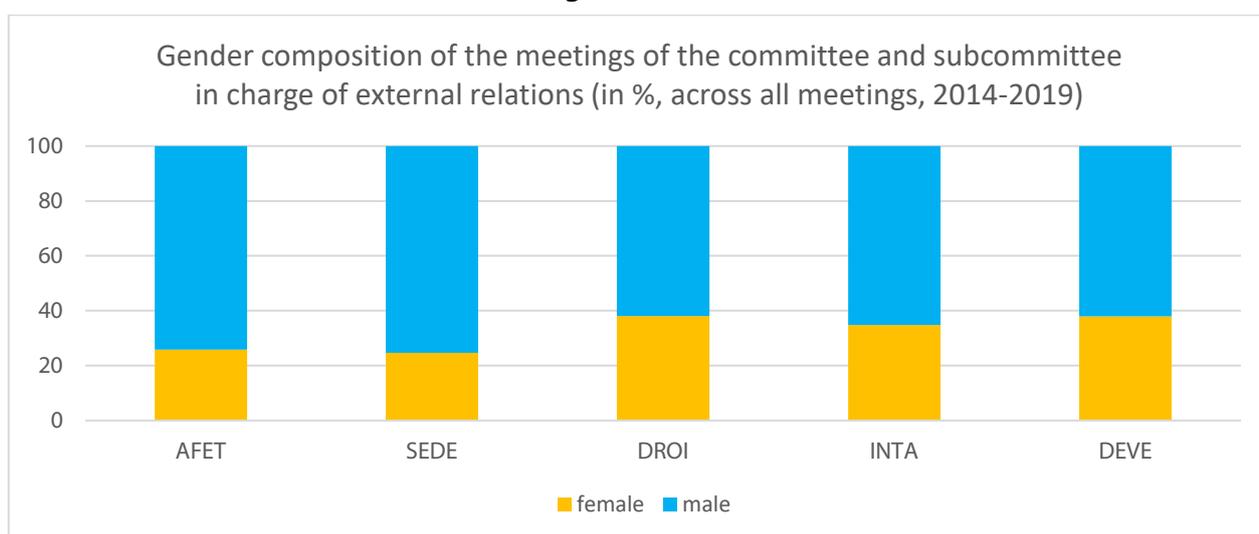
³⁴⁹ INTA and FEMM, Draft Programme for the Joint Hearing on 'Gender Equality in EU Trade agreements', Brussels, 11 May 2017, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/118042/Draft%20agenda%20INTA-FEMM%20Joint%20hearing%20Gender%20in%20EU%20TA%20-%2011%20May%202017%20pdf.pdf>, accessed on 17 July 2021.

³⁵⁰ INTA, Mission report following the mission to China from 7-9 May 2018, doc. no. PE622.111v01-00, at 4 and 6-7.

previous legislative term (2014-2019). Within the limits of the database used, the analysis³⁵¹ shows that the average gender composition of these meetings consisted of 67.7 % men and 32.3 % women. In absolute terms, on the 'better' performing side, with most women in meetings, we find DROI with 38.1 %, DEVE with 38 % and INTA with 34.8 % of female members in meetings; while on the 'worse' performing side, we have SEDE with only 24.7 % and AFET 25.9 % of female members in meetings. The data hence shows strong prevalence of male members in the meetings. In relative terms, however, when the figures on the gender composition of meetings are compared to the gender composition of the committees and subcommittees themselves,³⁵² the picture changes somewhat. While DROI remains the most gender balanced (with 10.6 percentage points more female MEPs attending subcommittee meetings than there are women in the subcommittee's full membership), AFET also comes out more gender balanced (with an excess of 6.73 percentage points), while DEVE achieves parity (with only 0.4 percentage points fewer female MEPs attending committee meetings than there are women in the committee's full membership). INTA (with 9.1 percentage points fewer female MEPs attending committee meetings than there are women in the committee's full membership) and SEDE (with a deficit of 1.9 percentage points) are on the less gender balanced side.

As interviews have emphasised, gender imbalance in the meetings of the committees and subcommittees erodes the authenticity of their diplomatic action abroad as it is hard to require gender equality from partners abroad, while roughly three quarters of MEPs present at meetings of the key external relations committee – AFET – are male. For committee work to 'lead by example' abroad, the gender composition of the committees' and subcommittees' meetings should be better balanced.

Figure 1: Gender composition of the meetings of the EP committees and subcommittees in charge of external relations (in %, across all meetings, 2014-2019)



Note: The FEMM committee is not included due to the lack of data on this committee in the database received by the EP.

³⁵¹ This analysis results from an anonymised dataset provided by the EP administration (DG Finance). The dataset is based on signatures made by members on the presence lists distributed during official meetings and missions abroad. For some meetings no presence lists have been recorded. In addition, for meetings held in Brussels or Strasbourg, members may not have always signed the presence list, although they attended the respective meeting. Presence lists for ad-hoc delegations under the lead of Committees are recorded either under the name of the (lead) Committee or as Ad-hoc delegations. The analysis of these data can therefore only be indicative.

³⁵² The figures on gender balance among the full members of the external relations committees and subcommittees in the 2014-2019 legislature are as follows: AFET had 19.17% women members (73 full members: 14 women and 59 men), SEDE had 26.6% (30 full members: 8 women, 22 men), DROI 27.5% (29 full members: 8 women, 21 men), DEVE 38.4% (26 full members: 10 women, 16 men), and INTA 43.9% (41 full members: 18 women, 23 men).

4.2.2 Gender equality promotion through the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG)

Created in 2012, the DEG is a dedicated group of 16 MEPs whose role is to oversee the EP's efforts to support democracy beyond the EU.³⁵³ The Group is presided over by the AFET and DEVE chairs, and includes the EP Vice-Presidents responsible for the Sakharov Prize and for Human Rights and Democracy, the DROI chair and the chair of the Conference of Delegation Chairs. The Group is the key EP body for parliamentary capacity-building, mediation and dialogue and the attainment of the values of democracy, rule of law and human rights, including gender equality. In 2014, the DEG adopted a Comprehensive Democracy Support Approach, which focuses on a smaller number of priority countries and regions over a longer period. One MEP is appointed as the 'lead' for each country and region.³⁵⁴ While a limited list of priority countries is confirmed each year, the Western Balkans and Turkey have remained a 'standing' priority year on year.

Three particular EP tools of greatest relevance for parliamentary diplomacy are: the Sakharov Prize, Jean Monnet Dialogues for Peace and Democracy and the Simone Veil programme, while other tools continue to be refined or developed.

4.2.2.1 The Sakharov Prize

While the Sakharov Prize is awarded for freedom of thought and human rights activism broadly conceived, the EP can use it as an important tool for mainstreaming gender in international relations. Sakharov Prize laureates are often engaged in gender advocacy.

In the period 2014-2019, no less than three laureates had a strong connection with the promotion of gender issues and women's rights.³⁵⁵ Dr Denis Mukwege (Democratic Republic of Congo, 2014) devoted his life to combating gender-based violence and helping victims of rape and sexual violence, both as a doctor and as an activist. Raif Badawi (Saudi Arabia, 2015) is a male human rights activist and blogger, whom Saudi authorities sentenced to flogging and 10 years in prison for his human rights work, including against the male guardianship system. Nadia Murad and Lamyia Aji Bashar (Syria, 2016) are survivors of sexual enslavement and violence by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), who, after escaping, engaged in advocacy about the plight of Iraq's Yazidi community.

By recognising the importance of gender equality within the wider human rights activism through the Sakharov Prize, the DEG complements other EP diplomatic instruments. It does so by supporting the global gender equality struggle, by raising awareness of the different socio-cultural approaches to gender relations, and by galvanising discourse on gender around the world, not only through the prize's own symbolism but also through concrete cooperation as laureates often build a lasting relationship with the EP and contribute to its activities through speaking roles and networking.

4.2.2.2 Jean Monnet Dialogues for Peace and Democracy

Launched in October 2016, Jean Monnet dialogues are a mediation tool aimed at strengthening inter-party dialogue and building consensus and trust between national political group leaders, which is necessary for the development or consolidation of a democratic parliamentary culture.³⁵⁶ The dialogues seek to

³⁵³ See an analysis of the DEG's efforts concerning elections in post-Maidan Ukraine in: Immenkamp, Beatrix and Naja Bentzen, 'Parliamentary Diplomacy: Democracy Support at the European Parliament', in Olivier Costa (ed.), *The European Parliament in Times of EU Crisis: Dynamics and Transformations* (Springer 2019) 413-437.

³⁵⁴ EP, Brochure 'Global Democracy Support', May 2019, at 5.

³⁵⁵ DEG, 'Sakharov Prize Laureates 2011-2020', available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sakharovprize/en/laureates/2011-2020>, accessed on 30 September 2021.

³⁵⁶ EP, 'Jean Monnet Dialogues', available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/globaldemocracysupport/en/mediation-and-dialogue/jean-monnet-dialogues>, accessed on 18 July 2021.

contribute to institutional reforms in the partner countries by facilitating consensus over national policy priorities and by diffusing political tensions. Jean Monnet dialogues often take place in Monnet's historic home in Bazoches-sur-Guyonne and this is not only a matter of symbolism: being away from media attention enables the participants to focus on the agenda in isolation from the usual pressures of daily politics. The dialogues are not designed as a series of thematic conferences, but rather as a cyclical process involving preparatory consultations with political leaders, *in camera* meetings in search of concrete outcomes, and follow-up on the commitments undertaken. To ensure success, Jean Monnet dialogues are governed by nine simple rules aimed at fairness and equality of the process, so as to maximise the chances of reaching agreement.³⁵⁷

The EP reaffirmed its support for Jean Monnet dialogues in a March 2019 resolution on conflict prevention and mediation,³⁵⁸ welcoming the successes of the dialogues with Ukraine and North Macedonia and the DEG decision to extend the tool across the Western Balkans countries.³⁵⁹ There are currently three active dialogues: Jean Monnet Dialogue with the Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada* (launched on 27 October 2016 in Bazoches-sur-Guyonne); Jean Monnet Dialogue with the North Macedonian *Sobranie* (launched on 18 May 2018 in Ohrid); and the Inter-Party Dialogue with the Serbian *Narodna Skupština* (launched on 9 October 2019 in Belgrade), which applies a methodology adapted to the specific conditions in this country.

The DEG Annual Work Programme for 2021 foresees the launch of preparatory activities for Jean Monnet dialogues with the parliaments of Georgia and Moldova, while exploratory assessments of the need for such a dialogue is planned in relation to the parliaments of Montenegro and Tunisia. One of the possible topics within the EP's 'Train the Trainers' approach to the Pan-African Parliament may include the sharing of experiences gained through Jean Monnet dialogues.

4.2.2.3 The Simone Veil Programme

That the EP is a highly innovative institution is shown by the fact that DEG is actively seeking to design new democracy support programmes. Of particular importance is the Simone Veil programme,³⁶⁰ because its goal is to empower women parliamentarians to promote gender equality, inclusive societies and democratic change.

The programme consists of tailored training modules on: 'Advancing equality' (increasing women's political participation, gender-sensitive legislation and budgeting, EU gender acquis for pre-accession countries); 'Political negotiation and advocacy' (EP culture of compromise, rapporteurship and cross-party negotiations, mapping the political landscape, advocacy); 'Empowering leadership' (use of social media, inclusive language); 'Keys to personal wellbeing and resilience' (dealing with harassment and compliments, mindfulness, empathic communication); and 'Pre-elections' (campaigning, fundraising). The programme therefore gives participants an insight into the tools that can be used to stimulate greater gender-responsiveness in parliaments through a discussion of practical examples and acquisition of hands-on experience. The programme also aims at women's personal development as individuals and not only as politicians and professionals.

The Simone Veil programme was launched on 11 December 2020 by means of a conference on 'Women's Leadership and their Role in the Democratisation Process of Their Countries',³⁶¹ which highlighted the need

³⁵⁷ These rules are that: 1. Mediation principles will apply if needed; 2. Every political party engages on equal terms; 3. Zero is not an option; 4. Nothing is ruled in or ruled out in advance; 5. Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed; 6. No media communication until there is a concrete outcome; 7. Pre-existing proposals, motions or draft laws should not be submitted; 8. If there is a political agreement on a topic, a drafting methodology will apply; 9. Any agreed common draft can then be submitted jointly by the parties.

³⁵⁸ EP, Resolution of 12 March 2019 on building EU capacity on conflict prevention and mediation, doc. no. P8_TA(2019)0158.

³⁵⁹ Point 19 thereof.

³⁶⁰ EP, 'Simone Veil Programme for women empowerment', internal document on file with the research team.

³⁶¹ See the Draft Programme of this conference at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20201210RES93564/20201210RES93564.pdf>, accessed on 18 July 2021.

to eliminate the barriers that women still face in politics, and achieve a level playing field for both women and men. The implementation of the programme in priority countries or regions is set for 2021. Given the coincidence of the Covid-19 pandemic, this topic features prominently in the individual Simone Veil offerings. Thus, the Simone Veil programmes held so far – that in North Macedonia (January 2021) and Montenegro (April 2021) – both focused on the gendered impacts of the pandemic.

4.2.2.4 Other women-focused DEG programmes

Alongside the Simone Veil programme, the DEG organises other activities addressing gender equality and women's rights. Country-specific activities can address matters such as the eradication of gender-based violence, support for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention (e.g. in Moldova),³⁶² or the raising of awareness of the importance of gender equality in the fight against extremism and radicalisation (e.g. in Tunisia).³⁶³ These can also take the form of study visits, such as that by members of the Gender Equality Committee of the Montenegrin Parliament in February 2018,³⁶⁴ or of issue-oriented seminars, such as that organised on the topic of social media for women parliamentarians from Montenegro and North Macedonia in November 2019.³⁶⁵

A further DEG programme in the area of parliamentary diplomacy, which is devoted to mediation and yet to be launched, concerns support for women peace-builders.³⁶⁶ This aims to ensure full involvement of women in peace processes, including in the implementation phase. Similarly, the Young Political Leaders programme is set to be enriched by a new thematic priority on 'Women and Peacebuilding'.³⁶⁷

4.2.3 Gender equality promotion through inter-parliamentary delegations

The analysis below is divided into two subsections. The first one presents insights drawn from: (a) a quantitative analysis of the references to different dimensions of gender equality and women's rights made in the minutes of all ordinary and inter-parliamentary meetings of EP delegations in the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020; and (b) quantitative analysis of the gender composition of all delegations.

The second one carries out an in-depth analysis of three case studies – Saudi Arabia, Serbia and EuroLat. This was performed through: (a) a qualitative analysis of the data collected through interviews; and (b) a quantitative analysis of the references to gender or women made in all ordinary and inter-parliamentary meetings of the case study delegations in the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020. The case studies are analysed from a holistic perspective by examining a variety of relevant gender-oriented actions: EP resolutions; the political practice of selected committees and subcommittees (missions abroad and, where relevant, public events and other activities); DEG activities; and the action taken by inter-parliamentary delegations for bilateral relations (Saudi Arabia and Serbia) and multilateral relations (EuroLat). Since the central focus of the present study is on gender equality promotion by inter-parliamentary delegations, the empirical material of direct relevance to the case studies which is drawn from resolutions and the work of committees, subcommittees and the DEG is presented in this subsection rather than in the subsections providing general insights about the latter three EP bodies (see subsections 1.1.4 and 1.1.5 above). This manner of presentation helps to assess the mutual complementarity of

³⁶² DEG, Annual Work Programme for 2021, at 10.

³⁶³ Ibid, at 13.

³⁶⁴ See the Programme of this study visit at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/212892/Programme_Study-visit_Montenegro_Gender-Equality-Committee_20-21-February-2018.pdf, accessed on 18 July 2021.

³⁶⁵ See the Programme of this seminar at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/212900/2019-11-13-14_Media_Seminar-social-media-Programme.pdf, accessed on 18 July 2021.

³⁶⁶ DEG, Annual Work Programme for 2021, at 25.

³⁶⁷ DEG, Annual Work Programme for 2021, at 28.

parliamentary diplomatic work on gender equality promotion which is undertaken by different EP bodies, thus highlighting their contribution to the criterion of joint venture.

4.2.3.1 Gender equality promotion across all inter-parliamentary delegations

Methodology

We examined the minutes of all ordinary and inter-parliamentary meetings held by delegations that were available on the websites of the EP.³⁶⁸ All the minutes found add up to the total of 719, of which 35 were meetings that were not noted on the delegations' websites. All the meetings that took place from 2014 until 2020 add up to 1239. The minutes that were not accessible to us add up to 520. This means that the following analysis worked with around 58 % of the meeting minutes.³⁶⁹ Despite this inevitable shortcoming, which makes extrapolation hard to perform, the data and findings illustrate some broad trends in gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy.

From an operational perspective, all gender-related and women-related keywords found in the available delegation meeting minutes were grouped under nine overarching categories, each addressing a dimension of gender equality: Economic dimension, Peace and security dimension, Political dimension, Violence against women, Social dimension, Gender equality (general and miscellaneous references), Legal dimension, Internal dimension, and Intersectionality. The purpose of devising these categories was to facilitate capturing all references made in delegation meetings which were of relevance to gender equality and women's rights rather than to guide other methodological tools used in this study, which have their own objectives. The exhaustive list of keywords used is presented in Annex 3 – List of keywords related to gender and women.

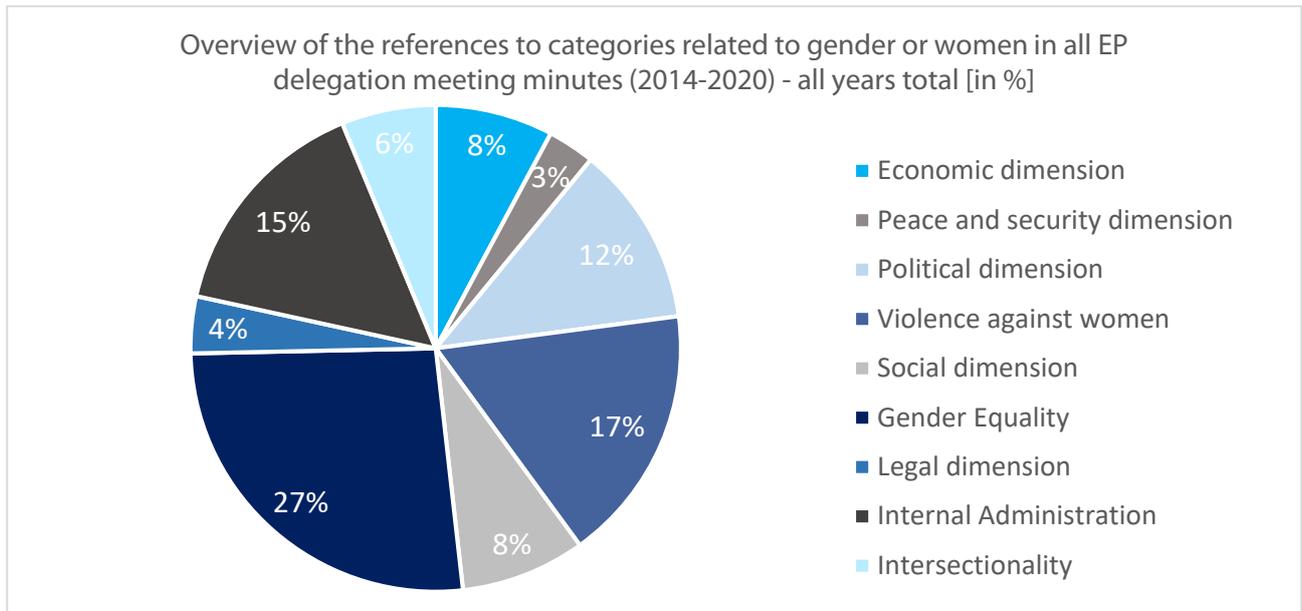
Gender-related references in inter-parliamentary delegations' ordinary and interparliamentary meetings

In the delegation meeting minutes, the aforesaid keywords were mentioned a total of 450 times. Figure 2 below gives an overview of the references to the overarching categories related to gender and women as they appear in the minutes of all delegation meetings. These are presented in terms of their percentage out of the total number of gender and women related references found in the EP delegation meeting minutes in the period 2014-2020.

³⁶⁸ Minutes from 2020-2018 were all found at <https://emeeting.europarl.europa.eu/emeeting/delegation/en/archives/DEEA>. Minutes from 2016-2014 were found at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/archives/8/delegations>. Minutes from 2017 were split and were found at both of the websites above. Some of the missing minutes were found at the following sites <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/archives/8/dsee/activities/inter-parliamentary?tabCode=kosovo> or at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/dsee/activities/ordinary-meetings> by looking at either 'ordinary meetings' or 'inter-parliamentary meetings' under the category 'activities'.

³⁶⁹ The delegations that held most meetings across all years (2014-2020) were the Delegation to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (DACP) with 61 meetings, followed by the Delegation for relations with the United States (D-US) and the Delegation for relations with Iran (D-IR) which held 55 and 53 meetings respectively. The most active years in terms of the number of meetings were 2017 (250 meetings across all delegations), 2015 (239 meetings) and 2016 (229 meetings). In 2020, only 83 meetings were held, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 2: Overview of the references to categories related to gender or women in all EP delegation meeting minutes (2014-2020) - all years total [in %]



Figures 3 and 4 and break down this data for each of the years in the period 2014-2020. They do so by presenting references to the said categories in terms of absolute numbers and in terms of percentages.

Figure 3: Overview of the references to categories related to gender or women in all EP delegation meeting minutes (2014-2020) - by year [in absolute numbers]

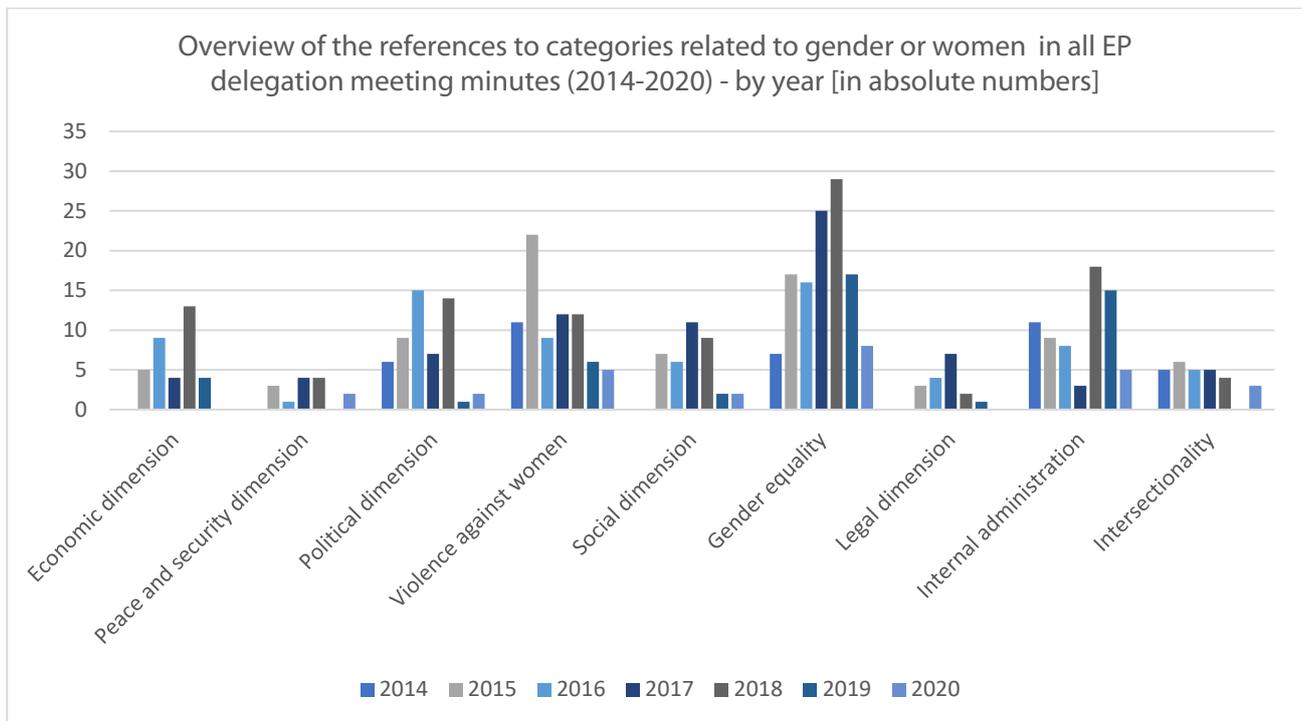
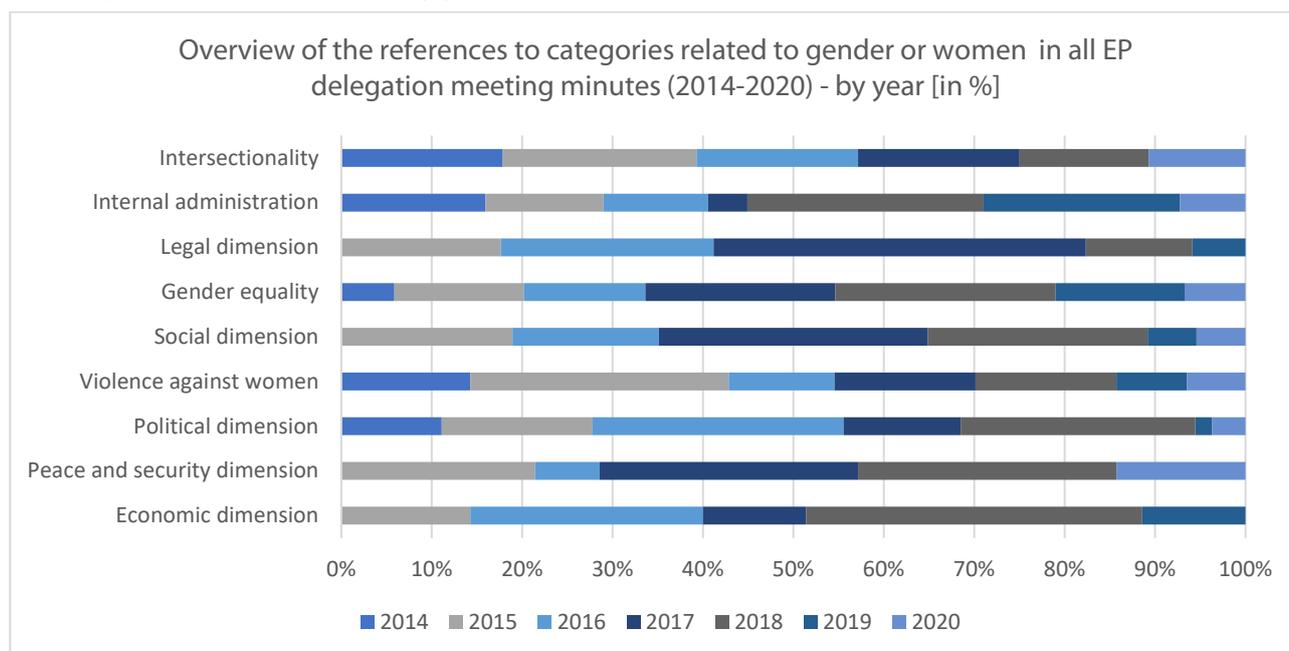


Figure 4: Overview of the references to categories related to gender or women in all EP delegation meeting minutes (2014-2020) by year [in %]



We found that the categories most mentioned across all delegation meeting minutes in all years in the period 2014-2020 were 'Gender equality' (27 % of all the references), 'Violence against women' (17 %) and 'Internal administration' (15 %). We also found that each of the overarching categories was mentioned in the course of the period 2015-2018, while between two and four categories were not mentioned at all in 2014, 2019 and 2020. The category 'Gender equality' was the most predominant one in almost all years.³⁷⁰

The quantitative analysis carried out above has enabled us to assess the degree of authenticity and pragmatism in the Parliament's gender-oriented action. On the one hand, MEPs' mentions of the different aspects of gender equality and women's rights indicates a level of ownership of the matter in internal delegation debates, but also helps to raise awareness among delegation members about the pervasiveness of gender issues in external relations. On the other hand, the prevalence of general references to gender and women suggests that improvements are needed so as to increase the level of specificity in delegations' discussions, and thus make the EP's action towards third countries and regions more pragmatic and contextualised. Also, engaging in more specific and better targeted debates on gender equality and women's rights could avoid perceptions of their being treated tokenistically. Equally, the absence of some gender-related categories in delegation minutes in different years signals delegations' variable engagement on gender equality. For example, the absence of delegation discussions on the economic and legal dimensions of gender equality in 2020 may hinder the application of a critical approach to policy design. This would have been highly significant in order to scrutinise the gender-focused economic impacts of Covid-19 in the EU and abroad, and to appraise the various gender implications of the restrictions on fundamental freedoms imposed during the pandemic. This would have contributed to greater implementation of the UN SDG Goal 5, especially given its recent emphasis on the consequences of Covid-19 for women.³⁷¹

³⁷⁰ See the text accompanying footnote 66 above.

³⁷¹ See the text accompanying footnote 66 above.

Gender composition of ordinary and inter-parliamentary meetings of inter-parliamentary delegations

Our quantitative analysis of the composition of standing inter-parliamentary delegations covers ordinary as well as inter-parliamentary meetings held in the 8th legislative term (2014-2019). Within the limits of the database used³⁷², the analysis shows that the average gender composition of the delegations' meetings consisted of 66 % of men and 34 % of women. This is slightly lower than the percentage of female MEPs elected in this term (35.8 %).³⁷³ As further demonstrated by Figure 5 below, gender composition across delegation meetings has varied considerably.

The top three most inclusive delegations, with the highest numbers of women in their meetings, were the Delegation to the EU-Chile Joint Parliamentary Committee (D-CL) with 68.3 %, the Delegation to the EU-Mexico Joint Parliamentary Committee (D-MX) with 63.3 %, and the Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula (DARP) with 58 %. The delegations with the lowest numbers of women in their meetings were the Delegation to the Joint CARIFORUM-EU Parliamentary Committee (DCAR) with 100 % male members in meetings, the Delegation for relations with Afghanistan (D-AF) with 94.1 % male members in meetings, and the Delegation to EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (D-RS) with 90.5 % male members in meetings. Occupying a middle-ground position with 44.7 % of women in its meetings is the remaining case study delegation – the Delegation to EuroLat.

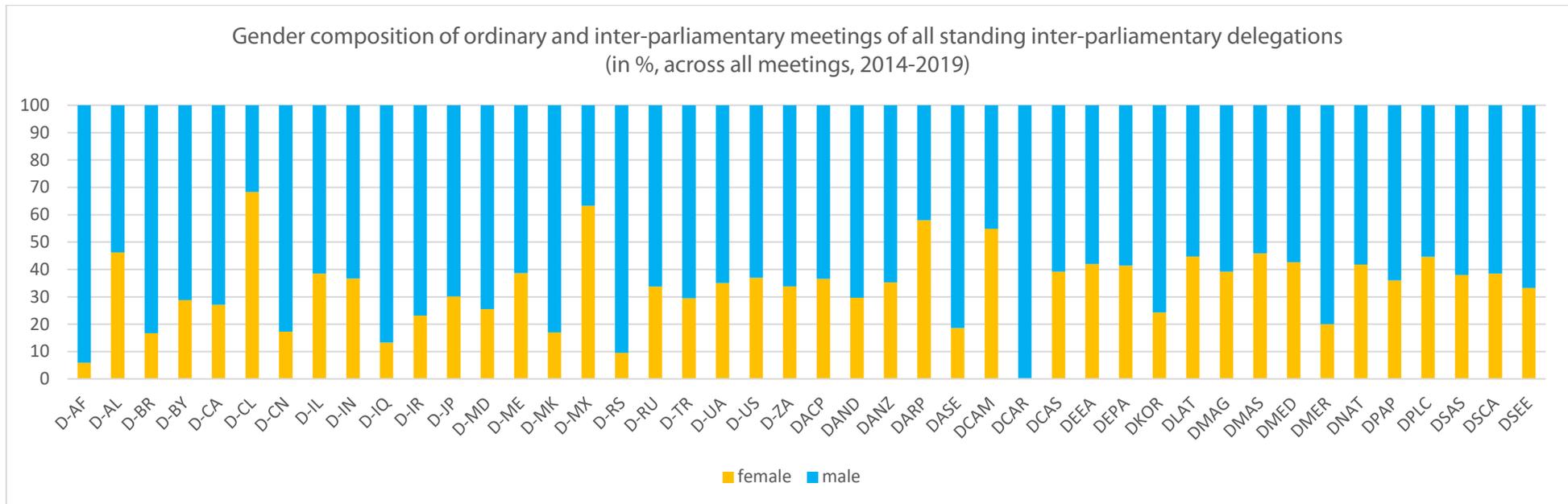
If looked at across years, gender composition of delegation meetings shows an almost steady increase in the number of female MEPs present in these meetings. Thus, female members accounted for 29.3 % of the delegation meetings in 2014, while this number rose to 34.8 % in 2019. A 5.5 % increase in female representation in delegation meetings is a positive development and strengthens female MEPs' opportunities to make their views known, including importantly on gender issues. However, the rate of progression towards gender equality is still fairly slow.

The variance in the share of women in delegation meetings may affect the consistency of gender equality promotion pursued by the EP abroad. For instance, while the prevalence of female MEPs in meetings devoted to the Arab peninsula is very welcome, the strong dominance of male MEPs in meetings devoted to Afghanistan, where women's rights are of similar political salience as in the Arab peninsula, may lead to female MEPs' voices on gender issues being heard far less in the case of Afghanistan than in the case of the Arab peninsula. This may decrease coherence in the EP's approach to the same matter (e.g. gender inequality in some Muslim countries) in different countries.

³⁷² See footnote 351.

³⁷³ EP, 'Women in the European Parliament', 8 March 2021, at 6.

Figure 5: Gender composition of ordinary and inter-parliamentary meetings of all standing inter-parliamentary delegations (in %, across all meetings, 2014-2019).

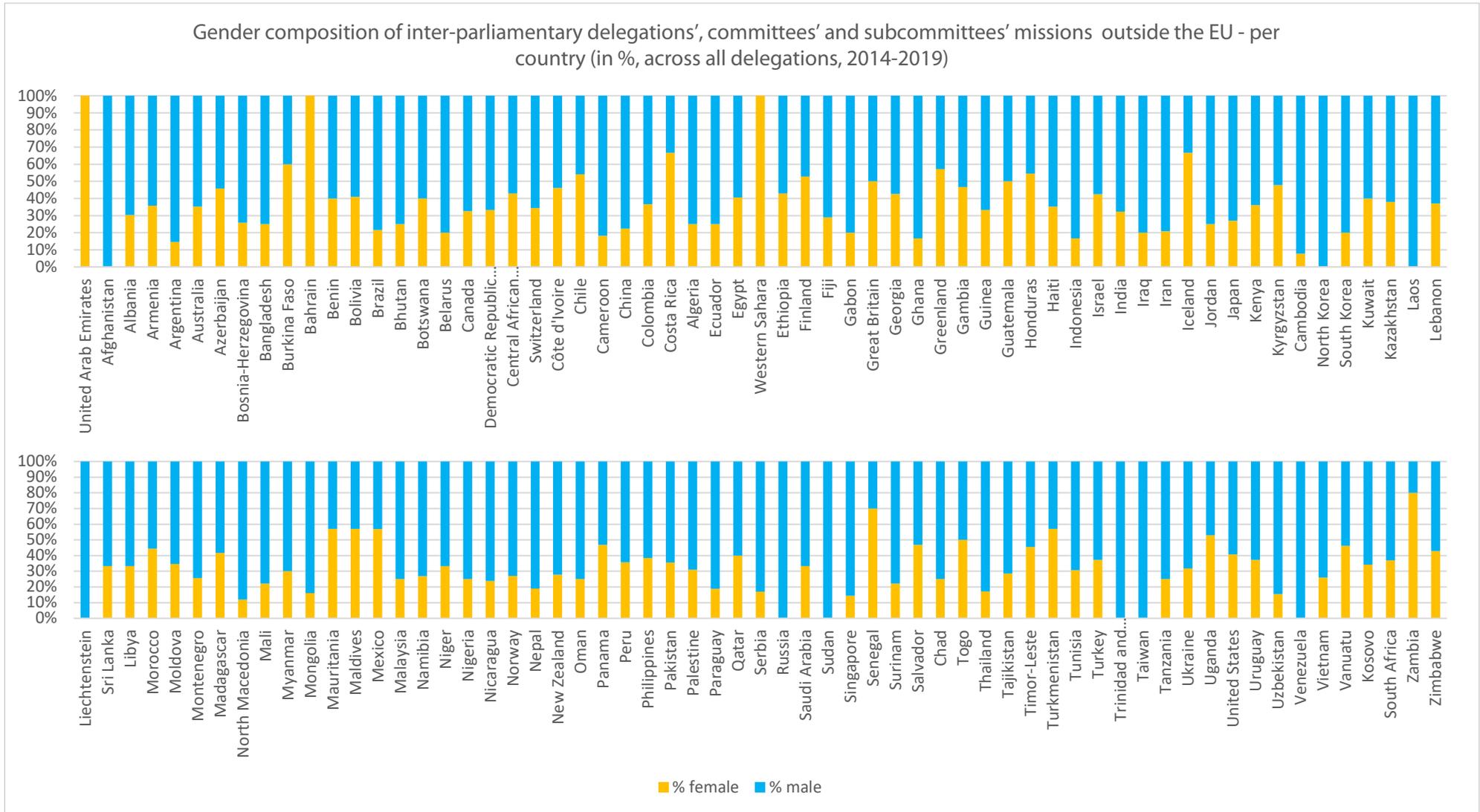


Gender composition of inter-parliamentary delegations', committees' and subcommittees' missions outside the EU

When looking at those activities taking place in third countries – specifically the gender composition of EP inter-parliamentary delegations, committees and subcommittees sent on missions abroad, we are again faced with variable results which prevent any meaningful broader inferences. Figure 6 shows that, for the period studied, the available data suggest that the delegations sent to the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Western Sahara consisted of 100 % female members. By contrast, those sent to Afghanistan, North Korea, Laos, Russia, Sudan, Trinidad and Tobago, Taiwan and Venezuela were 100 % male. Of the delegations selected for case studies, the delegations sent to Saudi Arabia were 33.3 % female and those sent to Serbia 16.9 % female. The delegations sent to meet counterparts from EuroLat are difficult to gauge, because the meetings were organised in a wide variety of cities across Latin America and Europe.

These data corroborate the finding above about the lack of coherence in the EP's approach. The fact that regarding two countries with significant gender inequality – United Arab Emirates and Afghanistan – the composition of missions was diametrically opposite hampers the authenticity of EP action and reduces mission members' ability to raise gender equality issues where their own delegation is fully or predominantly male. Acting by doing should be a guiding principle for any mission sent abroad by the EP, especially to countries with tangible women's rights problems. Additionally, the fact that female MEPs are prevalent in the meetings of DARP but not in its missions sends a similarly mixed signal to the EP's partners where majority male missions are expected to advocate gender equality. The effectiveness of such advocacy would increase if EP missions were more balanced.

Figure 6: Gender composition of inter-parliamentary delegations', committees' and subcommittees' missions outside the EU - per country (in %, across all delegations, 2014-2019)



4.2.3.2 Gender equality promotion by selected inter-parliamentary delegations: case studies

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia occupies the 147th place in the ranking of a total of 156 countries surveyed in the Global Gender Gap Index 2021 rankings. In this country, women's economic and political position is such that women hold only 6.8 % of the managerial positions (a gap of some 93 %), while there are no female ministers in government at all.³⁷⁴ As mentioned below, women's social position is to a significant extent determined by the reformed but continuing guardianship system, according to which women are treated as legal minors.

EP Resolutions

The EP has repeatedly drawn attention to Saudi Arabia's poor record on gender equality and women's rights in its resolutions. Since 2014, six resolutions specifically addressed women's rights or wider human rights with implications for women's rights.

The most relevant for this study are two resolutions – one from February 2019 and another from May 2018 – which were adopted in support of women's rights defenders.³⁷⁵ The resolutions have several common threads and, among other things, highlighted the following issues. First, the MEPs strongly condemned the detention, repression and torture against women human rights defenders (specifically in the context of the campaigning against the driving ban on women) and other human rights-related activists, and demanded their immediate and unconditional release. Second, they insisted on the cessation of all forms of harassment, including those occurring at judicial level. Third, they expressed deep concern over the prevalence of various forms of gender-based violence, the male guardianship system, the ability of men to end marriage by a text message, and for them to track women's travels through government web services. Fourth, the MEPs called on Saudi authorities to ratify the ICCPR and the CEDAW Optional Protocol, while removing the reservations to CEDAW. Fifth, and importantly, the MEPs regretted the inefficient statements by the EEAS and the EU member states concerning women's rights defenders, insisted on the full implementation of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, and called for greater action by EU institutions within the UN Human Rights Council and the CSW.

The state of women's rights in Saudi Arabia has also been addressed in other related contexts. The resolution on Ethiopian migrants in Saudi detention centres of October 2020 condemned the ill-treatment of all detainees, particularly women and children, calling for their release, and investigation into allegations of violations of their human rights.³⁷⁶ Yet this resolution was an occasion not only to address the detainees' personal liberty but also the wider situation of migrant women on the Saudi labour market. On this, the MEPs expressed concern about "the particularly negative impact of the systemic discrimination of migrant women", noting their vulnerability to physical abuse, extremely long working hours and lack of freedom of movement.³⁷⁷

Three other resolutions incorporate statements on women's rights. The resolution on the death penalty in Saudi Arabia of July 2021 reiterated the EP's demand for the release, *inter alia*, of women's rights

³⁷⁴ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2021, March 2021, at 14-15.

³⁷⁵ EP, Resolution of 14 February 2019 on women's rights defenders in Saudi Arabia, doc. no. P8_TA(2019)0117; European Parliament resolution of 31 May 2018 on the situation of women's rights defenders in Saudi Arabia, doc. no. P8_TA(2018)0232.

³⁷⁶ EP, Resolution of 8 October 2020 on the situation of Ethiopian migrants in detention centres in Saudi Arabia, doc. no. P9_TA(2020)0260, point 1 and 4 in particular.

³⁷⁷ Point 9 thereof.

defenders,³⁷⁸ while the resolution on the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi of October 2018 noted that his killing was “part of a pattern of a widespread crackdown”, *inter alia*, against “women activists”.³⁷⁹ A further resolution concerns above-mentioned Sakharov Prize laureate Raif Badawi, which condemned his treatment by Saudi authorities, but also stated that Saudi Arabia’s political and social system was “profoundly undemocratic” and made women “second-class citizens”.³⁸⁰

Committees and subcommittees (focus on AFET and DROI)

In the period studied, AFET sent two **missions** to Saudi Arabia: once to Saudi Arabia and Qatar (8-12 February 2016) and another time to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and Iran, the latter jointly with DROI (11-15 February 2018).³⁸¹ While reports on these missions are not traceable through the EP Public Register of Documents, press releases reveal some of their key content. The 2016 visit to Saudi Arabia was an occasion for MEPs to meet not only with King Salman bin Abdulaziz and different members of the Saudi government but also with the Vice-Speaker and 20 members of the Shura Council. Importantly, when the EP delegation met with the Chairman of the Saudi Human Rights Commission, they raised the issue of Raif Badawi’s human rights.³⁸² This was also raised during their 2018 visit to Saudi Arabia. That said, while the press releases make references to human rights in general, there is no indication that women’s rights were discussed during the 2016 Qatar visit³⁸³ and the 2018 visits to Kuwait and Iran.³⁸⁴

For its part, DROI undertook its first mission to Saudi Arabia together with members of the Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula in 2017, during which the situation of women in general and the guardianship system in particular were discussed (29-31 October 2017).³⁸⁵

AFET and DROI also held several exchanges of views on the situation of human rights in Saudi Arabia. Further missions are mentioned below under the DEG activities.

DEG activities

Saudi Arabia has not been among the DEG’s priority countries in recent years. However, the award of a **Sakharov Prize** to Raif Badawi in 2015, as discussed above,³⁸⁶ has led to a number of actions and events within the **Sakharov Prize Network**, which demonstrate not only a commitment to continued support for human rights activists who fully or partially promote gender equality, but also strong intra-institutional cooperation among EP bodies, primarily DROI.

³⁷⁸ EP, Resolution of 8 July 2021 on the death penalty in Saudi Arabia, notably the cases of Mustafa Hashem al-Darwish and Abdullah al-Howaiti, doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0357, point 11.

³⁷⁹ EP, Resolution of 25 October 2018 on the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, doc. no. P8_TA(2018)0434, recital J.

³⁸⁰ EP, Resolution of 12 February 2015 on the case of Mr Raif Badawi, Saudi Arabia, doc. no. P8_TA(2015)0037, recital H.

³⁸¹ AFET, Activity Report 2014-2019, at 44-45.

³⁸² Press release, ‘Foreign Affairs MEPs received by King Salman of Saudi Arabia’, 9 February 2016, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20160209IPR13503/foreign-affairs-meps-received-by-king-salman-of-saudi-arabia>, accessed on 26 October 2021.

³⁸³ Press release, ‘Foreign Affairs MEPs meet the Emir of Qatar, Tamim al-Thani’, 10 February 2016, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20160209IPR13505/foreign-affairs-meps-meet-the-emir-of-qatar-tamim-al-thani>, accessed on 25 October 2021.

³⁸⁴ AFET and DROI, Press statement ‘Delegation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Kuwait and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 11-15 February’, 15 February 2018, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/138863/Press%20release%20AFET%20-%2015Feb2018.pdf>, accessed on 25 October 2021.

³⁸⁵ Press release, ‘First visit of the European Parliament’s Subcommittee on Human Rights to Saudi Arabia’, 1 November 2017, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20171101IPR87301/first-visit-of-the-ep-s-subcommittee-on-human-rights-to-saudi-arabia>, accessed on 25 October 2021.

³⁸⁶ See the text accompanying footnote 355 above.

These actions regularly provide political support to defend Sakharov Prize laureates, including in relation to Raif Badawi's imprisonment and health situation. This type of support is provided by members of the Sakharov Prize Network (above all the EP President and the EP Vice President in charge of this Network), but also by committees and subcommittees (AFET, DEVE, DROI) and individual MEPs concerned.³⁸⁷

Other examples further illustrate the DEG's involvement in parliamentary diplomacy. In 2016, the Mid-Term Sakharov Prize Network Conference in Brussels (23-24 May 2016) was attended by Raif Badawi's spouse, Ensaf Haidar, helping to strengthen the message in favour of his release from prison.³⁸⁸ In 2018, Ms Haidar met with DROI members in Ottawa on this subcommittee's ad hoc mission to Canada (30 October 2018). She then took part in two events during the EP's Human Rights Week (19-20 November 2018): an exchange of views on the EU human rights policy with Saudi Arabia organised by DROI and the high-level conference marking the '70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'.³⁸⁹ In 2019, the DEG's activities included support for the Raif Badawi Foundation Fellowship project led by Ms Haidar.³⁹⁰

These DEG engagements in parliamentary diplomacy demonstrate the application of the principles of joint venture through the mobilisation of resources across the EP's bodies and members; and co-creation through the EP's active cooperation with human rights activists in EU and international forums.

Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula (DARP)

DARP is composed of 15 members and covers Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Yemen and the Gulf Cooperation Council, which is a regional inter-governmental organisation headquartered in Riyadh, which includes all these countries except for Yemen. The Delegation, whose name has varied over the years, has existed since 1979, the year of the first EP election. Since the first one in February 1988, DARP has so far held a dozen inter-parliamentary meetings with counterparts from Saudi Arabia, which is the highest frequency of meetings compared to those held with the other countries from DARP's remit.³⁹¹

The delegation's activities focus on supporting EU political priorities and highlighting human rights abuses in the Gulf region. When it comes to DARP's gender-related activities, it is important to note that "work towards a more inclusive society where the role of women is strengthened" is particularly highlighted by the incumbent DARP Chair, Dr Hannah Neumann, as being a part of her mandate.³⁹²

This delegation held a total of 30 **meetings** (including inter-parliamentary meetings) in the period 2014-2020 during which 30 different references related to gender or women were made in the publicly available minutes. The quantitative analysis demonstrates that DARP was the only delegation out of the three case studies during whose meetings all nine aforesaid overarching categories related to gender or women were mentioned. As illustrated in different ways in Figures 7 and 9 below, the most predominant categories were 'Political dimension' and 'Gender equality', both having a 20 % share in the total number of delegation meetings. The diversity and frequency of referencing gender and women in DARP meetings contributes to mainstreaming these issues within the delegation. This helps to increase delegation members' awareness of the gender dimension of EU-Saudi Arabia relations and strengthens the Parliament's ownership and authenticity in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in this country.

³⁸⁷ DEG, Annual Report 2016, at 20-21; DEG Annual Report 2017, at 24.

³⁸⁸ DEG, Annual Report 2016, at 21.

³⁸⁹ DEG, Annual Report 2018, at 33.

³⁹⁰ DEG, Democracy Support Work Programme in the First Part of 2019, at 15.

³⁹¹ DRAP, 'History', available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/darp/about/history>, accessed on 20 July 2021.

³⁹² DARP, 'Welcome from the Chair', <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/darp/home>, accessed on 21 July 2021. By comparison, the previous delegation chair's welcome message did not mention gender equality or women's rights.

Figure 7: References to categories related to gender and women in DARP meeting minutes – per category, across all years (2014-2020)

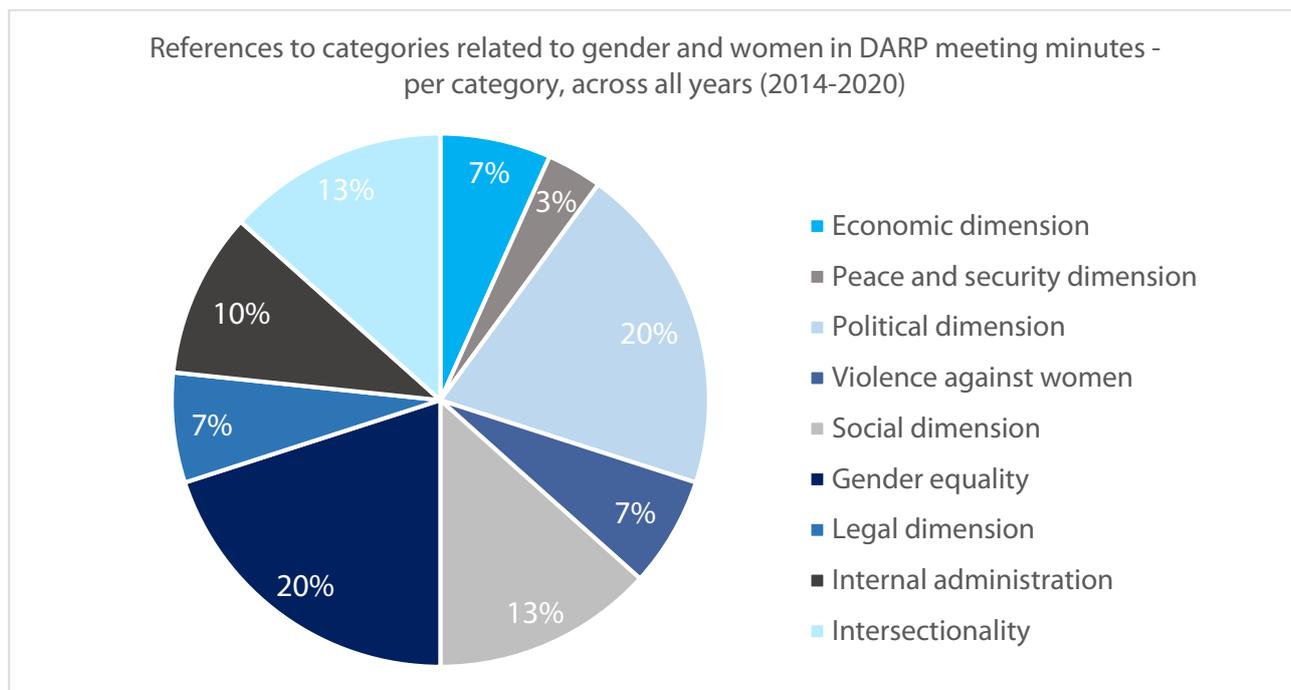


Figure 8: References to categories related to gender and women in DARP meeting minutes (2014-2020) – per category, per year [in %]

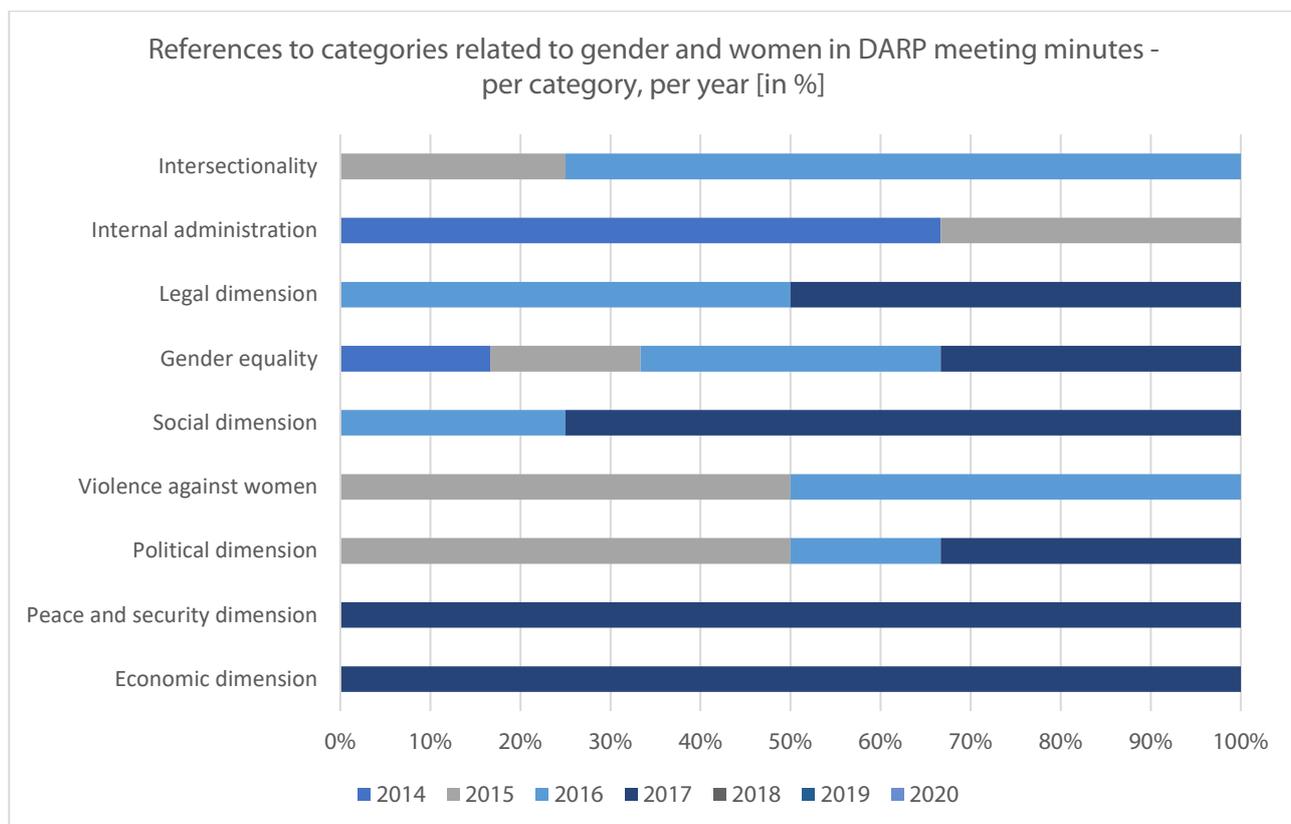
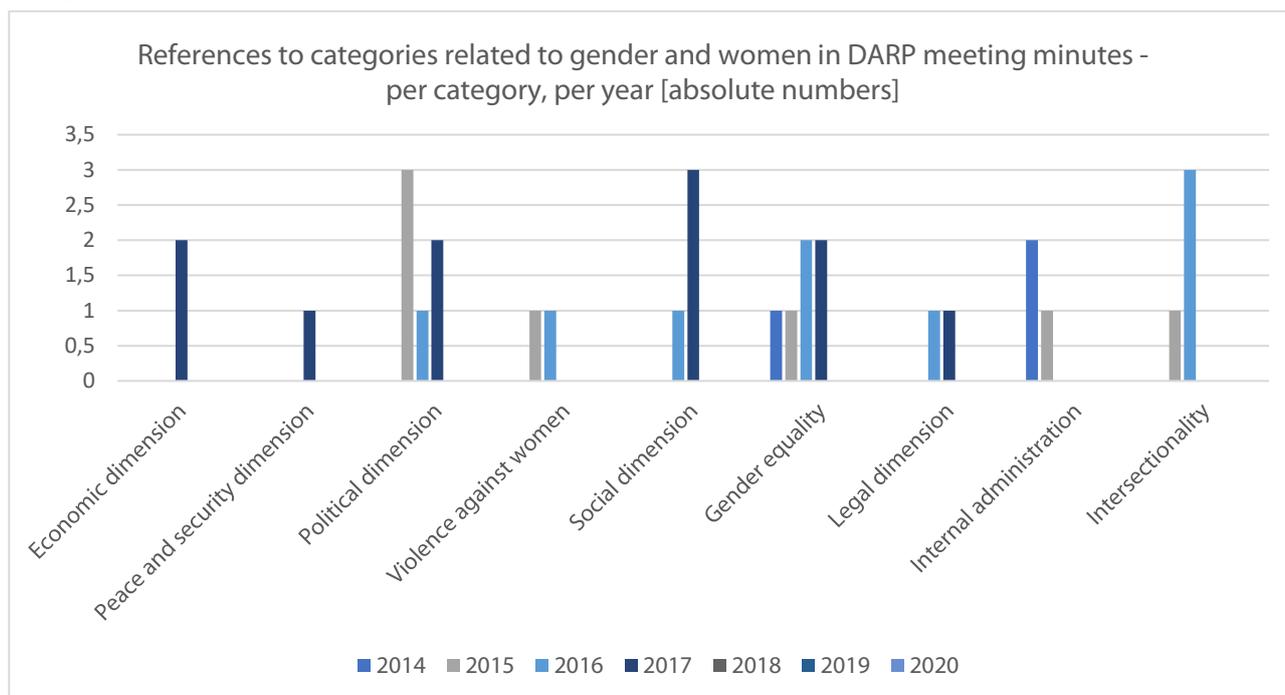


Figure 9: References to categories related to gender and women in DARP meeting minutes – per category, per year [absolute numbers]



A qualitative analysis of DARP’s **inter-parliamentary meetings** (IPMs) with Saudi Arabia also shows that gender equality and women’s rights are indeed directly discussed both with Saudi counterparts from the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia (*Majlis ash-Shura* or Shura Council) and with representatives of the government, universities and other institutions. To wit, DARP has since its establishment held a total of 14 IPMs with Saudi Arabia, with three of these – 12th, 13th and 14th – taking place during the 2014-2020 period (8th and 9th legislative terms). In all three of these inter-parliamentary meetings, the social, economic and political position of women in Saudi Arabia was addressed with various interlocutors.

The 12th IPM, taking place in February 2015, addressed women’s rights through MEPs’ discussions with the Chairman of National Society for Human Rights, Vice-Rectors of the Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University for Women, and Vice-Speaker of the Shura Council. Additionally, a meeting between MEPs from the DARP delegation and representatives of the EU Member States’ Embassies in Saudi Arabia highlighted “the need to increase the number of visits and of people-to-people contacts, especially among women [...]”.³⁹³

The 13th IPM, taking place in October 2017, was an opportunity to discuss the position of women in Saudi society with the then Saudi Foreign Minister, who, for instance, stated that segregation between men and women in public areas would soon be a thing of the past, “even at football matches”.³⁹⁴

The latest, 14th IPM, took place in February 2020, when a delegation of MEPs visited Saudi Arabia. This visit included several meetings on the socio-economic transformation of the country. These meetings enabled MEPs to give “particular emphasis to environmental issues and women empowerment”, stress the need “to ensure that women’s rights are fully respected”, and raise the issue of the imprisonment of women’s

³⁹³ DARP, Mission report following the 12th European Parliament-Saudi Arabia Interparliamentary Meeting from 15-16 February 2015, doc. no. PE543.370v01-00, 24 July 2015, at 6.

³⁹⁴ DARP, Mission report following the visit of the Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula to Saudi Arabia from 28 to 31 October 2017, doc. no. PE614.124v01-00, 21 November 2017, at 3.

rights defenders.³⁹⁵ In a similar vein, the DARP Chair issued a strong statement of support in February 2021 following the release from prison of Loujain al-Hathloul, a young Saudi women's rights activist who had gained prominence for publicly challenging the women's driving ban and other aspects of the male guardianship system.³⁹⁶

The above overview of DARP's activities demonstrates a high level of activity of this delegation in promoting gender equality and women's rights. These activities are evidence of concrete application of the principles of co-creation and contextualisation, while our interviews have indeed shown that the delegation has made a significant contribution to the mainstreaming of these issues both among MEPs and among Saudi officials.

Serbia

Quite unlike Saudi Arabia, Serbia ranks 19th in the Global Gender Gap 2021 index and 2nd in the 'Eastern Europe and Central Asia' region, outstripped only by Lithuania. In the 2021 ranking, Serbia was one of the five most-improved countries. In terms of political representation, in the two-year period from January 2019 to January 2021, Serbia was in the group of countries where the share of women ministers increased the most (in Serbia's case from 19 % to 43.5 %).³⁹⁷ As the following subsections show, this fairly good score does not, however, mean that gender equality has been fully achieved.

EP Resolutions

The most important policy in EU-Serbia relations is that of enlargement. The European Commission's annual reports on progress in the EU accession process are a regular and well-established way to assess the state of harmonisation of national legislation with EU law, including in the area of gender equality and women's rights. As an illustration, the Commission's 2020 progress report analysed the gender dimension of Serbian law and politics from the perspectives of: amendments passed by the Serbian parliament with respect to electoral thresholds and quotas on electoral lists; the state of the processes of amending the Anti-Discrimination Act and adopting the Gender Equality Act (both delayed at the time but since passed); legislation on violence against women and domestic violence; gender-based persecution; and the gendered nature of teaching materials.³⁹⁸

Building on the Commission's progress reports are EP **resolutions** on this matter. The latest EP resolution was adopted in relation to the Commission's reports on Serbia for 2019 and 2020,³⁹⁹ in which MEPs provided both positive and negative assessments. As positive developments, the resolution welcomed the "strong female representation in the new parliament and government", "the substantial representation of national minorities in parliament", as well as the "government's initiative to move forward with the law on same-sex unions and changes of name and gender of transgender persons in accordance with the relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights".⁴⁰⁰ As negative developments, the resolution expressed concern over delays regarding the said Gender Equality Act. The MEPs also stated that "coordination and an efficient institutional set-up with adequate resources in this area are still lacking, and that the socio-economic status of women is still significantly worse than that of men" as well as that there is a "high

³⁹⁵ DARP, Press statement, 'Delegation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman on 23-27 February 2020', 4 March 2020.

³⁹⁶ DARP, Statement by Chair of Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula, Hannah Neumann, welcoming the release of women's rights defender, Loujain al-Hathloul', 11 February 2021.

³⁹⁷ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2021, March 2021, at 16.

³⁹⁸ European Commission, Staff Working Document 'Serbia 2020 Report' accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the EP, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, '2020 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy', doc. no. SWD(2020) 352, 6.10.2020.

³⁹⁹ EP, Resolution of 25 March 2021 on the 2019-2020 Commission reports on Serbia, doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0115.

⁴⁰⁰ Points 59 and 61 thereof.

prevalence of patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes in society and public discourse, and the lack of knowledge of the judiciary, prosecutors and lawyers in this regard".⁴⁰¹ Concern was also voiced over the high rate of women and children as victims of violence and domestic violence, and over the lack of a coherent policy approach towards the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.⁴⁰² Obstacles were also noted with intersecting factors affecting many women, such as ethnicity, poverty, social origin and disability.⁴⁰³ To remedy these shortcomings, the MEPs called on Serbia to "increase efforts aimed at gender equality and women's rights by paying special attention to gender mainstreaming and increased cooperation with civil society, in particular women's organisations" and to include a gender perspective in economic programmes.⁴⁰⁴ All of the other EP resolutions on Serbia adopted in the 8th legislative term – those assessing progress reports for this country for the years 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018 – also addressed gender equality and/or women's rights.

Committees and subcommittees (focus on AFET and DROI)

Although publicly available information indicates that FEMM did not send any missions to Serbia in the period analysed, this committee organised a **hearing** in Brussels in April 2019 on women's role in peace processes, including the specific case of the Western Balkans, which is of relevance to Serbia.⁴⁰⁵

AFET has organised four **missions** to the countries of the Western Balkans, of which two missions to Serbia and Kosovo (23-25 September 2015, together with DROI, and 27 February-2 March 2019); one to Bosnia and Herzegovina (18-19 May 2016); and one to North Macedonia and Albania (27 February-1 March 2019). Concerning these missions, only two reports are publicly available and neither mentions gender or women. The Western Balkans has also been a priority for this committee in the organisation of **inter-parliamentary committee meetings**, gathering committee MPs of the countries of the region and those of the EP. These meetings tend to focus on the security situation and the accession process with a focus on the implementation of reforms.⁴⁰⁶ While they can in principle be used to shine light on gender-related issues, there is no indication that this is done in political practice. For instance, the latest interparliamentary committee meeting concerning the Western Balkans, which AFET organised remotely in December 2020 and which was attended by representatives of the Western Balkans parliaments, marked 25 years of the Dayton accords, but did not address gender.⁴⁰⁷ AFET also held two relevant **hearings**: one on the mid-term evaluation of the EU enlargement policy and the way forward (21 November 2017); and, jointly with LIBE, on the rule of law in the EU accession process, (18 March 2019). There is, however, no indication in the draft programmes of these events that gender, or women's rights were discussed.

Jointly with FEMM and the inter-parliamentary delegations for relations with the Western Balkans countries and Turkey, DROI co-hosted an **exchange of views** on violence against women in the Western Balkans and

⁴⁰¹ Point 57 thereof.

⁴⁰² Points 55 and 56.

⁴⁰³ Point 56 thereof.

⁴⁰⁴ Point 58 thereof.

⁴⁰⁵ See Programme of this hearing at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/162220/Draft%20programme%20-%20FEMM%20Hearing%20on%20Women's%20Role%20in%20Peace%20Processes_March%202022.pdf, accessed on 21 July 2021.

⁴⁰⁶ AFET, Draft Agenda of the Interparliamentary Committee Meeting in the presence of national parliaments, 'European Integration Process of the Western Balkans: Regional Perspective', 21 November 2017, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/132002/Agenda_ICM%20WBs%20AFET%2021%20November.pdf, accessed on 26 October 2021.

⁴⁰⁷ AFET, Draft Agenda of the Remote Interparliamentary Committee Meeting, 2 December 2020, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/215675/AFET_ICM_2%20December%202020_draft%20agenda%20211120.pdf, accessed on 26 October 2021. See also AFET, Minutes 'Inter-Parliamentary Committee Meeting, Meeting of 2 December 2020', doc. no. AFET_PV(2020)1202_1.

Turkey in June 2017.⁴⁰⁸ However, this event covered ‘Western Balkans’ by inviting representatives of women’s rights organisations from Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina only, thus failing to achieve the presence of the majority of the Western Balkans region (missing were any representatives from Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and North Macedonia). While one recognises potential organisational limitations (e.g. the timing of the meeting, speaker availability, and the possibility for non-Western Balkans speakers to speak about the Western Balkans countries that were not represented in the meeting), we strongly advise the EP to address this issue in future meetings. This is particularly important in the context of the EP’s promotion of values abroad, because unequal representation of regional views at a meeting devoted to gender equality could send the wrong diplomatic message concerning the principle of “leading by example”.

This overview shows a high level of engagement by committees and subcommittees in a variety of formats, which involve the promotion of gender equality within the framework of the enlargement policy.⁴⁰⁹ The EP’s plenary resolutions, based on AFET reports, are the key tools for gender mainstreaming in accession processes. Their significance is additionally demonstrated by the fact that local stakeholders and organisations in the Western Balkans region, including in Serbia, widely discuss these resolutions and reports and use them to support their cause at the national level. This helps to increase the level of co-creation of gender policies in the process of legal harmonisation. This could be further enhanced by ensuring greater inclusion of gender as a formal discussion point in inter-parliamentary meetings with the parliamentarians from the Western Balkans countries, given that the importance of gender equality among the EU accession criteria. It would also strengthen the contextualisation of gender equality promotion in the Western Balkans, if this region was more evenly represented in the events devoted to this region.

DEG activities

Among the DEG activities regarding Serbia, the most important ones for gender equality promotion were capacity-building events. In particular, since 2014 the DEG has, in collaboration with other EP bodies, organised two gender-oriented **inter-parliamentary conferences** in Brussels surrounding International Women’s Day. One of them took place in March 2015 and addressed the political participation of women in the Western Balkans and Turkey,⁴¹⁰ while the other was held in March 2017 and focused on women’s economic empowerment.⁴¹¹ An insight into the programmes and participants lists of these events shed light on the nature of these gatherings. They included not only keynote speeches from EU institutions and international organisations and workshop sessions, but also speeches by Sakharov Prize laureates and an award ceremony for the EU Prize for Women Innovators. On both occasions, Serbia’s delegation consisted of the Deputy Speaker of the Serbian Parliament, Gordana Čomić, a member or vice-chair of the Serbian Parliament’s Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality, and other delegates.

⁴⁰⁸ FEMM and DROI, Joint exchange of views on violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey, Brussels, 8 June 2017, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/120123/programme%20FEMM%20DROI%20Exchange%20of%20views%20Western%20Balkans%20and%20Turkey%20\(002\).pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/120123/programme%20FEMM%20DROI%20Exchange%20of%20views%20Western%20Balkans%20and%20Turkey%20(002).pdf), accessed on 26 October 2021.

⁴⁰⁹ EPRS, Briefing ‘Women in the Western Balkans: Gender Equality in the EU Accession Process’, doc. no. PE 625.139, July 2018.

⁴¹⁰ EP, Inter-Parliamentary Conference on ‘The Political Participation of Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey’, organised by the Pre-Accession Actions Unit of the Directorate for Democracy Support in cooperation with the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, 4 March 2015, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/212361/Programme-interparliamentary-seminar_4-March-2015.pdf, accessed on 21 July 2021.

⁴¹¹ EP, Inter-Parliamentary Committee Meeting on ‘Women’s Economic Empowerment: Let’s Act Together’, organised jointly by the Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Directorate for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs, and the Secretariat of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality in collaboration the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments and the Directorate for Democracy Support, 8-9 March 2017, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/212309/Programme-interparliamentary-conference_8-9-March-2017.pdf, accessed on 21 July 2021.

Furthermore, in light of the “growing importance of the region” for the EU, the DEG Annual Work Programme for 2021 mentions the possibility of organising a **Western Balkans Week** which would “emphasise the parliamentary dimension of the enlargement process and offer a platform for discussion to actors of change in the region”.⁴¹² Although this is not explicitly foreseen, this event could be a venue for discussing *inter alia* gender equality and women’s rights.

In Serbia, the DEG has also organised the **Inter-Party Dialogue**, which follows an adapted version of the methodology of Jean Monnet dialogues, and whose goal is to improve the parliamentary culture of dialogue in the context of a deteriorating political atmosphere in the Serbian *Narodna Skupština*. This Dialogue focuses on talks between political group leaders, which are facilitated by the EP and *Skupština*. The Dialogue is divided into two phases. Phase 1 was composed of three rounds of dialogue (October–December 2019) and focused on improving the conditions for holding parliamentary elections through concrete initiatives and measures in line with OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. Phase 2 was formally launched on 1 March 2021 by a remote meeting between the EP facilitators and the Speaker of *Narodna Skupština*. This Dialogue seeks to facilitate party political consensus between the ruling and opposition parties. As such, the Dialogue is not a tool focused on gender equality promotion, which is why none of the documents and statements issued after consecutive Dialogue rounds mentions gender or women. Far more suitable for addressing gender equality and women’s rights are Simone Veil programmes, but none has so far been organised in Serbia, although this is planned as one of DEG’s future activities.

These activities shows that while the DEG has successfully used capacity building as a tool for gender equality promotion in Serbia. However, the predominantly electoral focus of the Jean Monnet Dialogues in Serbia has prevented this format from being used as a vehicle for gender mainstreaming. Yet the mandate of Phase 2 of the Dialogues encompasses ‘implementation of EU-related reforms’,⁴¹³ which can be utilised to include gender in the inter-party discussions facilitated by the EP. This could in turn contribute to a greater application of the principles of co-creation and contextualisation.

Delegation to the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (D-RS)

Although rooted in the Delegation for relations with Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was established in 1981 and which has changed its name many times, separate inter-parliamentary meetings with Serbia began being organised in 2006. The EU-Serbia IPMs were of an informal nature and had had no particular structure. This changed in 2013 with the entry into force of the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Agreement, which established a Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC).⁴¹⁴

The current EP Delegation to SAPC was created following the 2014 EP elections and is composed of 15 members. It meets with Serbian counterparts within the SAPC twice a year, with the exception of election years. The outcome of SAPC meetings has been the adoption of formal ‘declaration and recommendations’ on issues related to: Serbia’s EU accession process; the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue; democracy, the rule of law and human rights; economic development; and security and defence policies. Members of D-RS also go on field visits to Serbia in order to gain a first-hand insight into the local implementation of EU-financed projects, which enables delegation members to assist competent EP committees in the performance of

⁴¹² DEG, Annual Work Programme for 2021, at 14-15.

⁴¹³ EP, Global Democracy Support, ‘Jean Monnet dialogues: carrying on a legacy of peace making’, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/globaldemocracysupport/en/mediation-and-dialogue/jean-monnet-dialogues>, accessed on 26 October 2021.

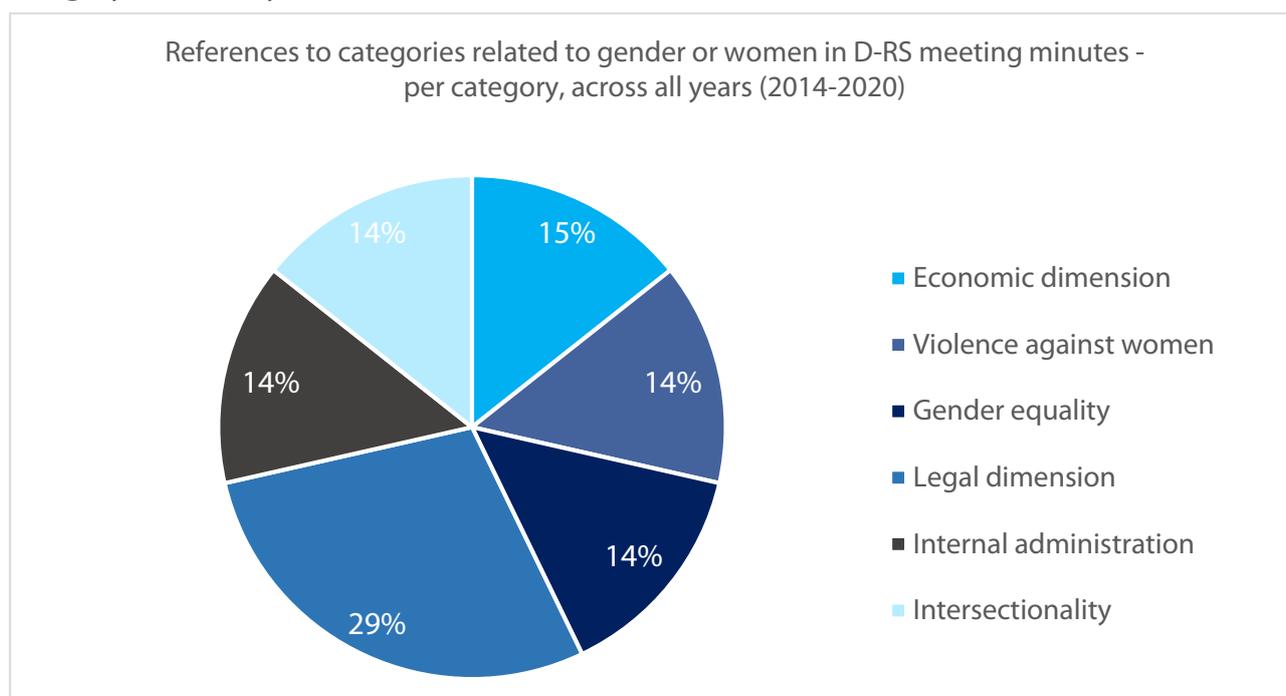
⁴¹⁴ Article 125 in conjunction with Article 12 thereof.

their budgetary and legislative tasks. Other than in these formats, D-RS meets in Brussels or Strasbourg 'occasionally'.⁴¹⁵

The SAPC has its own RoP.⁴¹⁶ Besides determining the different aspects of the governance and operation of the SAPC, this document does not address gender as there are no requirements concerning the representation of women in either delegation.

When it comes to its activities, D-RS held a total of 18 *meetings* in the period 2014-2020, during which seven references were made that related to gender or women. As shown in Figure 10, the most predominant category related to gender or women that was mentioned in these meetings was the 'Legal dimension', amounting to 29 % of these categories.

Figure 10: References to categories related to gender or women in D-RS meeting minutes - per category, across all years (2014-2020)



In D-RS, almost all the references related to gender and women were found in the meeting minutes from 2017. An interesting finding is that, in a region often associated with conflict and strong patriarchal culture, the 'Social dimension', the 'Political dimension' and the 'Peace and security dimension' were not mentioned at all. The delegation's emphasis on the 'Legal dimension' is closely related to the necessity for EU candidate countries to implement national legislative reforms in the process of accession. Yet, to be more effective, the delegation should ensure a higher degree of contextualisation of delegation discussions by including more dimensions of gender equality in its meeting agendas.

⁴¹⁵ D-RS, 'Introduction', available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/d-rs/about/introduction>, accessed on 21 July 2021.

⁴¹⁶ Rules of Procedure of the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, adopted by the Committee at its first meeting on 15 November 2013 in Belgrade and amended on 26 November 2014 in Strasbourg, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/118943/Rules-EU_Serbia_amended_11_2014.pdf, accessed on 21 July 2021.

Figure 11: Referenced to categories related to gender and women in D-RS meeting minutes (2014-2020) – per category, per year [in %]

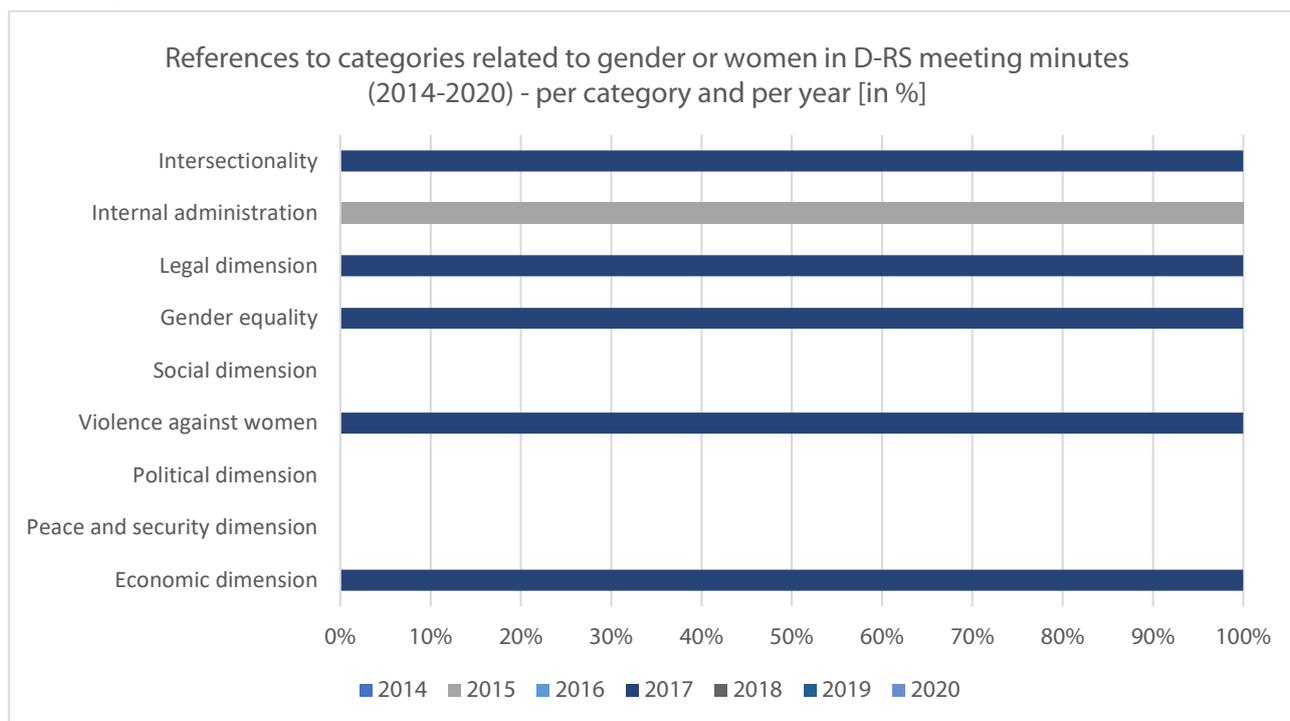
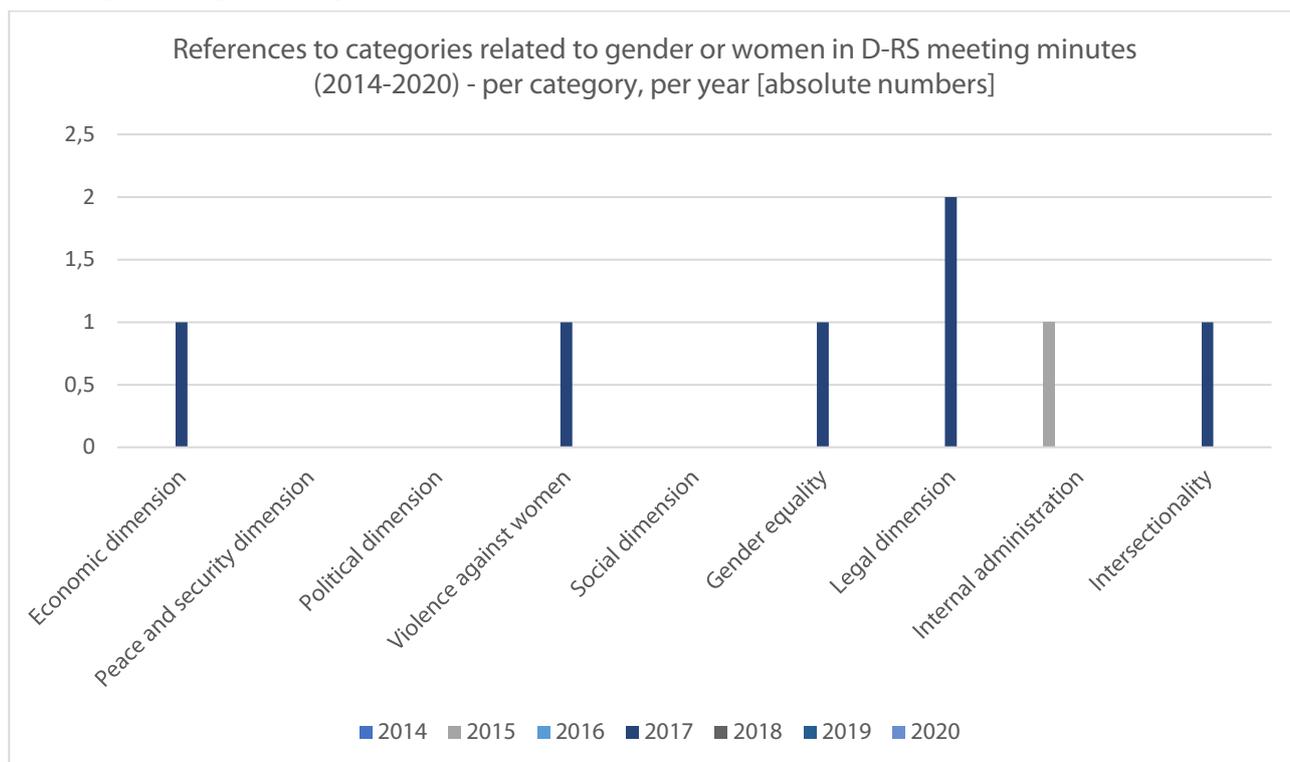


Figure 12: References to categories related to gender or women in D-RS meeting minutes (2014-2020) - per category and per year [in absolute numbers]



Since its establishment in 2013 to date, D-RS held a total of 12 *inter-parliamentary meetings* with Serbian counterparts within the SAPC format. Of all of them, the 6th IPM from September 2017 was the only one to include gender equality as an official agenda point. Although the formal SAPC ‘Declarations and

recommendations' only mention support for Serbia's activities on the adoption of a Gender Equality Act,⁴¹⁷ the minutes of the meeting demonstrate that gender was also mentioned in the context of economic development. Namely, the meeting noted that Serbia's budget for 2017 was the first time that gender-sensitive budgeting was introduced.⁴¹⁸

Gender was further mentioned in three other IPMs, but only in passing. The 8th and 9th IPMs briefly stated support for Serbia's activities towards the adoption of the said Gender Equality Act, while the 11th IPM "emphasised the importance of empowering women and youth in the labour market".⁴¹⁹

Apart from this, D-RS has engaged in the organisation of several gender-focused events. In this sense, D-RS collaborated with other enlargement-focused delegations in order to organise the **Joint Western Balkans and Turkey Delegations' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Rights**, which was held on 11 May 2021. The meeting gathered MEPs and regional experts on gender issues, who addressed matters of inequality in the work field, unrecognised cases of violence, and the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women's access to health services.⁴²⁰ Personal observation of this meeting by a member of the research team has yielded a number of important insights. The event allowed the participants to exchange not only their views, but also examples from national practices, gender-related statistics, information on the implementation of international instruments, reports about worrying trends (e.g. regarding gender-based violence), and insights about the impact of national cultures and mentalities which are difficult to remove through legislation (e.g. judges' reluctance to sentence perpetrators).

Another event – which D-RS co-organised with FEMM, DROI and the other enlargement-focused delegations – was a **joint exchange of views** on violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey, which took place on 8 June 2017.⁴²¹

The activities of D-RS show a moderate to low level of attention to gender equality and women's rights. This is coherent with the lesser relevance of gender equality in this country and the centrality of the accession process. However, the recent joint organisation of events with stakeholders and other delegations, committees and subcommittees demonstrates adherence to the principles of co-creation and joint venture and elevates the contextualisation of EP policy-making towards Serbia and the wider region of the Western Balkans.

The Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat)

EuroLat is a multilateral inter-parliamentary assembly established in 2006, replacing the 17 predecessor inter-parliamentary conferences which the EP and the Latin American Parliament had held since 1974.⁴²²

EuroLat is composed of 150 members divided into two components: (a) the European component consisting of 75 members from the EP; and (b) the Latin American component consisting of 75 members

⁴¹⁷ SAPC, 6th meeting, 'Declaration and recommendations', 13-14 September 2017, Strasbourg, doc. no. P.E.601.947, point 14.

⁴¹⁸ D-RS, Minutes of the 6th meeting of the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, 13-14 September 2017, Strasbourg, doc. no. PE601.959, at 4.

⁴¹⁹ SAPC, 11th meeting, 'Declaration and recommendations', 30-31 October 2019, Belgrade, point 8, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/delegations/d-rs/document_travail/2019/10-31/D-RS_DT\(2019\)10-31_XL.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/delegations/d-rs/document_travail/2019/10-31/D-RS_DT(2019)10-31_XL.pdf), accessed on 21 July 2021.

⁴²⁰ Summary of the meeting, 'Deteriorating situation for women in Western Balkans and Turkey', 1 June 2021, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/235331/Deteriorating%20situation%20for%20women%20in%20Western%20Balkans%20and%20Turkey.pdf>, accessed on 21 July 2021.

⁴²¹ See the Programme of this event at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/120123/programme%20FEMM%20DROI%20Exchange%20of%20views%20Western%20Balkans%20and%20Turkey%20\(002\).pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/120123/programme%20FEMM%20DROI%20Exchange%20of%20views%20Western%20Balkans%20and%20Turkey%20(002).pdf), accessed on 21 July 2021.

⁴²² See further in: Müller, Gustavo G, 'The Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat): Constructing a Common Bi-Regional Agenda', in Kolja Raube, Meltem Müftüler-Baç and Jan Wouters (eds), *Parliamentary Cooperation and Diplomacy in EU External Relations: An Essential Companion* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2019) 324-340.

from the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino), the Andean Parliament (Parlandino), the Central American Parliament (Parlacen), the Mercosur Parliament (Parlasur) and the Chilean and Mexican Congresses.⁴²³

EuroLat represents the parliamentary dimension of the Bi-Regional Strategic Partnership between the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean (often referred to as EU-LAC), which was established in June 1999.⁴²⁴ EuroLat's key role is to debate, monitor and review all matters pertaining to this partnership, among which the defence of the rules-based international order and tackling challenges related to democracy, rule of law, human rights, migration, poverty, and climate change. To these ends, EuroLat can adopt non-binding resolutions and recommendations for the attention of the institutions governing the partnership.

EuroLat is chaired by two Co-Presidents (one from the EU and the other from the Latin American component), who are assisted by 14 Co-Vice-Presidents (7 from each side), all of whom form EuroLat's 16-member Executive Bureau. EuroLat also has four standing committees for: Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights; Economic, Financial and Commercial Affairs; Social Affairs, Youth and Children, Human Exchanges, Education and Culture; and Sustainable Development, the Environment, Energy Policy, Research, Innovation and Technology. The committees and the Executive Bureau meet at least twice a year.

Significantly, EuroLat has its own RoP which address gender and women in three ways. First, in terms of EuroLat's internal composition, it is required that "the participating parliaments shall promote the participation of women in the Assembly's bodies".⁴²⁵ Second, the RoP state that the responsibilities of the Committee on Social Affairs, Youth and Children, Human Exchanges, Education and Culture include "matters relating to young people and gender equality".⁴²⁶ Third, two Vice-Presidents or members from both the EU and Latin American components are to be responsible for relations with civil society in their respective regions and for Euro-Latin American Women's Forum, on the basis of recommendations that may be issued by the EuroLat Executive Bureau.⁴²⁷

EP Resolutions

Since 2014, the EP has adopted two resolutions on Latin America, both of which addressed gender equality and women's rights. The first resolution was passed in April 2021 and analysed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in this region.⁴²⁸ In it, the MEPs made a number of important assertions. Noting that Latin America began the year 2020 "the world's most unequal region", they specifically pointed out the worsening of employment and labour participation rates "among women above all".⁴²⁹ They also emphasised the disproportionate effect of Covid-19 on vulnerable groups, including women and girls.⁴³⁰

⁴²³ See analyses of EuroLat and some of its component parliaments in: Müller, Gustavo G. 'The Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat): Constructing a Common Bi-Regional Agenda', in Kolja Raube et al. (eds), *Parliamentary Cooperation and Diplomacy in EU External Relations: An Essential Companion* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2019) 324–340; Stavridis, Stelios et al. 'The Origins, Structures and Functions of the Euro-Mediterranean and Euro-Latin American Inter-Parliamentary Assemblies', in Olivier Costa et al. (eds), *Parliamentary Dimensions of Regionalization and Globalization: The Role of Inter-Parliamentary Institutions* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013) 211-231; Mariano, Karina L. Pasquariello et al., 'Regional Integration and Parliamentary Diplomacy: Experiences of the Mercosur, Andean and Latin American Parliaments', in Stelios Stavridis and Davor Jancic (eds), *Parliamentary Diplomacy in European and Global Governance* (Brill Publishing 2017) 309–326; Jancic, Davor. 'Globalizing Representative Democracy: The Emergence of Multilayered International Parliamentarism', (2015) 38(2) *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review* 197-242.

⁴²⁴ See the background process preceding this in: Dri, Clarissa. 'The European Parliament and Regional Cooperation: The Case of Latin America', in Stelios Stavridis and Daniela Irrera (eds), *The European Parliament and its International Relations* (Routledge 2015) 161-177.

⁴²⁵ Article 2(5) of the Rules of Procedure of EuroLat of 20 September 2018.

⁴²⁶ Article 1(III) of Annex I of the Rules of Procedure of EuroLat of 20 September 2018.

⁴²⁷ Article 4(3) of the Rules of Procedure of EuroLat of 20 September 2018.

⁴²⁸ EP, Resolution of 29 April 2021 on the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America, doc. no. P9_TA(2021)0155

⁴²⁹ Recital I thereof.

⁴³⁰ Recital J thereof.

Underlining further that the pandemic has “aggravated gender inequalities”, MEPs noted that Latin America “has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world and [that] those rates have increased during the pandemic”, with lockdowns causing a “marked increase in domestic violence, rape and femicide” and with the lack of attention to sexual and reproductive health during the pandemic “endangering the lives of women and girls in the region”.⁴³¹

The second resolution was passed in September 2017 and centred on the EU’s political relations with the region.⁴³² Stressing gender equality as a shared value and a global challenge that offers opportunities for bi-regional cooperation, the MEPs urged:

“the effective implementation of gender equality, the empowerment of women, and policies in favour of the inclusion of women in all spheres of political, economic and social life, with a view to enhancing their active participation in society, strenuously combating femicide, guaranteeing their physical and psychological security, facilitating equal access to the job market, land ownership, and employment, and ensuring their sexual and reproductive health and rights [...]”⁴³³

The resolution went on to highlight the importance of improving the lives of girls and women, with access to education being vital to social and economic transformation. The MEPs also noted the importance of the Belém do Pará and Istanbul Conventions in addressing these challenges.

Committees and subcommittees (focus on DROI and INTA)

DROI organised two missions to Latin America in the period 2014-2019: one to Bolivia (17-21 April 2017) and another to Mexico and Guatemala (8-12 February 2016). Given the subcommittee’s focus on human rights, these missions very poignantly illustrate the laudable scale of the MEPs’ diplomatic efforts in the area of gender equality promotion. During the visit to Bolivia, the discussions focused, among other things, on women in general and violence against women in particular. Besides meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Presidents of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, and other members of the Pluractional Legislative Assembly (Bolivian Parliament), the MEPs also met with women’s associations. The DROI delegation issued a strong message on gender equality by welcoming ‘the high number of female representatives in parliament’, while noting that ‘this does not substitute for the necessary political will to fight femicides and widespread domestic violence, for the affording of full protection to all female victims of violence and domestic abuse, and for the enactment of strategies to empower women at all levels’.⁴³⁴ Similarly, during its visit to Mexico, the DROI delegation *inter alia* raised the issues of violence against women, women’s political participation and the situation of human rights’ defenders. In the MEPs’ meetings with over 50 representatives of the Mexican civil society, violence against women and girls was highlighted as ‘a matter of particular concern’.⁴³⁵ In Guatemala, MEPs also met with representatives of over 50 CSOs and one of the themes discussed with them was gender equality and widespread violence against women. Engaging in a dialogue with over 100 civil society representatives, including on issues of gender equality and women’s rights, in the span of several days represents an impressive level of engagement that demonstrates a strong commitment to the contextualisation and co-creation in the promotion of gender equality in external relations.

⁴³¹ Recital K thereof.

⁴³² EP, Resolution of 13 September 2017 on EU political relations with Latin America, doc. no. P8_TA(2017)0345.

⁴³³ Point 24 thereof.

⁴³⁴ Press release, ‘Bolivia: DROI delegation acknowledges significant progress in access to education, health care and drinking water’, 21 April 2017, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20170421IPR71952/press-statement-droi-delegation-to-bolivia>, accessed on 26 October 2021.

⁴³⁵ Press release, ‘Human Rights Delegation to Mexico and Guatemala’, 12 February 2016, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20160212IPR14154/human-rights-delegation-to-mexico-and-guatemala>, accessed on 26 October 2021.

For its part, INTA has also organised several **missions** to Latin America. During the *ad hoc* mission to Chile in December 2018, discussions were held with Chile's "top officials from the Gender Ministry and Industrial Property National Institute" on the Chilean legislative reforms related to gender, and measures aimed at a more inclusive role for women and indigenous peoples.⁴³⁶ INTA's mission to Colombia and Peru in February 2018 is another example of good practice of mission delegates discussing gender and the position of women with governmental and non-governmental representatives. For instance, discussions were held with the Colombian Labour Minister on the Colombian certification programme, which recognises companies that effectively implement gender equality principles; and with representatives of the Peruvian CSOs on gender pay gaps.⁴³⁷

The organisation of meetings with industry stakeholders and civil society representatives strongly contributes to greater co-creation and contextualisation in the EP's approach towards this region.

Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (DLAT)

DLAT is the above-mentioned EP's component of EuroLat.⁴³⁸ Like for DARP analysed above, the DLAT Chair's welcome message specifically mentions "the ongoing battle for effective gender equality" as one of the challenges shared between the EU and its Latin American counterparts, alongside pursuing the general goals of reducing inequalities and achieving SDGs.⁴³⁹

DLAT has held a total of 45 **meetings** in the period 2014-2020, during which gender or women were referred to 46 times in the meeting minutes covered by this study. In this delegation, 41 % of all the topics related to gender and women belonged to the overarching category of 'Internal administration'. Furthermore, most of the references related to gender and women were found in the meeting minutes from 2016, while the year 2019 was the only one without any references related to gender or women in DLAT meeting minutes. These insights are depicted in Figures 13 and 15 below in terms of percentages and absolute numbers.

The medium to high levels of references to gender and women in delegation meetings contributes to internal gender mainstreaming and fosters the delegation's authenticity in interactions with counterparts from Latin America.

⁴³⁶ INTA, Mission report following the ad hoc delegation to Chile from 18-20 December 2018, doc. no. PE632.085v02-00, 21 January 2019, at 2-3.

⁴³⁷ INTA, Mission report following the mission to Bogota, Colombia from 12-14 February 2018 and Lima, Peru from 14-16 February 2018, doc. no. PE618.132v02-00, at 4 and 7.

⁴³⁸ See the text accompanying footnote **Error! Bookmark not defined.** above.

⁴³⁹ DLAT, 'Welcome message', available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/dlat/home>, accessed on 22 July 2021.

Figure 13: References to categories related to gender and women in DLAT meeting minutes - per category, across all years (2014-2020)

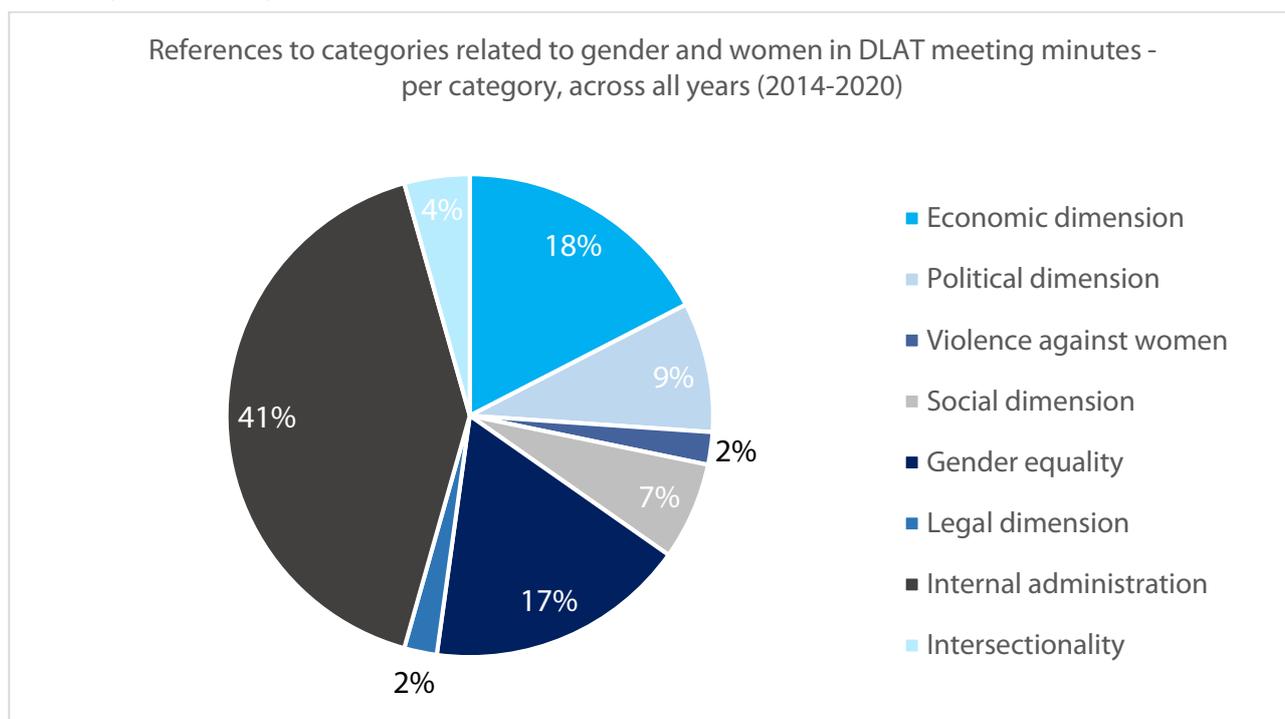


Figure 14: References to categories related to gender and women in DLAT meeting minutes (2014-2020) - per category, per year [in %]

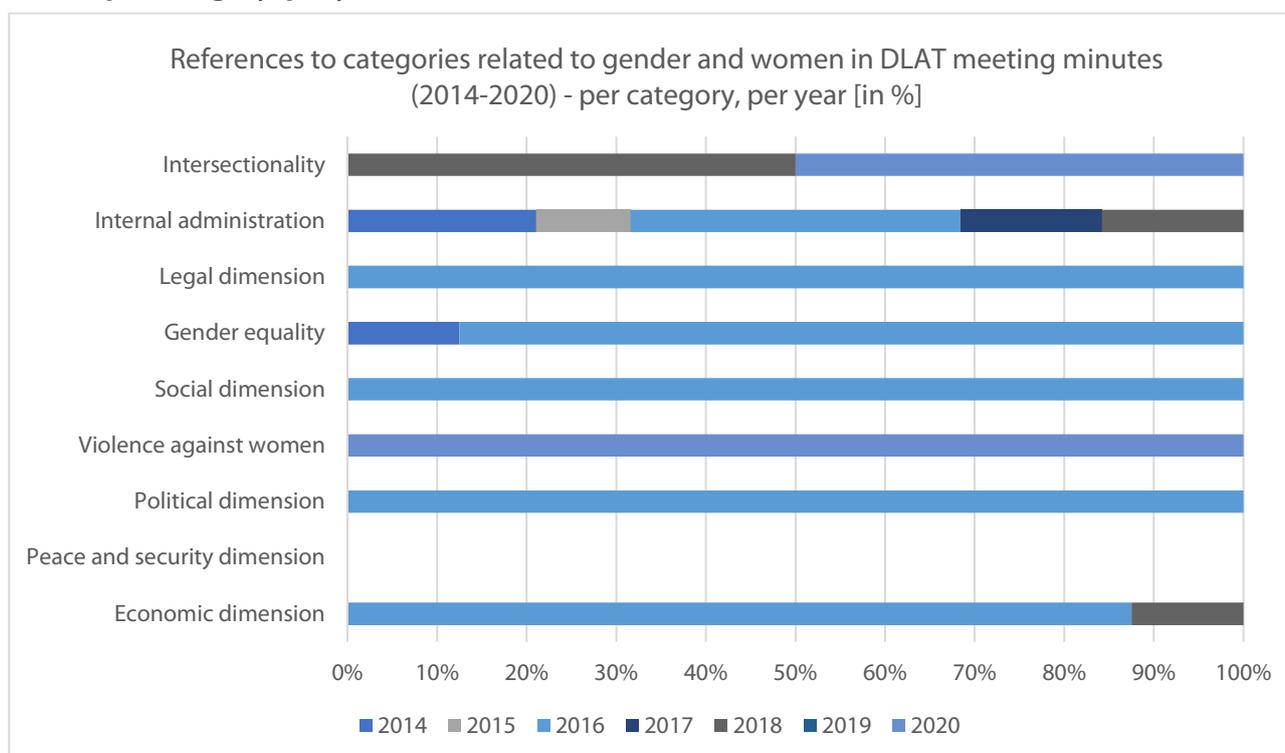
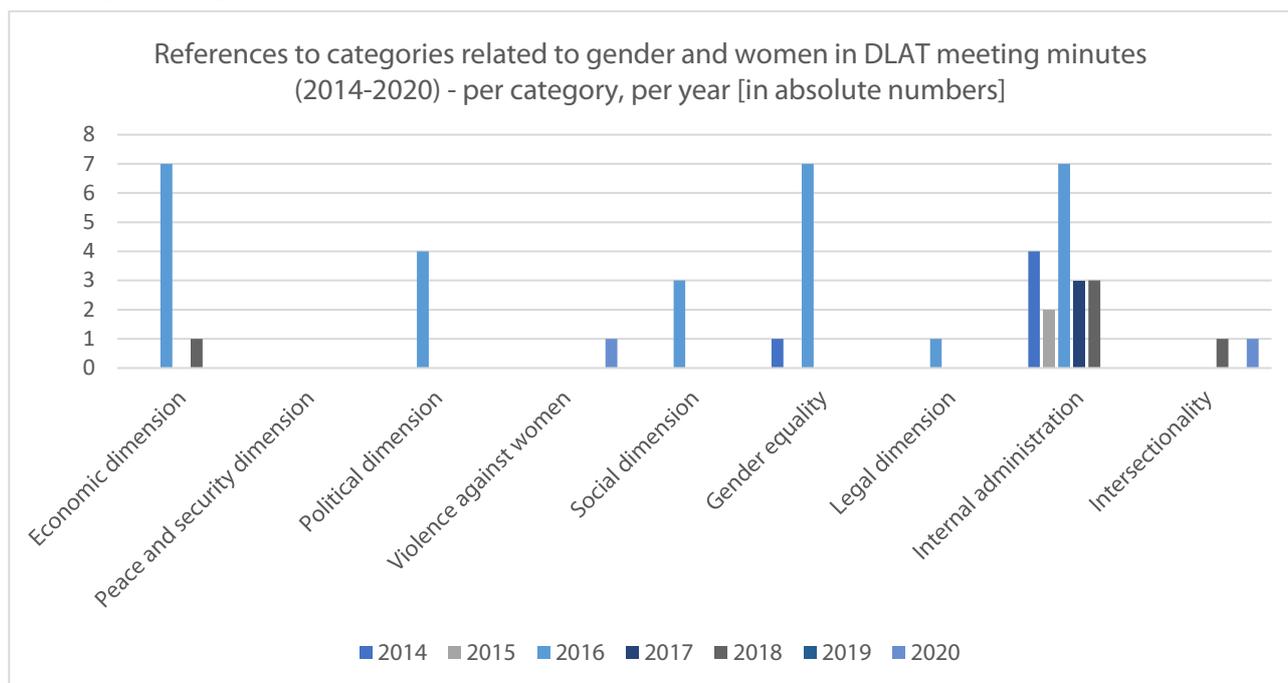


Figure 15: References to categories related to gender and women in DLAT meeting minutes (2014-2020) - per category, per year [in absolute numbers]



In the context of EuroLat, the key work on gender issues is done by the **Euro-Latin American Women’s Forum**, which is currently co-chaired by Samira Rafaela (European component) and Julia Argentina Perié (Latin American component). The creation of the Forum, originally envisaged as a network, was initiated by the EuroLat Committee on Social Affairs, Youth and Children, Human Exchanges, Education and Culture in May 2010 by means of an ‘urgent topic’ raised by Ms Isabel Recavarren, a Peruvian scholar who is the Director of *Centro de estudios, formación e información de América Latina* (Centre for studies, training and information on Latin America), a think tank based in Milan, Italy, that specialises in Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)-EU relations.⁴⁴⁰ The Forum was established in September 2011 in Milan, where its Steering Committee is also based.⁴⁴¹ Although the Forum does not have an official status within EuroLat and thus receives no structural funding, it was declared an ‘extra-parliamentary mechanism’ of the said EuroLat Committee in May 2012 in Hamburg.⁴⁴²

The meetings of the Euro-Latin American Women’s Forum are usually organised around EuroLat plenary sessions or committee meetings, but can also take place in other moments of the year. The Forum represents an important venue where women’s rights in political, economic and social spheres are discussed between European and Latin American parliamentarians, on the one hand, and representatives of governments, industry stakeholders, CSOs and academics, on the other. Due to the high importance of its links with non-governmental organisations, the Forum has been described as a ‘hybrid network’ with a

⁴⁴⁰ See: EuroLat minutes from 13 and 14 May 2010, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/eurolat/committees/social/meetings/2010_05_13_15_sevilla/minutes/817602en.pdf, accessed on 26 October 2021.

⁴⁴¹ Centro de estudios, formación e información de América Latina, ‘Foro EuroLat de la Mujer–Actividades & Eventos’, available at <https://www.cefiat.eu/foro-eurolat-de-la-mujer/actividades-eventos/>, accessed on 26 October 2021.

⁴⁴² Roggeband, Conny and Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann, ‘Gendering EU-Latin America Inter-Regional Relations’, in Thomas Kruessmann and Anita Ziegerhofer (eds), *Promoting Gender Equality Abroad: An Assessment of EU Action in the External Dimension* (LIT Verlag 2017) 163-189, at 182-183.

fluid structure which is not set in stone.⁴⁴³ These different parliamentary interactions within the Forum are well illustrated by the last two Forum meetings. The Women's Forum meeting held remotely in May 2021 focused on the impact of Covid-19 on pre-existing gender inequalities and consisted of an exchange of views only with governmental representatives (Argentina's Minister for Women, Gender and Diversity and its National Director of Economy and Gender, as well as Portugal's Secretary of State for Citizenship and Equality representing the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU).⁴⁴⁴ The in-person meeting of the Forum, held in Panama City in December 2019, however, gathered not only governmental representatives (e.g. Panama's Minister for Social Development) but also intergovernmental ones (e.g. UN Women) as well as those from the non-governmental sector (e.g. the President of the National Forum of Women in Political Parties, a Panamanian NGO, and a representative in charge of female entrepreneurship of Panama's Ciudad del Saber Foundation Innovation Centre).⁴⁴⁵ These examples demonstrate the wealth of interactions which women's forums and caucuses can generate.

This in turn fosters the EP's pursuit of co-creation in parliamentary diplomacy and enhances the contextualisation of its gender equality promotion efforts. This is confirmed by academic research, which has found that, by joining forces, members of EuroLat and CSOs have 'successfully created vehicles of informal power to advance gender equality issues in the bi-regional space'.⁴⁴⁶ The manifestations of the influence of the Euro-Latin American Women's Forum are that it has 'successfully influenced the agendas and resolutions of EuroLat', 'gained a voice as agenda-setter for the EuroLat', 'gained leverage in both the interparliamentary and extra-parliamentary arena', and 'managed to mobilise highly positioned professional women with a clear interest in women's issues'.⁴⁴⁷ These impacts are facilitated by the fact that members of the Forum occupy overlapping political positions at both bi-regional and national levels, allowing them to engage in 'multilevel lobbying' and 'co-operate across geographical and party lines, making it a potentially strong force'.⁴⁴⁸ The experience of the Euro-Latin American Women's Forum confirms the benefits of multi-layered international parliamentarism, which enables parliamentarians to act on the same issue within multiple interparliamentary forums in order to maximise their outreach and advocacy opportunities.⁴⁴⁹

Further impetus for the promotion of gender equality in Latin America, often owing to the work of the Euro-Latin American Women's Forum, is given at **inter-parliamentary meetings**, which take the form of EuroLat committee meetings and EuroLat plenary sessions. The latter are of particular significance, because they can result in the adoption of formal pronouncements (e.g. resolutions). Since EuroLat's

⁴⁴³ Roggeband, Conny and Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann, 'Gendering EU-Latin America Inter-Regional Relations', in Thomas Kruessmann and Anita Ziegerhofer (eds), *Promoting Gender Equality Abroad: An Assessment of EU Action in the External Dimension* (LIT Verlag 2017) 163-189, at 179.

⁴⁴⁴ Euro-Latin American Women's Forum, Meeting of 3 May 2021, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/eurolat/women_forum/meetings/2021brussels/default_en.htm, accessed on 30 September 2021.

⁴⁴⁵ Euro-Latin American Women's Forum, Minutes of the meeting of 13 December 2019, doc. no. EUAL_PV(2019)1213_1, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/eurolat/women_forum/meetings/panama2019/minutes/1195938EN.pdf, accessed on 30 September 2021.

⁴⁴⁶ Roggeband, Conny and Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann, 'Gendering EU-Latin America Inter-Regional Relations', in Thomas Kruessmann and Anita Ziegerhofer (eds), *Promoting Gender Equality Abroad: An Assessment of EU Action in the External Dimension* (LIT Verlag 2017) 163-189, at 179.

⁴⁴⁷ Roggeband, Conny and Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann, 'Gendering EU-Latin America Inter-Regional Relations', in Thomas Kruessmann and Anita Ziegerhofer (eds), *Promoting Gender Equality Abroad: An Assessment of EU Action in the External Dimension* (LIT Verlag 2017) 163-189, at 183-184.

⁴⁴⁸ Roggeband, Conny and Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann, 'Gendering EU-Latin America Inter-Regional Relations', in Thomas Kruessmann and Anita Ziegerhofer (eds), *Promoting Gender Equality Abroad: An Assessment of EU Action in the External Dimension* (LIT Verlag 2017) 163-189, at 184 and 186.

⁴⁴⁹ Jancic, Davor. 'Globalizing Representative Democracy: The Emergence of Multilayered International Parliamentarism', (2015) 38(2) *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review*, 197-242.

establishment to date, there have been 13 such sessions, of which seven in the period 2014-2020 (7th to 13th IPMs). All of them addressed gender equality and women's rights in a variety of contexts.

The 7th IPM, organised in March 2014, adopted two resolutions of importance to women's rights. The first one was an urgent resolution on femicide (the killing of women for gender-based reasons). In it, the parliamentarians condemned these crimes, and assessed both regions' legislative and judicial efforts aimed at their prevention and punishment.⁴⁵⁰ The second one concerned access to education.⁴⁵¹ Noting that learning is an indispensable tool for achieving gender equality and that women participate in the labour market on unequal terms, the resolution called on governments and enterprises to devise policies on continuing education so as to enhance women's access to work, reduce gender pay gaps, improve their work-life balance, and encourage greater representation of women in management roles.⁴⁵²

The 8th IPM, held in June 2015, passed an urgent resolution on the Paris climate summit, where parliamentarians urged "the systematic integration of gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in the negotiations of the UNFCCC and the anchoring of gender equality as an operational principle in the new climate agreement", while emphasising the importance of gender mainstreaming within the Green Climate Fund in a way that would take into account "the rights, needs, capacities, and knowledge of women".⁴⁵³ The resolution also requested the EU-CELAC Dialogue on Sustainable Development to be developed with the participation, *inter alia*, of women's organisations.⁴⁵⁴

The 9th IPM, organised in September 2016, adopted an array of documents mentioning gender or women from the political, economic and social perspectives. The resolution on the financing of political parties stressed their key role in securing equal political opportunities and conditions for both genders and called for the creation of incentives that would enable political parties to channel more resources towards greater political involvement, *inter alia*, of women.⁴⁵⁵ The resolution on the digital agenda noted the gender gaps in this area and called on the member states to engage in "seriously combating digital exclusion and uneven access" and to promote "an integrated gender equality perspective in public policies on digital development".⁴⁵⁶ The resolution on trade negotiations underscored the importance of gender mainstreaming in trade policies, highlighted the need for multilateral action in the promotion of gender equality, and praised Chile's firm commitment to including gender in the negotiations with the EU on an updated association agreement.⁴⁵⁷ Gender equality was also amply referred to in the resolution on the elimination of poverty as mandated by the SDGs.⁴⁵⁸ A recommendation further called for gender issues to

⁴⁵⁰ EuroLat (7th IPM), Urgent Resolution on femicide in the European Union and Latin America, 29 March 2014, Athens, doc. no. AP101.579v03-00. See a case study on the femicide in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, in: Pufleau, Mónica Velasco. 'The Impact of Parliamentary Diplomacy, Civil Society and Human Rights Advocacy on EU Strategic Partners: The Case of Mexico', in Stelios Stavridis and Davor Jancic (eds), *Parliamentary Diplomacy in European and Regional Governance* (Brill Publishing 2017) 134-155.

⁴⁵¹ EuroLat (7th IPM), Resolution 'Formal and informal education and continuing education', 29 March 2014, Athens, doc. no. AP101.308v04-00.

⁴⁵² Recital C and points 25 and 27 thereof.

⁴⁵³ EuroLat (8th IPM), Urgent Resolution on the Europe-Latin America position on issues related to climate and climate change in the context of the Summit of 2015 in Paris (COP 21), 5 June 2015, Brussels, doc. no. AP101.804v02-005, point 13.

⁴⁵⁴ Point 26 thereof.

⁴⁵⁵ EuroLat (9th IPM), Resolution 'Financing of political parties in the European Union and Latin America', 22 September 2016, Montevideo, doc. no. AP101.794v04-00, recital L and point 16.

⁴⁵⁶ EuroLat (9th IPM), Resolution 'Digital Agenda in the EU and the LAC countries', 22 September 2016, Montevideo, doc. no. AP101.935v04-00, recital AC and Points 13 and 14.

⁴⁵⁷ EuroLat (9th IPM), Resolution 'Trade aspects of the various EU-LAC negotiations currently being conducted', 22 September 2016, Montevideo, doc. no. AP101.940v03-00, recital K and points 4 and 13.

⁴⁵⁸ EuroLat (9th IPM), Resolution 'Combating poverty as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 22 September 2016, Montevideo, doc. no. AP101.781v04-00,

be incorporated into migration policies in order to prevent trafficking, violence and discrimination against women, especially given their vulnerability to these risks.⁴⁵⁹

The 10th IPM, taking place in September 2017, adopted a set of resolutions which in various contexts mentioned gender and women. The resolution on the trafficking of small arms and light weapons noted that they are “a major driver of domestic and gender-based violence”.⁴⁶⁰ The resolution on informal and undeclared work noted the particularly strong impact of these types of employment on women, and called for targeted awareness-raising campaigns and education programmes to address these challenges, while urging member states to take measures to promote formal employment especially for vulnerable groups, including women.⁴⁶¹ The resolution on the future of multilateral trade called on the WTO to “establish the principle that all trade policies should give due consideration to the gender dimension”, with a view to ensuring women’s participation and empowerment.⁴⁶²

The 11th IPM resulted in the adoption of several resolutions in September 2018, which extensively addressed gender equality and women’s rights. The resolution on the local implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stressed that awareness-raising campaigns should convey the message that SDGs tackle issues of direct relevance to citizens’ daily lives, including gender equality.⁴⁶³ Another resolution addressed gender equality from the perspective of social cohesion policies. The parliamentarians underlined that these policies should include gender equality measures and that there was a need to develop new indicators, approaches and methodologies for measuring gender inequality.⁴⁶⁴ Parliamentarians further highlighted that many countries experienced a regression in the policies aimed at reducing gender inequalities.⁴⁶⁵ The adverse position of women was also mentioned in the contexts of the fight against poverty,⁴⁶⁶ regressive labour market reforms,⁴⁶⁷ gender pay and pension gaps,⁴⁶⁸ and different forms of discrimination.⁴⁶⁹ The resolution on the governance of globalisation particularly stressed the need for gender mainstreaming in trade agreements, which “should be used as a tool to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment” and which should be elaborated based on gender-disaggregated data and with the participation of women’s organisations.⁴⁷⁰ This resolution also emphasised the need “to close gender gaps in access to and in the use of new technologies”,⁴⁷¹ which was also mentioned in the resolution on allocation of development aid.⁴⁷²

⁴⁵⁹ EuroLat (9th IPM), Recommendation ‘Migration, development and the economic crisis’, 22 September 2016, Montevideo, doc. no. AP101.709v06-00, recital G and point 5.

⁴⁶⁰ EuroLat (10th IPM), Resolution ‘Trafficking of small arms and light weapons’, 21 September 2017, San Salvador, doc. no. AP102.334v04-00, recital F.

⁴⁶¹ EuroLat, (10th IPM), Resolution ‘Informal and undeclared work in the European Union and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean’, 21 September 2017, San Salvador, doc. no. AP102.164v04-00, recitals E, G, L and Q and points 8 and 18.

⁴⁶² EuroLat (10th IPM), Resolution ‘The future of multilateralism post-Nairobi’, 21 September 2017, San Salvador, doc. no. AP102.318v04-00, point 10.

⁴⁶³ EuroLat (11th IPM), Resolution ‘Effectively implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level’, 20 September 2018, Vienna, doc. no. AP102.458v05-00, point 11.

⁴⁶⁴ EuroLat (11th IPM), Resolution ‘Tackling inequality through social cohesion policies in EU countries and Latin American and Caribbean countries’, 20 September 2018, Vienna, doc. no. AP102.427v04-00, recitals K and L.

⁴⁶⁵ Point 2 thereof.

⁴⁶⁶ Point 6 thereof.

⁴⁶⁷ Point 13 thereof.

⁴⁶⁸ Point 14 thereof.

⁴⁶⁹ Points 15 and 17 thereof.

⁴⁷⁰ EuroLat (11th IPM), Resolution ‘The Governance of Globalisation’, 20 September 2018, Vienna, doc. no. AP102.533v03-00, points 3, 4 and 12.

⁴⁷¹ Point 2 thereof.

⁴⁷² EuroLat (11th IPM), Resolution ‘Criteria for the Allocation of Official Development Aid to Middle-Income Countries’, 20 September 2018, Vienna, doc. no. AP102.530v03-00, point 20.

The 12th IPM, held in December 2019, reiterated the “need to step up our work on gender equality and to develop appropriate legislation and programmes combating gender violence”, underlining that greater participation of women in political, social and economic life as well as the elimination of violence against women are the two regions’ “shared priority objectives”.⁴⁷³ The meeting also emphasised that “[t]he EuroLat Assembly has influenced bi-regional policies in this area by contributing, inter alia, to the formulation of the gender chapter in the CELAC-EU Action Plan and to the inclusion of a gender chapter in the future EU-Chile Association Agreement”.⁴⁷⁴

The latest, 13th IPM, which took place in November 2020, concluded that “women are at the forefront of the response to Covid-19, as health professionals and unpaid carers, and that the digital divide, the underemployment rate and the degree of informal work of women in Latin America are considerably higher than those of men, reaching 80 % in some countries, and that women are therefore bearing the consequences of the pandemic much more acutely due to structural inequalities”.⁴⁷⁵ As a result, EU, Latin American and Caribbean countries were called upon to promote strategies specifically aimed at empowering women and assisting them financially, while maintaining the existing funds and programmes.

The survey of EuroLat’s and DLAT’s activities demonstrates a very high level of gender mainstreaming in EU-Latin America relations. Gender equality and women’s rights have consistently and regularly been raised in all key areas of life, setting an example for other national, regional and international assemblies. The functioning of a Women’s Forum within the framework of EuroLat amplifies the EP’s contribution to gender equality promotion within the region of Latin America.

4.3 Conclusions

The foregoing analysis allows us to make several overarching conclusions on the EP’s institutional framework for gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy.

With respect to the **legal and policy framework**, it is evident that the Parliament has placed significant emphasis on incorporating gender equality and women’s rights into the different documents governing the externally focused activities of its internal bodies.

The RoP address gender equality moderately well and this is because the relevant provisions, through differing formulations, require gender balance to be achieved with respect to the highest-ranking EP officials, standing committee bureaus, and inter-parliamentary delegations.

The Conference of Presidents’ implementing provisions score highly with respect to setting out the roles and competences of delegations and the DEG, but less well when it comes to gender equality, as this dimension is not foreseen as a standalone value but is instead subsumed under those of human rights and democracy.

As the most recent development, it is very welcome that the EP Bureau has taken the initiative to devise an institution-wide gender action plan that is to guide the adoption of such plans at the level of all EP bodies, including committees and delegations which are relevant to this study.

As regards the **political practice by different EP bodies**, our inquiry demonstrates that FEMM and the standing EXPO committees and subcommittees play a key role in mainstreaming issues related to gender equality and women’s rights. This is carried out by initiating resolutions, adopting reports and opinions, organising gender-oriented hearings and stakeholder meetings, requesting the commissioning of external

⁴⁷³ EuroLat (12th IPM), Declaration by the Co-Presidents, 13 December 2019, Panama City, doc. no. AP102.712v03-00, point 9.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, point 9.

⁴⁷⁵ EuroLat (13th IPM), Declaration of the Co-Presidents on a comprehensive and bi-regional EU-LAC strategy to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, 5 November 2020, held remotely, doc. no. AP102.943v02-00, point 20.

expertise, as well as by designing new awareness-raising and information sharing events (e.g. week-long events devoted to gender equality with wide committee participation) and programmes (e.g. DEG programmes at the intersection between gender and peace and security announced in 2021).

Furthermore, despite the impression by some interviewees that FEMM is not a particularly significant actor in EP external relations, our analysis shows that it is in fact a critical one. In our view, FEMM has thus contributed far more to mainstreaming gender in EP external relations than have the EXPO committees and subcommittees. This is a corollary of the fact that FEMM's primary focus is on gender equality and women's rights, while that of EXPO committees and subcommittees is on the content of a given policy area. This means that if gender is addressed within such a policy, this is done as one of the many other aspects of that policy, which dilutes any emphasis on gender.

Committees and subcommittees are institutionally more powerful than inter-parliamentary delegations in terms of the influence that they are capable of exerting (e.g. by directly feeding into the adoption of plenary resolutions). They also hold meetings more frequently and perform oversight over the work of delegations. The missions dispatched abroad by committees and subcommittees are an indispensable part of the EP's parliamentary diplomacy, which can be and are sometimes deployed for the promotion of gender equality. These have consisted both of regular missions (e.g. to international forums held annually) and ad hoc missions, where a need arises for MEPs to take action on the ground to gather facts and meet with local representatives. Public events are another fruitful tool for gender mainstreaming, which committees and subcommittees regularly utilise to bring women's rights to the forefront of policy debates in various countries and regions. Yet, gender mainstreaming in the framework of both missions and public events could be enhanced through a more systematic inclusion of gender-oriented topics and speakers on the committee and subcommittee agendas.

The DEG makes a multifarious contribution to gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy, which complements the work of committees, subcommittees and delegations. The most important way in which gender can be highlighted as an important value is through the award of a Sakharov Prize, the Sakharov Prize Network and the associated activities. Award ceremonies, however, are only the start of the diplomatic effort. As the case of Raif Badawi shows, the EP actively engages with the Sakharov Prize laureates and, where needed, their family members, so as to protect their human rights, support their cause, and involve them in the work of the Parliament. Jean Monnet dialogues are more directed towards improving the health of partner countries' domestic political relations than towards promoting EU founding values. The DEG's key instrument for external gender equality promotion is the Simone Veil programme, because it directly addresses women's political empowerment. However, having only been launched in December 2020, its impact should be assessed in the future when the programme has run for several years across different countries, so as to enable meaningful insight.

Delegations themselves are critical to gender mainstreaming in EP external relations, helping to deepen the diplomatic work of committees and the EP as a whole. Yet the degree to which gender equality and women's rights are addressed by delegations in their relations with counterparts abroad varies depending on the state of gender equality in the partner country or region. Although a wider empirical investigation is needed, the data collected in this study indicates that gender equality is more likely to be emphasised by delegations to countries or regions with poorer gender equality and women's rights records (e.g. Saudi Arabia and the Latin American region) than by delegations to countries or regions where the said records are better (e.g. Serbia). Moreover, the presence of an EU international agreement governing bilateral parliamentary relations is likely to set the competences of the EP delegation in charge, which, as a consequence, can cause gender equality to be addressed less. For example, in the case of Serbia, the accent of EP-Serbia parliamentary relations is placed on the accession process, and only if the accession process identifies gender as an issue within one of the negotiating chapters is gender likely to be examined by the EP's delegation and the inter-parliamentary meetings.

Finally, taken together, the committees, the DEG and delegations have a significant potential to enhance gender equality promotion in EP external relations. Yet, to realise this potential to a fuller extent, it is important to address, in a more detailed manner, the bottlenecks which can be identified in institutional framework and political practices. This is the object of analysis of the next section.

5 Assessment and identification of good practices and existing bottlenecks

This section addresses the second specific objective of the study and aims to analyse the extent to which current political practice is delivering on the gender equality commitments undertaken in the context of EP parliamentary diplomacy. To do so, the following subsections discuss the extent to which the existing rules and practices are effective in terms of furthering the EP's commitment to gender equality in foreign and security policies.

5.1 Assessment of the legal and policy frameworks

5.1.1 Rules of procedure

Given the rise in the overall number of women MEPs (from 1.3 % in 1958 to 16.6 % in 1979, to 30.3 % in 1999, to 39.1 % in 2021),⁴⁷⁶ gender-oriented provisions of the EP's RoP are to be welcomed insofar as they require attention to be paid to gender in different appointment procedures. However, several gaps remain.

First, gender is explicitly mentioned as a selection criterion regarding the highest-ranking officials (President and Vice-Presidents), Quaestors, committee bureaux and delegations. The situation with committee chairs has indeed improved, with 11 out of 27 committees chaired by female MEPs (40.7 %).⁴⁷⁷ The situation with delegations still needs attention, however, because, as Figure 16 below shows, only 13 out of 44 delegations are chaired by a female MEP (29.5 %).⁴⁷⁸ Furthermore, the RoP do not mention gender in relation to EP political groups. This is important because Rule 34(1) of the RoP states that political groups 'shall carry out their duties *as part of the activities of the Union* [...]'.⁴⁷⁹ The same Rule entitles political groups to a secretariat, but without addressing the gender dimension of it.

Second, when it comes to the appointment of delegation members, the RoP requirement for political groups to fairly represent gender is less stringent than that which addresses nationality. With respect to nationality, there is a negative quota prohibiting more than one third of delegation members from having the same nationality. There is no quota or share of MEPs who must be women, or expressed negatively, a quota that would prohibit delegation membership to have more than a certain share of men. Political practice indicates that this *de facto* may not be a particular problem, because gender parity has roughly been achieved, with 20 out of 44 delegations having a higher percentage of women among their members (41.4 % or higher) than the share of women in the EP taken as a whole (39.1 %).⁴⁸⁰ Despite this, however, setting a quota could be a significant recognition of the importance of gender in terms of political representation. Other than this, the RoP also make no mention of gender with respect to secretariats of committees, subcommittees and delegations, an element addressed by the EP 2021-2022 Roadmap analysed in Section 4 of this study.

⁴⁷⁶ EP, 'Women in the European Parliament', 8 March 2021, at 6.

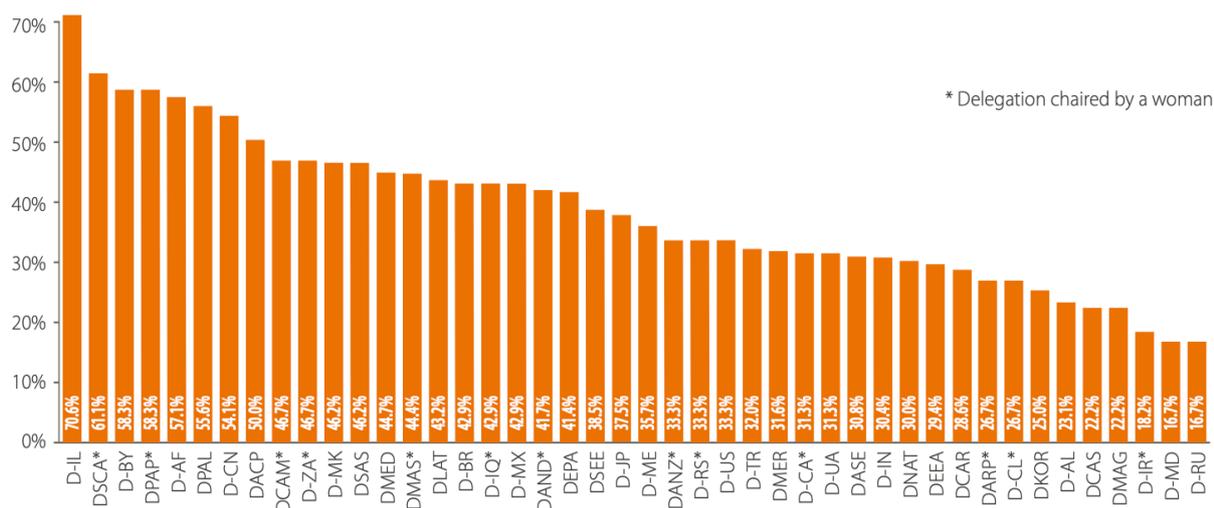
⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, at 10.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, at 12.

⁴⁷⁹ Emphasis added.

⁴⁸⁰ EP, 'Women in the European Parliament', 8 March 2021, at 12.

Figure 16: Female membership of all 44 EP delegations in 2021



Source: EP, 'Women in Parliament 2021', at 12.

Third, while the RoP govern delegations, there are no provisions on the EP's multilateral assemblies (the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean). The RoP only state that AFET is the EP body responsible for relations with assemblies falling within its remit. This is sub-optimal for at least two reasons. One is that the literature sees these assemblies as 'unique' and a 'special' form of cooperation, because the EP played a leading role in establishing them.⁴⁸¹ The other is that several interviews have identified these assemblies as important venues for parliamentary diplomacy, and that the existence of formal provisions can stimulate parliamentary action to be taken, including on gender equality. While these assemblies have their own RoP, the EP's RoP could specify the objectives of action which are common to each such assembly, in order to recognise the added value of their multilateral nature and the fact that the EP is the dominant component in these assemblies. The EP RoP could stimulate: the utilisation of multilateral assemblies for the mainstreaming of EP values, including gender equality, both through discourse (e.g. in debates and the assemblies' official documents) and institutional arrangements (e.g. by promoting the idea of establishing a women's caucus, forum or committee); the utilisation of these assemblies as vehicles to strengthen linkages with local civil society and stakeholders from the partner countries or regions; the sharing of best practice among the EP delegations participating in these assemblies; reviewing the successes and failures of the assemblies and discussing their future operation as key venues for parliamentary diplomacy. This could incentivise the cross-fertilisation of ideas and experiences, enhance the effectiveness of the EP's value promotion abroad, and thereby contribute to better implementation of the joint venture and leadership principles.

Fourth, the RoP only call for cooperation to be established with PACE. This is desirable because of the human rights focus of this assembly, which is conducive to gender equality promotion. Interviews have shown that, despite common claims that parliamentary diplomacy is mainly oriented towards talking rather than taking action, EP-PACE cooperation is indeed very important in building consensus among the parliaments of EU member states on different issues. The reaching of such consensus, albeit not legally binding within the EU, can be very effective politically, as this can create pressures for certain positions to

⁴⁸¹ Cofelice, Andrea and Stelios Stavridis, 'The European Parliament as an International Parliamentary Institution (IPI)', (2014) 19(2) *European Foreign Affairs Review* 145–178, at 161.

be upheld within the EU. Therefore, formalising the EP's cooperation with other relevant IPAs beyond PACE – such as the IPU, NATO-PA or OSCE-PA – would contribute to achieving greater intersectionality in their respective approaches and better mutual coordination of work.

5.1.2 The Conference of Presidents' decisions

The central drawback of the Decision on delegations and missions abroad and of the Decision on DEG activities is that neither make any reference to gender, women or female MEPs and staff. The two Decisions feature several other shortcomings that merit improvement.

The **Decision on delegations and missions abroad** refers to the Union's values, but does so with reference to Article 6 TEU. This is puzzling because the current version of Article 6 TEU relates to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights, but does not mention gender equality. Therefore, even though this Decision was adopted in 2015, well after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, it is likely that this is a reference to pre-Lisbon Article 6 TEU, which used to refer to several EU values listed in the Decision. However, it is unclear why the Conference of Presidents would choose to refer to former Article 6 TEU, which contained a restricted list of EU values, instead of to current Article 2 TEU, which contains a wider list of founding EU values which includes 'equality between women and men'. Even reference to former Article 2 of the Treaty establishing the European Community would have been better, because this referred to 'equality between women and men', while former Article 6 TEU did not. This is an important omission, because the result is that gender equality is effectively excluded from the list of principles that are supposed to drive the work of interparliamentary delegations. While this observation may *prima facie* appear legalistic, the fact that even among the pre-Lisbon Treaty provisions, there was an alternative which would have encompassed gender equality, but which was not chosen, shows at least the lack of attention being paid to the choice of legal basis on which the work of delegations should be based.

Similarly, the statement of the powers of delegations mentions work on human rights, the protection of minorities and the promotion of democratic values, but omits any reference to gender equality. This is another anomaly, because current Article 2 TEU refers both to minority rights and gender equality, while the Decision refers to minority rights but not to gender equality.

For its part, the **Decision on DEG activities** could have referred to the specific need of addressing the position of women parliamentarians in third country parliaments, but does not do so. This is particularly important given that capacity building forms part of all non-electoral components of DEG activities.

Greater explicit referencing of the promotion of gender equality and women's rights in the said Decisions, as opposed to their being implicitly covered by wider EU values, would help to consolidate the joint venture principle in EP parliamentary diplomacy.

5.1.3 EP Gender Action Plan and Roadmap

The EP Bureau's 2021-2022 Roadmap for the implementation of the Gender Action Plan makes an important step forward in improving gender mainstreaming across EP bodies and widening the application of the principles of joint venture and authenticity in EP parliamentary diplomacy. The improvements are made at both political and administrative levels by setting an array of milestones concerning committee and delegation membership, external expertise and intra-institutional collaboration. The Roadmap is far-reaching, well-considered and accompanied by indicators and benchmarks to verify the implementation of commitments. One notable gap is discernible, however.

Namely, while the Roadmap requires gender impact assessments to be drawn up for legislative initiative reports, there is no requirement specifically to assess the gender impacts of EU international agreements, whether they be in the area of trade, peace and security, or environment. Impact assessments of EU international agreements are already produced by the European Commission in the form of general and

sustainability impact assessments, which can involve the adoption of an inception impact assessment, consultations with stakeholders, the publication of final reports, and the production of post-report position papers by Commission services. The EP's involvement in this regard can include the adoption of committee reports, recommendations and resolutions by the plenary, and a variety of ex ante and ex post analyses by the EPRS. In particular, the EPRS does assess potential impacts of trade agreements,⁴⁸² although there is no guarantee that this would encompass gender impacts. In this sense, the EP's Impact Assessment Handbook, last updated in September 2017,⁴⁸³ requires that the Commission's impact assessments that accompany its proposals should include 'impacts outside the Union, including on international trade' and 'as far as possible, qualitative criteria, such as the impact on vulnerable social groups (social benchmarking), gender equality'.⁴⁸⁴ Failing this, the EP committee responsible could either ask the Commission to revise its original impact assessment or request from the EP's Ex-Ante Impact Assessment Unit to produce or commission the production of the EP's own substitute impact assessment. However, there is no explicit specification that impact assessments of EU international agreements should encompass gender. Hence, providing a formal incentive, or requirement, for the conduct of gender-oriented scrutiny of the different documents produced before or during negotiations – such as negotiating mandates, negotiating directives, textual proposals, negotiation round reports – is important because international agreements are a key tool through which the Union exports its norms and values, including gender equality. This could in turn better equip EP bodies with information that could be utilised in interparliamentary meetings and in contacts with non-parliamentary actors abroad. This would be an important way in which the EP and its externally-focused bodies can support the implementation of a more critical approach to policy design with respect to EU international agreements.

5.2 Assessment of political practice

The following assessment is based on the insights gained through: (a) a qualitative survey carried out among members, assistants and staff of the EP's interparliamentary delegations; (b) in-depth interviews held with MEPs, political group advisors and administrative staff; and (c) documentary analysis of the political practice of EP committees, subcommittees, the DEG and delegations carried out in Section 4 of this study.

The survey received replies from 86 respondents from 37 different delegations.⁴⁸⁵ Two respondents replied for more than one delegation, bringing the total number of replies received to 88. Of the 88 replies, 40 % were by MEP assistants, 20 % by MEPs who are regular or substitute members of delegations, 19 % by staff/administrators, 15 % by MEPs' political advisors, and 6 % by MEPs who are delegation chairs. For several survey questions, to enable calculation and comparison, the answers of 'to a great extent', 'to some extent', 'to a limited extent' and 'not at all' were ranked from 1- 4 (1 being the lowest score and 4 being highest), while 'don't know' answers were not counted as they did not provide substantive insight. The summary of answers was then provided in the form of mean scores.

The main objective of the interviews was to complement the documentary and quantitative analyses as well as the survey by inquiring about the personal opinions, perceptions, experiences, attitudes and

⁴⁸² See for instance: EPRS, Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value, 'European Parliament work in the fields of Impact Assessment and European Added Value–Activity Report for July 2019 to December 2020', doc. no. PE 662.616, March 2021, at 29-30.

⁴⁸³ This Handbook was adopted by the Conference of Committee Chairs on the request of the Conference of Presidents which was made on 15 November 2012 (see CoP meeting minutes no. PE 499.457/CPG).

⁴⁸⁴ Conference of Committee Chairs, Impact Assessment Handbook–Guidelines for Committees, doc. no. DV\1136\1136722, at 5.

⁴⁸⁵ One should note that there is a possibility that those who decided to participate in the survey are those who are most motivated and most interested in gender equality.

activities of the MEPs and administrative staff, above all from delegations. The interviews were semi-structured and based on a set of common discussion points which were then tailored to each interviewee's role and activities. We conducted 28 interviews for the specific purposes of this section.

5.2.1 Committees and subcommittees

5.2.1.1 Good practices

One of the most salient developments has been the push for the inclusion of *gender chapters in EU trade agreements*.⁴⁸⁶ Such a chapter is for the first time envisaged in the negotiations on a modernised EU-Chile Association Agreement.⁴⁸⁷ For this part, the EP insisted on this in a September 2017 Recommendation,⁴⁸⁸ which was based on an INTA report. The fact that the rapporteur in this case was not only the Chair of Delegation Chairs and the Chair of the EP Delegation to the EU-Chile Joint Parliamentary Committee but also a gender equality champion – Inmaculada Rodríguez-Piñero Fernández – helped to create intra-institutional bridges between committees and delegations. However, the inclusion of gender chapters in trade agreements has not yet become standard practice. For instance, the agreement in principle on an EU-Mercosur Association Agreement, which was announced on 28 June 2019, only mentions gender very briefly within the 'trade and sustainable development' chapter,⁴⁸⁹ but not as a standalone chapter. Indeed, the literature has argued that gender has not been mainstreamed in EU-Mercosur trade relations and that gender is not a prominent aspect of EU foreign and development policies towards Mercosur.⁴⁹⁰ While the inclusion of gender chapters in international agreements can therefore increase the authenticity and pragmatism of EU diplomatic action, variable insistence on it could produce opposite effects. In this sense, although both Chile and Mercosur are in the region of Latin America, with Chile being an associate member of Mercosur, gender equality is treated differently in the EU's respective agreements with these two partners. Although such outcomes are a corollary of the varying political will on the part of the EU's partner, the high salience of gender issues in EuroLat resolutions suggests that greater consistency in negotiating international agreements would be desirable.

Another very positive practice is the *cross-fertilisation of ideas* between committees and subcommittees owing to frequent organisation of joint meetings and collaboration on opinions, reports and public events. This means that EP bodies are working in tune and understand that gender equality is a matter of joint venture that requires collective institutional effort.

A further advantage relates to strong *engagement with external stakeholders* ranging from civil society representatives, policy makers from relevant institutions to academics, which helps to bring diverse views on gender to bear on the positions adopted by committees and subcommittees. One particularly important aspect of this, which creates a link to DEG activities, is the practice of some committees (e.g. AFET, DROI, DEVE) of inviting prominent female human rights activists and opposition leaders to speak.

⁴⁸⁶ See a reflection on gender chapters in trade agreements not involving the EU in: Hughes, Valerie. 'Gender Chapters in Trade Agreements: Nice Rhetoric or Sound Policy?', *CIGI (Centre for International Governance Innovation) Opinion*, 9 October 2019, available at <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/gender-chapters-trade-agreements-nice-rhetoric-or-sound-policy/>, accessed on 24 July 2019.

⁴⁸⁷ See the EU's textual proposal at: https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2018/june/tradoc_156962.pdf, accessed on 24 July 2021.

⁴⁸⁸ EP, Recommendation of 14 September 2017 to the Council, the Commission and the European External Action Service on the negotiations of the modernisation of the trade pillar of the EU-Chile Association Agreement, doc. no. P8_TA(2017)0354, recommendation (v).

⁴⁸⁹ Article 13(f) of the Trade part of the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement, available at https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2019/july/tradoc_158166.%20Trade%20and%20Sustainable%20Development.pdf, accessed on 24 July 2021.

⁴⁹⁰ Hoffmann, Andrea Ribeiro. 'Gender Mainstreaming in Mercosur and Mercosur-EU Trade Relations', in Anna van der Vleuten et al. (eds), *Gender Equality Norms in Regional Governance* (Springer 2014), 117-138

AFET, for instance, was the first committee to invite Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who stood against Alexander Lukashenko as candidate in the Belarusian presidential election of 9 August 2020. The committee discussion took place about a fortnight after the election,⁴⁹¹ and some two months before the EP decided to award her a Sakharov Prize. In this way, the EP can help to increase the legitimacy and international profile of women activists and politicians outside the EU. At the same time, this contributes to the advancement of co-creation and greater contextualisation of EP diplomatic work in the partner countries or regions.

Yet another hallmark of committee practices is that *intersectionality* has been taken into account in numerous EP resolutions. This helps to mainstream the gender impacts of trade, security and environmental action taken by the EU abroad (e.g. through international agreements) and bring critical approach to policy design to the fore.

From a more internal perspective, it is laudable that all standing committees and subcommittees have adopted *gender action plans*.⁴⁹² These are critical to ensuring that a gender dimension is present in the committees' diplomatic work and to greater joint venture in EP parliamentary diplomacy. Examples of good practice are AFET's and INTA's almost identical gender action plans. These plans *inter alia* set the objectives to: integrate a gender dimension in committee reports and opinions; check whether the European Commission's sustainability impact assessments of international agreements take into account the gender dimension and whether its international negotiating teams are gender-balanced; make greater use of the studies and analyses of gender equality; verify gender balance among paid experts and invited speakers; ensure greater collaboration with FEMM, HLG, GMN, EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender and EIGE; and include meetings with women's organisations in missions abroad.⁴⁹³ DROI's Gender Action Plan *inter alia* highlights the need for gender mainstreaming training, the importance of knowledge or experience of gender mainstreaming in recruitment processes, and it offers a gender mainstreaming checklist for the organisation of hearings, exchanges of views and workshops.⁴⁹⁴ These gender action plans are important tools of self-reflection and stimulate committees' and subcommittees' adherence to a whole array of criteria, ranging from the authenticity and pragmatism of the EP's parliamentary diplomacy to co-creation and the contextualisation of gender equality promotion efforts.

5.2.1.2 Bottlenecks

The key bottleneck concerns the lack of, incomplete or sporadic *implementation* of gender-related commitments both within the EU (e.g. gender action plans) and by the EU's partners abroad (e.g. where a gender-oriented demand is made in an agreement or resolution). It has become common practice for the EP to highlight these shortcomings in its resolutions, which, on the EU's side, negatively affect the authenticity of the EP's gender equality promotion efforts.

Another point for improvement concerns the commissioning of *external expertise*, which has otherwise provided helpful assistance to committees. Namely, different types of outputs (studies, briefings, in-depth analyses) could pay greater attention to gender equality and women's rights as matters prominently intersecting with wider policy considerations in different areas of action. This means that gender equality

⁴⁹¹ AFET, Minutes of the meeting of 25 August 2020, doc. no. AFET_PV(2020)0825, agenda point 3 (the situation in Belarus).

⁴⁹² See: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/gender-mainstreaming/product-details/20160602CDT00721#20160602CDT00721-section-1>, accessed on 30 September 2021.

⁴⁹³ AFET, Action Plan on Gender Mainstreaming, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/154926/AFET%20Gender%20Action%20Plan%20July%202018.docx.pdf>, accessed on 30 September 2021.

⁴⁹⁴ DROI, Action Plan on Gender Mainstreaming, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/154931/DROI%20Action%20Plan%20on%20Gender%20Mainstreaming.pdf>, accessed on 30 September 2021.

should not only be approached from the perspective of the gender of the authors, as the 2021-2022 Roadmap rightly emphasises, but also through the content of the output. For example, a May 2020 study requested by INTA on trade and investment relations with China – which has become the EU's largest trading partner, surpassing the US⁴⁹⁵ – does not address gender and women's rights.⁴⁹⁶ Yet doing so would help to strengthen gender expertise within the EP bodies engaging in parliamentary diplomacy.

A further point for improvement is to reflect on and consider devising measures of *follow-up* not only to commitments and demands made in resolutions, but also to the informal networks built through public events (e.g. hearings, exchanges of views, interparliamentary meetings, meetings with CSOs during missions). The EP is in a strong position to maintain and deepen the pool of expertise on which it has relied in the drawing up of various documents. Greater follow-up would ensure that gender equality promotion does not remain at the level of superficial action, that the EP can capitalise on the right momentum achieved through different diplomatic activities, and that it builds a parliamentary network for future cooperation.

Also desirable would have been greater coherence across committees' and subcommittees' gender action plans in terms of their commitment to check whether sustainability impact assessments incorporate a gender dimension. DEVE and DROI, for instance, do not mention this aspect of gender mainstreaming in their gender action plans.⁴⁹⁷ This would have been desirable given the significance of EU international agreements as a tool for promoting human rights abroad. Also, SEDE's otherwise well-drafted gender action plan mentions gender balance in the composition of the subcommittee's missions, which is important for authenticity, but does not mention that missions should strive to meet with women's organisations and NGOs during these missions, which would have been important for co-creation and contextualisation.⁴⁹⁸

A shortcoming of a more technical nature, which nonetheless poses problems for analysis and evaluation, concerns the aforesaid inconsistent availability of reports on committee and delegation missions abroad owing to security and confidentiality considerations. Many of these reports are unavailable on committee and delegation websites and on the EP's Public Register of Documents. This hampers transparency and makes it more difficult to appraise the otherwise very important diplomatic efforts undertaken by the many different EP missions abroad.

5.2.2 DEG activities

5.2.2.1 Good practices

Our interviews indicate that EP delegations are particularly helpful in putting gender-related issues on the agenda in the partner country/region, which is then followed up by capacity-building programmes delivered by the DEG and/or EU delegations. This stresses the importance of synergies and coordination between the different EP bodies working on gender equality promotion, underlining a commitment to joint venture in parliamentary diplomacy.

⁴⁹⁵ BBC News, 'China overtakes US as EU's biggest trading partner', 17 February 2021, available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-56093378>, accessed on 17 July 2021.

⁴⁹⁶ EP, Study 'EU-China trade and investment relations in challenging times', doc. no. PE 603.492, May 2020.

⁴⁹⁷ DEVE, Action Plan on Gender Mainstreaming, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/154930/DEVE%20gender%20mainstreaming.pdf>, accessed on 30 September 2021; DROI, see note 494 above.

⁴⁹⁸ SEDE, Strategy on Gender Equality and Mainstreaming, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/161113/SEDE%20Gender%20Strategy%20January%202019%20final%20\(003\).pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/161113/SEDE%20Gender%20Strategy%20January%202019%20final%20(003).pdf), accessed on 30 September 2021.

Another important good practice of the DEG is the increasing attention being paid to gender equality in its capacity-building activities. This specifically concerns the recent initiation of the Simone Veil programme, the planned Women Peace Builders programme and the incorporation of a gender dimension within the Young Leaders programme. As shown by interviews, the Simone Veil programme aims to have participants become ‘actors of change’ and share their knowledge with colleagues within their institutions, rather than for them to remain passive recipients of trainings. Helpful synergies between the DEG and delegations can occur in practice, for example by appointing the chair or vice-chair of a given delegation as the DEG’s lead member for a priority country.⁴⁹⁹ However, our interviewees did not find this practice paramount to the success of DEG programmes.

A further important practice is the organisation of *gender-oriented interparliamentary conferences and seminars*, which aim to gather members of parliamentary committees responsible for gender equality or to exchange views with experts and stakeholders, or a combination of the two. Interviews have confirmed that events of this type are important venues for parliamentary diplomacy. They allow participants to put in perspective not only their own day-to-day work, but also the wider legal and political issues which they may be experiencing or witnessing at domestic and local levels (e.g. obstacles in relation to enactment, enforcement, or prevalent traditions and cultures). In this way, the EP contributes to the building of policy networks with the EU, but also among policy makers, activists and experts from the participating countries.

Jean Monnet dialogues as a well-developed tool of soft power have the advantage of galvanising party political debates in the partner countries and devising very detailed and concrete policy targets, thereby contributing to the pragmatism of the mediation processes involved. They are also of an interinstitutional character, given that EP delegations, the Commission and the EEAS often cooperate in the organisation of different sessions.⁵⁰⁰ This enables wider EU considerations to inform interparliamentary discussions and to facilitate dialogue at different political levels.

These activities demonstrate the EP’s leadership on gender equality, targeted allocation of resources to initiatives that add most value in advancing women’s rights, a commitment to the sharing of good practices with partner countries and regions, and an effort to expand the Parliament’s network.

5.2.2.2 Bottlenecks

The principal shortcoming of the DEG activities is the fact that *Jean Monnet dialogues are not focused on gender equality promotion* but on political and democratic development, although one could argue that democratic development generally encompasses gender equality. We have not identified any particular obstacles to incorporating issues of gender and women’s empowerment into the different sessions organised within Jean Monnet dialogues. This could be a particularly effective way of mainstreaming gender in the national politics of the partner countries, due to the dialogues’ focus on the heart of the political process rather than on capacity building. Practice has shown, for instance, that in the case of the first and longest-standing Jean Monnet dialogue – that with the Ukrainian Parliament – this format of cooperation has ‘reinforced the standing of the EP as a trusted, reliable and respected EU institution’, enabling it to advance certain priorities on the agenda in EU-Ukraine relations.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ For example, the DEG’s lead member for Tunisia is the vice-chair of the Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries and the Arab Maghreb Union, including the EU-Morocco, EU-Tunisia and EU-Algeria Joint Parliamentary Committees.

⁵⁰⁰ Debuysere, Loes and Steven Blockmans ‘Europe’s Coherence Gap in External Crisis and Conflict Management: the EU’s Integrated Approach between Political Rhetoric and Institutional Practice’, *Bertelsmann Stiftung*, November 2019, at 27.

⁵⁰¹ Goinard, Myriam. ‘The Growing Role of the European Parliament as an EU Foreign Policy Actor’, in Martin Westlake (ed.), *The European Union’s New Foreign Policy* (Springer 2020) 107-124, at 118.

Even if gender was more prominent in Jean Monnet dialogues, one of the recurrent comments in the literature has been that more work is needed to improve the *implementation* of the commitments made during these dialogues. Different experts have found that ‘the implementation of parliamentary reforms has been relatively limited’⁵⁰² and that the dialogues ‘gained little traction’⁵⁰³ due to the non-implementation of recommendations. However, an improvement in this regard has since been achieved owing to the adoption of so-called implementation tables, which take stock of the progress made by reviewing the level of achievement through the use of intelligible indicators (‘achieved’, ‘partially achieved’, ‘ongoing’, ‘not achieved’).

Both the focus and implementation dimensions of Jean Monnet dialogues indicate that greater attention should be paid to seizing the momentum of inter-party contacts to mainstream gender in the spirit of co-creation and contextualisation.

5.2.3 Delegations

As the study’s principal focus is on delegations, the analysis of the good practices and bottlenecks is provided below in greater depth than for the committees/subcommittees and the DEG. They are presented together according to a more developed structure, which was devised following a synthesis of the information and data drawn from both the survey and the interviews. The aim of this is to provide better visualisation of the insights gained and to facilitate the traceability of these insights within the empirical material gathered. The five categories under which the insights have been grouped are: general insights; instruments; intra-institutional and inter-institutional cooperation; impact; and peer learning.

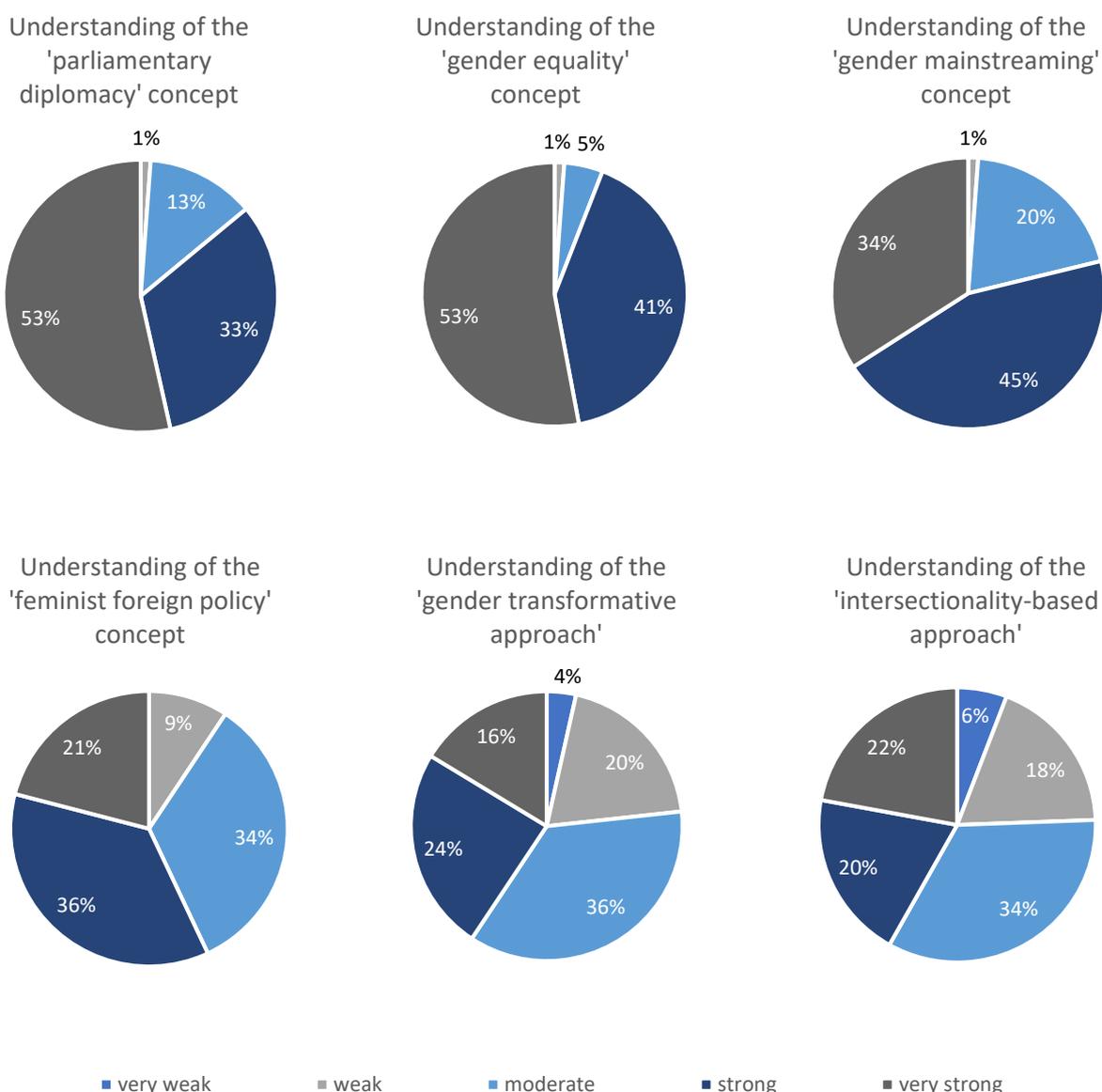
5.2.3.1 General insights

1. Understanding of concepts. It is encouraging that 86 % of the survey respondents (hereinafter: respondents) demonstrate a ‘very strong’ (53 %) or ‘strong’ (33 %) understanding of the concept of parliamentary diplomacy, and further, that 94 % have a ‘very strong’ (53 %) or ‘strong’ (41 %) understanding of ‘gender equality’. The confidence drops somewhat with ‘gender mainstreaming’, where 79 % of the respondents have a ‘very strong’ (34 %) or ‘strong’ (45 %) understanding; and decreases more tangibly with ‘feminist foreign policy’, where 57 % of the respondents have a ‘very strong’ (21 %) or ‘strong’ (36 %) understanding. Understanding is the lowest with respect to the ‘gender transformative approach’ and ‘intersectionality-based approach’, where the highest level of understanding is ‘moderate’ (36 % and 34 % respectively). These two concepts are also the only ones where participants had ‘very weak’ understanding (4 % and 6 % respectively), but also where more significant minorities had a ‘weak’ understanding (20 % and 18 % respectively). This data is presented below in Figure 17.

⁵⁰² EP, Study ‘EP democracy support activities and their follow-up, and prospects for the future’, doc. no. PE603.474, January 2019, at 5.

⁵⁰³ Balázs Jarábik et al., ‘The EU and Ukraine: Taking a Breath’, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 28 February 2018, at 5.

Figure 17: Understanding concepts



Note: For the 'gender equality' and 'gender mainstreaming' concepts, 85 out of the total of 86 people replied.

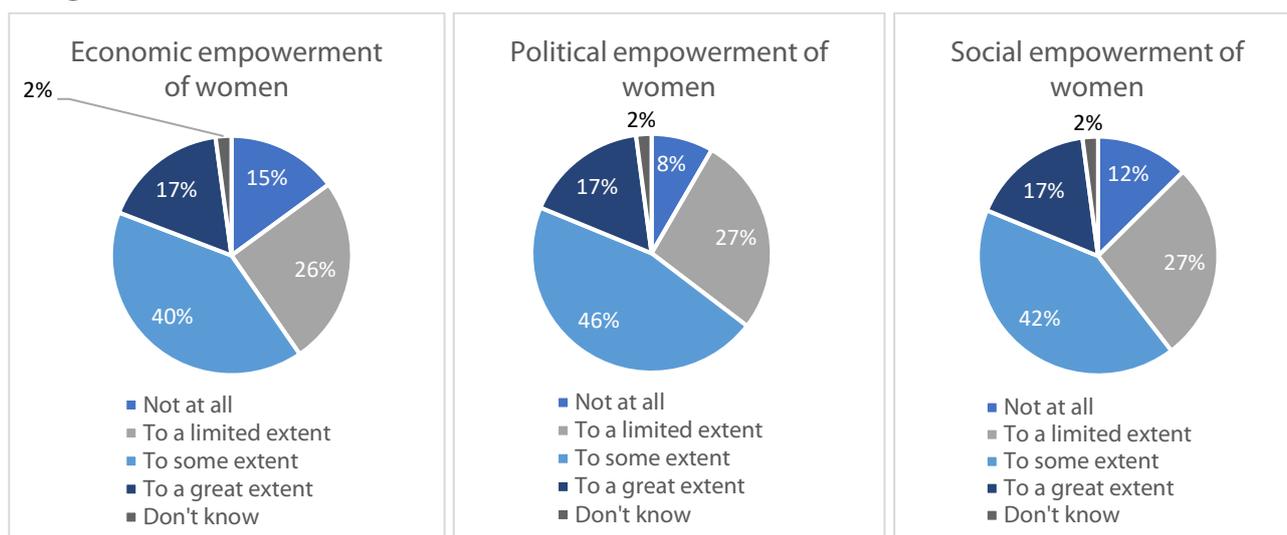
2. Usefulness of parliamentary diplomacy for gender equality promotion. Of the 48 replies received to this question, 86 % found parliamentary diplomacy 'very useful' (48 %) or 'useful' (38 %) for gender equality promotion, while only 12 % thought that it was either 'of limited use' (10 %) or 'of no use' (2 %).

3. Extent to which gender equality is addressed in the work of delegations. In the view of most respondents, delegations address gender equality 'to some extent' (41 %) or 'to a limited extent' (29 %). Another 22 % thought it was addressed 'to a great extent', while 8 % thought it was 'not addressed at all'. The reasons why gender equality was not addressed at all is summarised by the following respondents' explanations:

- lack of capacity and experience;
- absence of will on the part of some political groups to take gender balance seriously;
- size of the delegation, frequency of meetings, and low priority (e.g. a small delegation which does not meet often is more likely to prioritise highly politically salient topics which are deemed 'hot issues' for the partner country/region or for EU relations with that country/region, both in delegation meetings and in interparliamentary meetings);
- presence of a male chairperson over the last 10 years;
- absence of gender equality as a topic: on delegation agendas; in delegation meeting discussions; and among the invited speakers (an overwhelming majority of whom have been male in some delegations);
- no focus on gender equality beyond the gender focal point, who is not always known to other delegation members; and
- absence of gender balance in different EP bodies and absence of gender mainstreaming in the reports (unless the responsible MEP actively works on it) and in other statements/outputs from the committees, the plenary and delegation bureaux.

4. Extent to which different dimensions of gender equality are discussed within delegations. As Figure 18 demonstrates, the most prevalent reply among the respondents was that the key dimensions of gender equality were discussed 'to some extent': 40 % for the economic empowerment of women; 46 % for the political empowerment of women; and 42 % for the social empowerment of women. All three dimensions are discussed 'to a great extent' according to only 17 % of the respondents. This indicates that while all three dimensions are fairly well discussed within delegations, there is ample room for improvement. This is most acute in relation to the economic empowerment of women, which 15 % of the respondents thought was 'not at all' discussed. This is sub-optimal, because interviews indicated that gender equality promotion goes hand in hand with economic development in the partner countries/regions. To improve gender equality promotion within delegations, it was further highlighted by our interviewees that the Conference of Delegation Chairs plays a critical role in ensuring that certain topics are put, and kept, on delegations' agendas, so this governing body is the optimal one to stimulate the internal mainstreaming of gender issues with respect to EP external relations. One symbolic but nonetheless very encouraging development is the explicit mention of gender equality in the welcome messages issued by delegation chairs on their delegation's webpages (e.g. Saudi Arabia and EuroLat). This sets the tone about the delegation's objectives and puts gender equality on the map of the delegation's future activities.

Figure 18: The extent to which different dimensions of gender equality are discussed within delegations



Note: the total number of responses to this question was 47 for the economic empowerment of women and 48 for political and social empowerment of women.

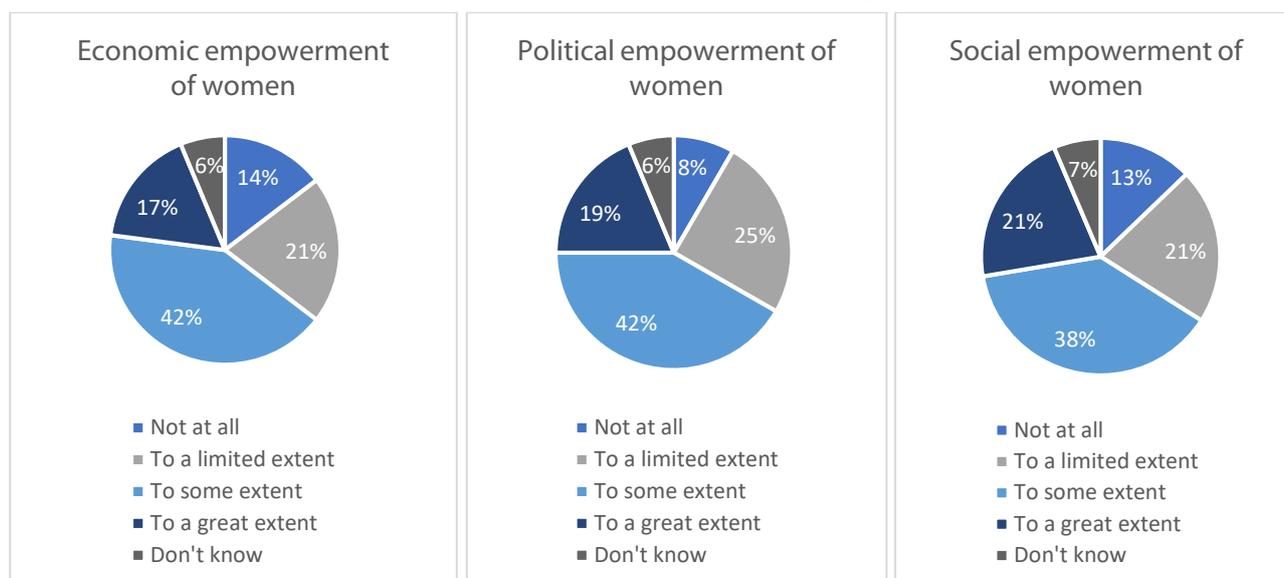
5. Extent to which different dimensions of gender equality are discussed during inter-parliamentary meetings between EP delegations and their counterparts from partner countries/regions.

As in the previous question, the most prevalent reply for all three dimensions was ‘to some extent’, which indicates that all three dimensions are fairly well discussed within the delegations (42 %, 42 % and 38 % for economic, political and social empowerment of women respectively). This indicates that the particular format of meeting – whether within EP delegations or in their meetings with foreign delegations – does not make a difference in terms of the aspect of gender equality discussed by MEPs. This is good practice, as it could be understood as a sign that the outcomes of intra-delegation discussions are raised with EP counterparts in interparliamentary meetings. Interviews have confirmed this because interparliamentary assembly meetings have been identified as good opportunities to put gender on the agenda and stimulate a debate with parliamentarians from partner countries/regions. In fact, there is sometimes more interest on the part of the partner country/region to discuss gender than on that of the EP.

One significant bottleneck that we have identified concerns gender balance in the delegations participating in interparliamentary activities. This is particularly important because, as interviewees have pointed out, the composition of the delegations of the partner countries/regions is often up to the institutions of that country/region to decide, which can result in gender imbalances in their delegations. Therefore, where these exist, the RoP of bilateral or multilateral parliamentary bodies should endeavour to promote gender equality in the composition of the participating delegations (e.g. the EuroLat RoP do, while the SAPC RoP do not). Where they do not, suitable terms of reference could be agreed to set out the parameters for interparliamentary meetings, including notably the gender composition of delegations. The absence of rules on the gender composition of delegations was also detected in the case of certain DEG activities. This is exemplified by the Inter-Party Dialogue process with Serbia. Although the facilitators of the Dialogue are gender balanced (with a female chair of the Serbia delegation on the EP’s side and a male MP on the Serbian Parliament’s side), there is no gender balance with respect to the participants in the dialogue, because these are chosen by the Serbian side. In practice, in the absence of any particular gender-related rules, the EP’s interlocutors have thus far overwhelmingly been male. Interviews suggest in this respect that the dynamic of interparliamentary dialogues tends to be completely different when participation is gender balanced, as more diverse viewpoints will be flagged and debated. Thus, formalising the requirement of gender balance in the different transnational interparliamentary forums

(whether joint parliamentary committees or DEG activities) can be an important way in which the EP can promote gender equality in external relations.

Figure 19: Extent to which different dimensions of gender equality are discussed during IPMs



Note: the total number of responses to this question was 47 for the social empowerment of women and 48 for political and economic empowerment of women.

5.2.3.2 Instruments

1. Tools for gender equality promotion most used by delegations. Concerning the extent to which different tools for gender equality promotion are used by EP delegations, the survey offered 13 tools as possible answers.⁵⁰⁴ The results, summarised in Figure 20 and presented in greater detail in Figure 21, were as follows.

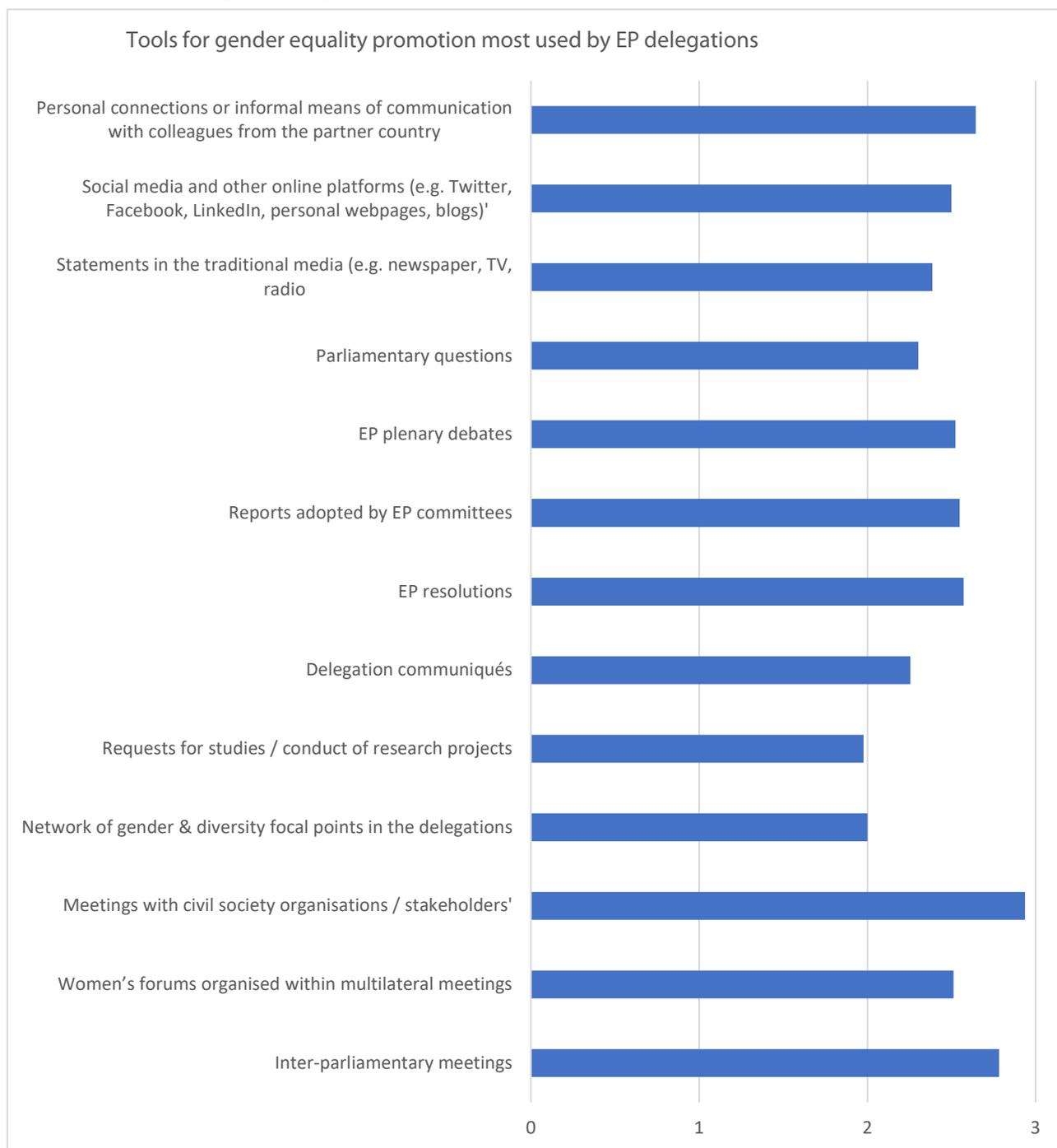
The most important tool for gender equality promotion in terms of its use by delegations is 'meetings with CSOs/stakeholders' (score of 2.9), followed by 'interparliamentary meetings' (score of 2.8), and 'personal connections or informal means of communication with colleagues from the partner country' (score of 2.6).

Of similar importance (with the total score around 2.5) are the following tools: 'EP resolutions', 'reports adopted by EP committees', 'EP plenary debates', 'women's forums organised within multilateral meetings', and 'social media and other online platforms'. Slightly lower scores were achieved by 'statements in the traditional media', 'parliamentary questions' and 'delegation communiqués' (score ranging between 2.4-2.3).

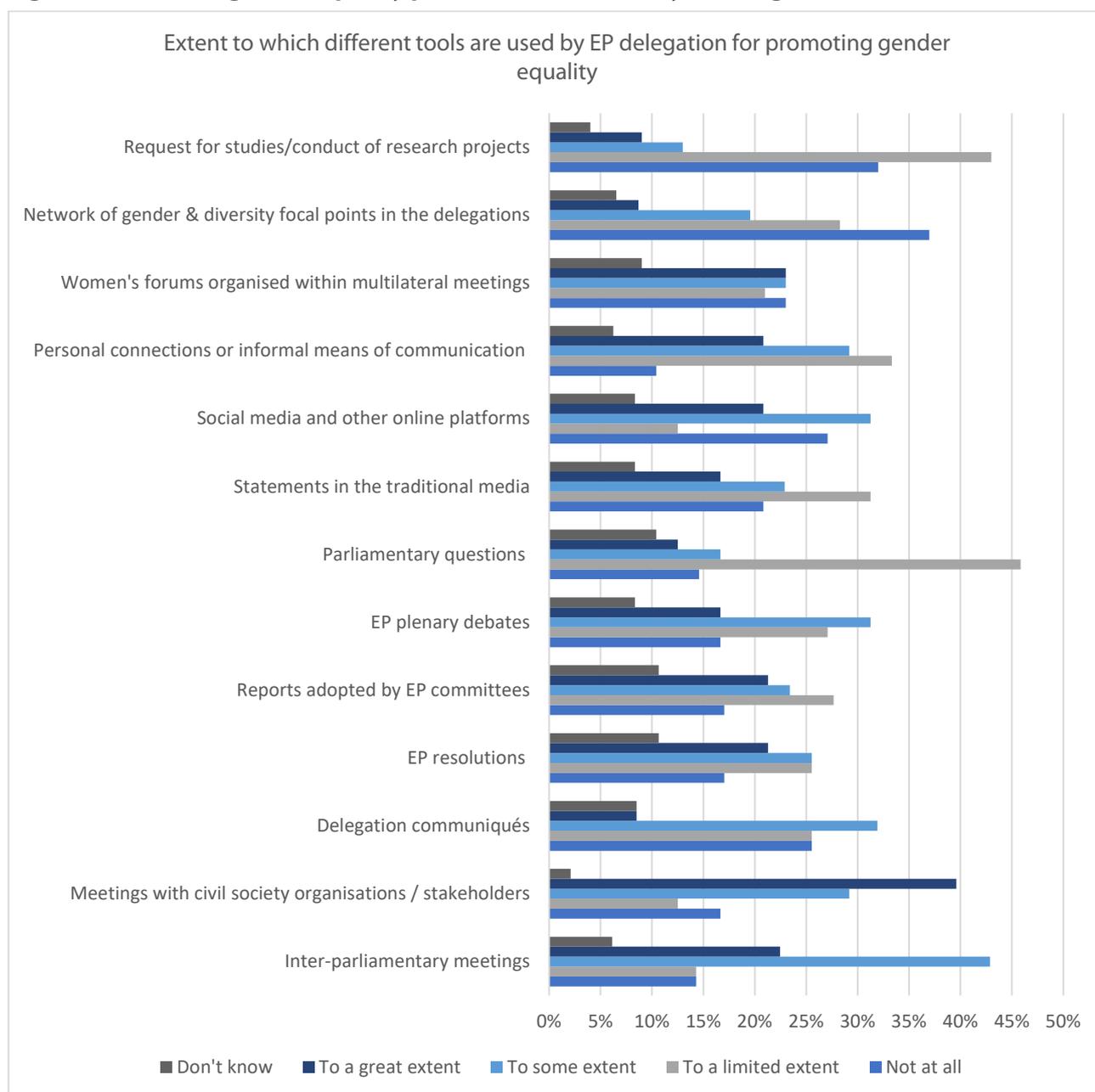
The lowest scores were given to 'network of gender and diversity focal points in the delegations' (score of 2) and 'requests for studies' (score of 1.97).

⁵⁰⁴ These were: 1) Inter-parliamentary meetings; 2) Women's forums organised within multilateral meetings; 3) Meetings with civil-society organisations/stakeholders; 4) Network of gender diversity focal points in the delegations; 5) Request for studies/conduct of research projects; 6) Delegation communiqués; 7) EP resolutions; 8) Reports adopted by EP committees; 9) EP plenary debates; 10) Parliamentary questions; 11) Statements in the traditional media (e.g. newspaper, TV, radio); 12) Social media and other online platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, personal webpages, blogs); and 13) Personal connections or informal means of communication with colleagues from the partner country.

Figure 20: Tools for gender equality promotion most used by EP delegations – summary



Note: the total number of replies differed per tool, ranging from 46 to 49.

Figure 21: Tools for gender equality promotion most used by EP delegations – detailed overview

Note: the total number of replies differed in each tool, ranging from 46 to 49.

Our interviews have further illuminated the good practices and bottlenecks concerning delegations' practical experience with gender focal points and gender action plans as instruments for gender equality promotion in external relations.

MEPs tend to agree that **gender action plans** adopted at the level of the entire Union are helpful in terms of providing statistics, identifying targets, and showing ambitions. Yet, at committee level, there is no consistency in the content and level of ambition between the gender action plans, and many MEPs are unaware of their existence. Some of our interviewees felt that this is partly due to the lack of instruction from both political and administrative levels on how to implement these plans. Such instruction would be particularly important given that gender action plans are not legally binding. It is therefore advised that there be a more effective procedure for reviewing the implementation of committee-level gender action plans (e.g. by mobilising the network of gender focal points). At delegation level, these problems do not

arise because delegations are neither required to adopt gender action plans nor produce such plans on their initiative.

When it comes to **gender focal points**, the key advantages of appointing them, at least in theory, are that they centralise gender mainstreaming in one person and facilitate gender-sensitive agenda setting. The low relevance of gender focal points for delegations' work on gender equality promotion, highlighted by the survey, may therefore appear surprising. Yet interviews have explained why that is so.

First, beyond the fact that appointments only began in the spring of 2020 and that the procedure is therefore new, the bottleneck most widely emphasised by our interviewees is the lack of clarity about the role, duties, mandate, workload and status of gender focal points. When delegation secretariats were asked by the Conference of Delegations Chairs to identify any MEPs interested in this role (26 November 2019), no further information or requirement was provided. This has led, in some cases, to internal communications stating that it is up to the MEP herself/himself to decide how to perform this role. Unsurprisingly, some MEPs have been wary of putting themselves up for positions which are ill-defined, and the consequences of which are not clear from the outset.⁵⁰⁵ However, in order to clarify the role and duties of the gender focal points, the CDC chair requested the AFET committee to commission the present study. Its findings and recommendations will be the basis for defining clear guidelines/action plan for the promotion of gender equality in the work of the EP standing delegations.

Second, even if the roles had been clearly defined, there is a lack of interest among MEPs, even where they are sympathetic to gender equality. This is partly because of the lack of capacity to take on extra work due to already very tight agendas. For many MEPs, this is a low-profile role, which is often understood as little more than 'a top up' to their regular job.

Third, interviewees have pointed out that some gender focal points are not necessarily trained in, or knowledgeable about, gender equality. This raises the issue of the selection criteria, which, again, do not seem to be in place, due to the unstructured and decentralised nature of the process of appointing gender focal points, which relies on delegation secretariats' own resourcefulness in finding suitable and willing MEPs.

2. Monitoring of EU international agreements by delegations. While committees have paid attention to gender in their scrutiny of EU international agreements, delegations do so far less. Almost a half of the respondents acknowledged 'no engagement' in gender-sensitive monitoring of international agreements between the EU and third countries and international organisations. Looking specifically at the cases where engagement was acknowledged, in all areas except security, monitoring takes place 'ex post' slightly more than 'ex ante'. Delegations' greater focus on ex post scrutiny is in harmony with the Implementing Provisions on delegations, which are tasked with "the assessment of international agreements concluded between the EU and third countries".⁵⁰⁶

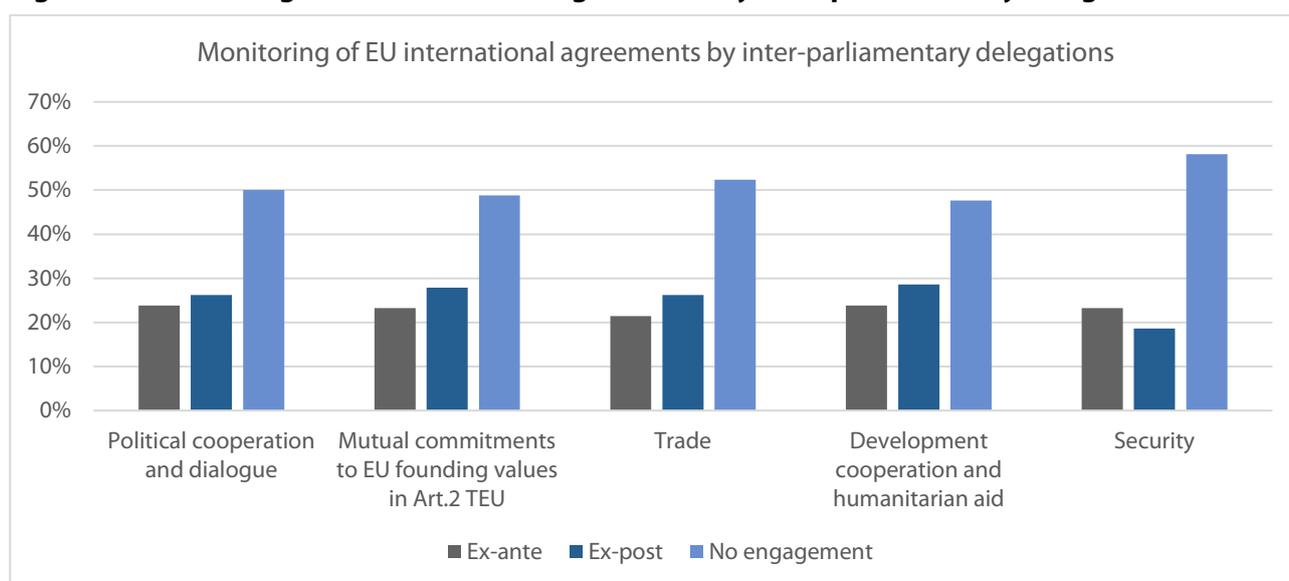
Weak delegation engagement on EU international agreements is an important aspect of their work that requires improvement. The importance of gender-sensitive approaches to the scrutiny of EU international agreements was underlined above as a shortcoming of the 2021-2022 Roadmap, but also as a good practice of the responsible EP committees. While delegations should not duplicate the work of committees, they should indeed more closely cooperate with them with a view to exchanging data, analyses and political positions on the impact of EU international agreements on gender equality and women's rights.

⁵⁰⁵ To remedy this, some political groups (e.g. the Greens/EFA) have created informal guidelines for the roles of gender focal points, but this is a matter of a given group's own proactive attitude to gender equality rather a legal requirement.

⁵⁰⁶ Article 4 of the Conference of Presidents Decision on the implementing provisions governing the work of delegations and missions outside the European Union, doc. no. PE 422.560/CPG, 29 October 2015.

This is particularly relevant from the perspective of the leverage, highlighted by interviewees, which the EP's right of consent to EU international agreements generates in the EU's relations with partner countries/regions.⁵⁰⁷ Even so, the interviews demonstrate that the EP's and thus delegations' leverage is far from being limitless. Instead, it varies depending on the EU's overall influence in the partner country/region. While this influence can be considerable in the case of countries covered by the Union's enlargement and neighbourhood policies (e.g. Serbia or Azerbaijan), it can noticeably diminish in the case of countries that exercise significant regional and/or global influence of their own, especially where there is no, or no clear, consensus on liberal democratic values in the partner country (e.g. China); or where there is such a consensus, but the partner country's political will to deepen links with the EU is weak (e.g. Switzerland). The influence is weakest in countries where the EU has very little leverage (e.g. Saudi Arabia), where any, or any significant, change is unlikely to be a consequence of the EP's activism, although some influence can be exerted on a personal level in MEPs' interactions with foreign parliamentarians and other interlocutors.

Figure 22: Monitoring of EU international agreements by inter-parliamentary delegations



3. Availability of information on gender equality in the partner country/region. Access to timely and regular information is critical to parliaments' engagement in virtually any area of activity. While executive institutions acting in external relations often resort to secrecy and speedy decision making, the EP has built a good reputation as a moral tribune. Yet, for delegations to be able to effectively contribute to the fulfilment of this and other related roles in the context of gender equality promotion, consistent information provision is essential.

The survey shows that almost half of the respondents (47 %) believe that they are provided with sufficient information, but that this is not, or not always, regular. Another 28 % of the respondents thought that they have timely and regular gender-specific information, while 10 % respondents found the information they are provided with not, or not always, timely. A significant proportion of respondents (15 %) believe that they do not have enough gender-specific information and have only general information which does not address gender equality.

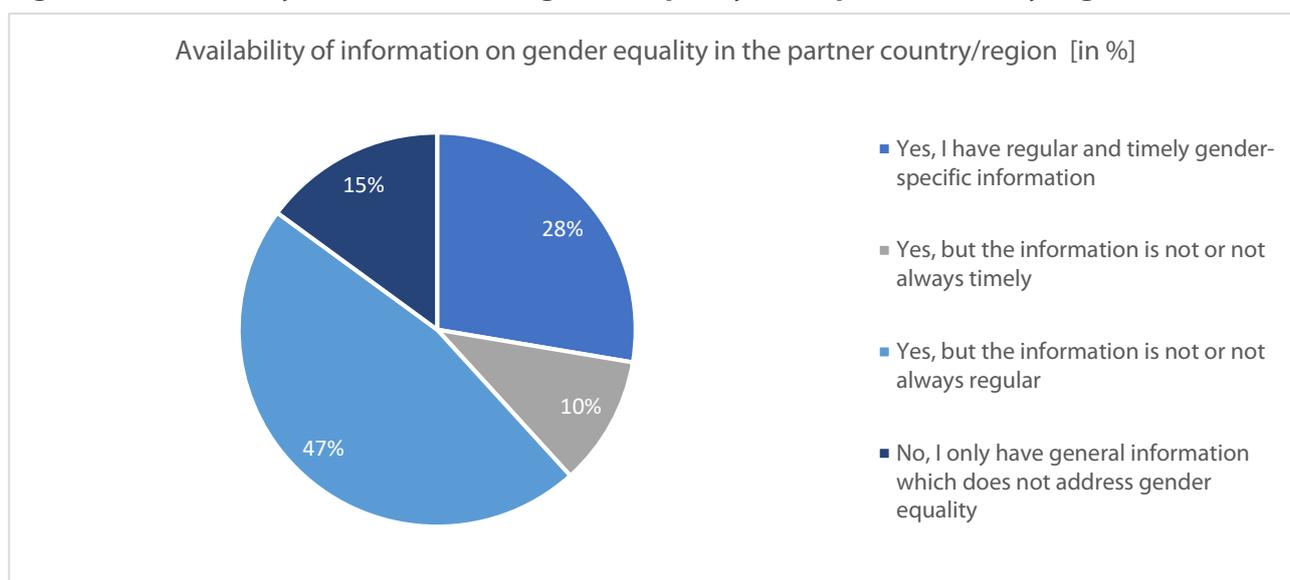
Interviews furthermore show that although MEPs' contacts with ambassadors as well as with their counterparts during bilateral and multilateral interparliamentary meetings are important for information

⁵⁰⁷ Article 218(6)(a) TFEU.

gathering and networking, these channels are insufficient for the continuous performance of delegations' tasks. Similarly, while the EEAS has proven to be an important source of information when it comes to networking (e.g. suggesting persons whom MEPs should meet with, exchanging contact details, organising joint meetings), it will not hesitate to withhold politically sensitive information from MEPs.

These obstacles should be addressed, because interviews underlined the importance of delegation members having adequate information and knowledge about the operation of foreign legal and political systems, especially those that are fundamentally different to those in Europe (e.g. Saudi Arabia). The availability of information about the partner country/region can indeed determine the level to which MEPs can understand and meaningfully engage with such a system and with those working within it.

Figure 23: Availability of information on gender equality in the partner country/region



Note: the total number of replies to this question was 47

5.2.3.3 Intra-institutional and inter-institutional cooperation

1. Collaboration between delegations and other EP bodies. FEMM was selected by the highest number of respondents (37) as delegations' most important interlocutor when it comes to gender equality promotion. This was followed by DROI (26 respondents), AFET (17 respondents), DEVE (14 respondents) and INTA (7). The least important interlocutor was SEDE (4 respondents). This broadly corresponds to the conclusions of the documentary analysis of the political practice, carried out in Section 4 of this study. Importantly, however, two respondents mentioned LIBE as an important partner for gender equality promotion, while another respondent mentioned 'Presidents of political groups and the President of the EP' as important partners for the gender equality promotion.

It is further shown by interviews that the actual level of intra-EP cooperation is highly contingent on the personal attitude of delegation chairs and their choice to be pro-active and utilise the mutual hearing rights which the RoP place at the disposal of committee and delegation chairs. Beyond this, much intra-institutional dialogue within the EP is based on informal contacts rather than on formal rights. This is to some extent caused by the absence of formal legal requirements or procedures that would bring about a degree of regularisation in intra-institutional dialogues between delegations and other EP bodies in charge of gender equality (e.g. with the GMN or the High-Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity); so if any do take place, the interviewees felt that these were more haphazard than systematic.

Moreover, interviews revealed that, although AFET's and DEVE's oversight over the work of delegations can sometimes be an obstacle to delegations because of the constant need for delegations to coordinate

their positions with this committee, this relationship can also be very beneficial in terms of ensuring coherence (e.g. between the statements of the delegation chair and of the AFET chair) so that the EP as a whole speaks to its partners abroad with one voice. This is important as any contradictory claims can undercut both delegations' and committees' influence.

Overall, however, our interviewees were of the view that intra-EP coordination and communication between delegations and other EP bodies (e.g. different units and directorates within the EP's DG EXPO, secretariats) has improved, and that there is now a good level of awareness of each other's activities.

2. Collaboration between delegations and the European Commission and the EEAS. When it comes to the Commission, most respondents found collaboration 'very useful' or 'useful' (both 34 %). Some 17 % of the respondents found it to be 'of limited use', 13 % did not know, while only 1 % thought such collaboration was of 'no use'. As regards the EEAS, most respondents thought that collaboration was 'useful' (46 %) or 'very useful' (30 %). A further 13 % thought such collaboration was 'of limited use', 7 % did not know, while 4 % thought it was 'of no use'. Hence, in relation to both the Commission and the EEAS, significant majorities found delegations' collaboration with them helpful.

This is also borne out by the interviews. These indicate that it is common practice for briefings to be organised between one or more delegation members and the Commission and/or the EEAS, in the context of EP delegations' missions abroad. The briefing can take place before a delegation travels, but also during the mission, while post-mission briefings aimed at follow-up happen less frequently or do not happen at all. An example of good practice is that EU Delegations on the ground in the partner country help to facilitate EP delegations' contacts with governmental and non-governmental representatives, and that they often participate in the meetings organised by EP delegations. Depending on the items on the agenda of the meetings planned in the framework of EP delegations' missions to a partner country, the said briefings can address gender equality.

5.2.3.4 Impact

1. Extent to which delegations contribute to achieving improvement in terms of gender equality in the partner country/region. Of the total of 48 replies received to this question, nearly a half of the respondents (46 %) found that delegations contributed 'to some extent' to improving the state of gender equality in the partner country/region, while 36 % of the respondents believed delegations contributed 'to a limited extent'. A further 8 % of the respondents thought that delegations had 'no contribution' at all and 6 % did not know. This indicates an overall moderate contribution of delegations to achieving concrete gender equality improvements abroad.

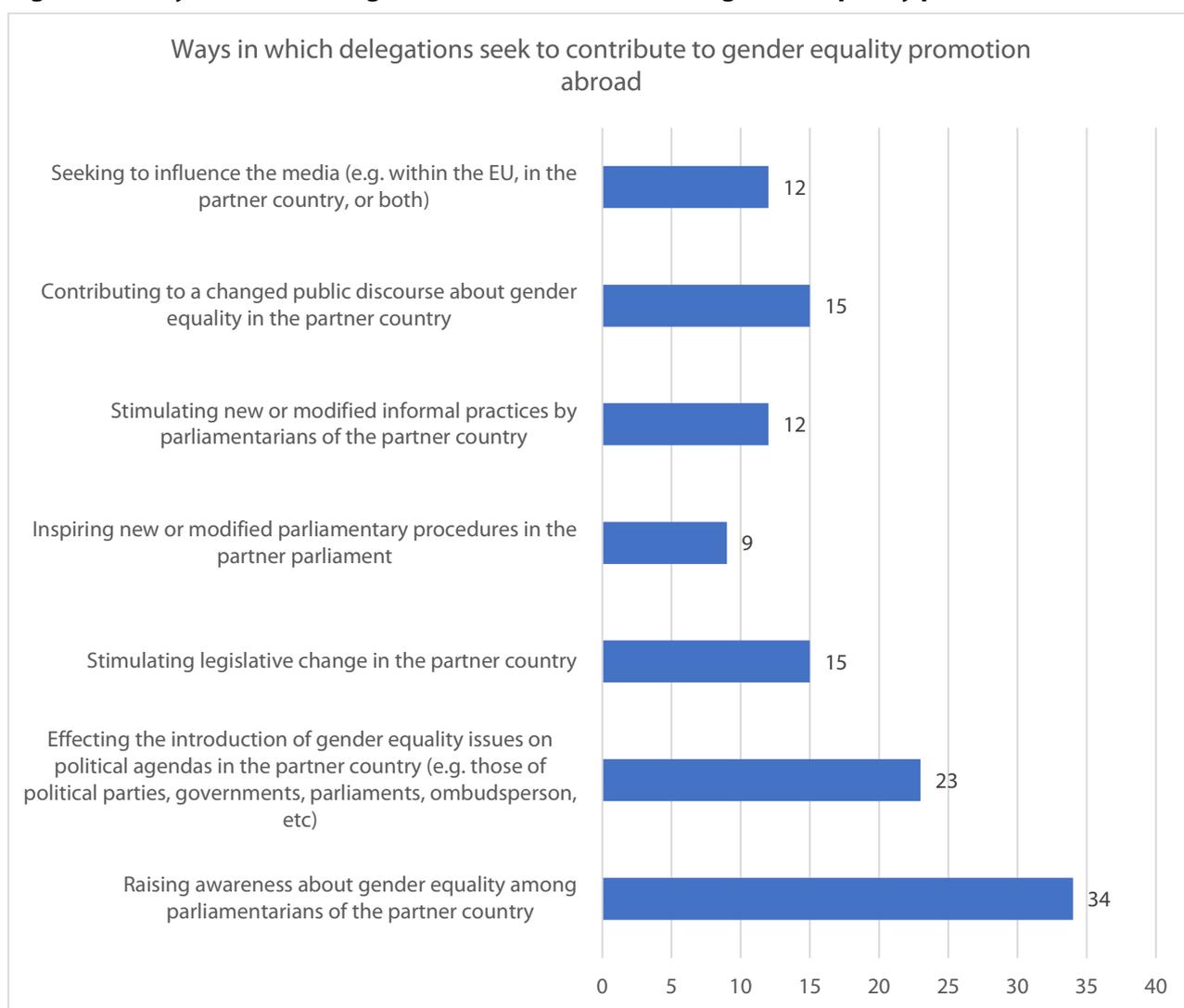
2. Ways in which delegations seek to contribute to gender equality promotion abroad. The 46 replies received to this question suggest that the most common way in which delegations seek to contribute to gender equality promotion abroad is by 'Raising awareness about gender equality among parliamentarians of the partner country' (34 respondents) and by 'Effecting the introduction of gender equality issues on political agendas in the partner country (e.g. those of political parties, governments, parliaments, ombudsperson, etc)' (23 respondents).

The middle ground is occupied by the moderately useful ways of engagement: 'Stimulating legislative change in the partner country' (15 respondents), 'Contributing to a changed public discourse about gender equality in the partner country' (15 respondents), 'Seeking to influence the media (e.g. within the EU, in the partner country, or both)' (12 respondents), and 'Stimulating new or modified informal practices by parliamentarians of the partner country' (12 respondents).

The least commonly used way is the one focused on 'Inspiring new or modified parliamentary procedures in the partner parliament' (9 respondents).

These insights confirm that the delegations’ transformative strengths lie in its discursive and networking powers, through which MEPs can seek to inform public opinion with different perspectives. They further indicate the importance of enhancing the DEG’s contribution to capacity-building in partner countries/regions abroad, as an aspect which is not particularly strong in the work of delegations. However, the interviewees also warned that it is hard to assess delegations’ actual contribution to gender equality promotion in terms of specific results, because interparliamentary meetings as a rule do not have any specific outcomes set in advance which need to be attained. Instead, delegations’ contribution to gender equality is gradual and tends to remain at the level of general promotion and advocacy. Somewhat more incisive gender equality promotion by delegations is possible in enlargement processes, where accession criteria can specify concrete requirements that the candidate country needs to fulfil.

Figure 24: Ways in which delegations seek to contribute to gender equality promotion abroad



Note: 46 respondents replied to this question

Interviews have furthermore revealed just how important **informal work** by pro-active delegation chairs and members is for gender equality promotion.

Within delegations, these include efforts to achieve a more gender-balanced composition of delegation missions sent abroad, by encouraging women’s participation and expressing disapproval of predominantly male missions. This is important because one of the serious practical bottlenecks has been the dominance of male MEPs in the delegation missions sent abroad, which can undermine the EP’s

message on the importance for partner countries/regions to respect gender equality. Leading by example was highlighted as a very powerful tool by our interviewees. Another initiative, which was not as such a part of formal rules, is for the delegation chair to impose a quota for women on the delegation's speaking lists.

When abroad, these efforts include the head and regular members of EP missions liaising with the EU ambassador on the ground, in order to support the rights of women in parliamentary elections in the partner country/region, but also seeking to meet with female parliamentarians of the partner country/region before official meetings take place. This has further involved organising trainings for women who wish to stand as a candidate at elections, or pushing for the adoption of women quotas at elections. This kind of support can have actual impact in practice, for example by more women being elected to the parliament of the partner country/region, or by women quotas being implemented in political parties' electoral lists. Also, informal exchanges of views between MEPs and foreign officials on gender-related issues can be helpful and need not take place in the format of interparliamentary meetings.⁵⁰⁸ EP delegations can furthermore encourage partners abroad to appoint parliamentary focal points of their own, where this has not been done. At an individual level, efforts can include encouraging foreign female parliamentarians to take the floor during interparliamentary meetings, which has on occasion had EP delegation members sending 'hidden' nods of support across the table, as a way of reassuring and expressing solidarity with their female counterparts for speaking up in a male-dominated environment where this is not the norm (e.g. Saudi Arabia).⁵⁰⁹

The informal talks that MEPs may organise abroad involve meetings not only with parliamentarians, but also with women entrepreneurs and representatives of CSOs. Similarly, establishing women's forums is very important for instilling confidence among the participants, be it in relation to women's political, economic or social empowerment. MEPs' society-oriented contacts are in fact essential in order for them to grasp and adapt to the sensitivities of the local culture, the success of which can be decisive to the level of reception by the partner country/region of the norms promoted by the EP, including gender equality. Two examples, drawn from the interviews, illustrate MEPs' engagement with non-governmental actors abroad quite well. On the one hand, especially in countries where the EU is an influential player, MEPs' meetings with civil society activists can significantly raise the latter's public profile, increase their visibility through higher media interest for their work, and thereby shore up the legitimacy of their cause. On the other hand, NGOs can be useful partners to EP delegations where they seek to achieve the same goals. This was the case with efforts of the EP Delegation to the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee in assisting this country's ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Although Ukraine still has not ratified this convention, the mode of operation of this delegation is telling. Without an EP liaison officer in Ukraine and faced with language problems, the delegation decided to collaborate with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), a non-profit organisation from the US. NDI had many more personnel, greater logistical and language resources, and a very well-developed network of contacts in Ukrainian institutions and organisations, all the while sharing the same commitment to values of liberal democracy. This enabled the EP to have greater access to information and to address language and staffing problems. However, an

⁵⁰⁸ See, for instance, the informal online meeting on "Women empowerment in the Gulf" held on 12 November 2020 between DARP members and female representatives from the Gulf region, including the Secretary General of the Family Affairs Council at the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development of Saudi Arabia, Ms Hala Altuwaijri, who reported on her country's plans to prioritise increased participation of women in the labour market so as to achieve a thriving economy as part of the Saudi Vision 2030 (aimed at reducing dependence on oil, diversifying the economy and other goals). See KSA Mission to EU, Tweet of 13 November 2020, available at <https://twitter.com/KSAmissionEU/status/1327281175447150592>, accessed on 25 July 2020. See also: European Parliament, Study "The Situation of Women in the Gulf States", doc. no. PE 509.985, October 2014.

⁵⁰⁹ At an even more personal level, the way an MEP dresses in interparliamentary and other meetings (e.g. a bright coloured dress) can already be a form of gender equality activism in conservative circles, where strict dress codes are envisaged for formal gatherings.

overly open support by the EP of CSOs in partner countries/region can backfire where such organisations can be seen by the government and sections of the public as foreign agents (e.g. in Serbia).

These insights show that improvements in gender equality do not only depend on formal proclamations, but micro-level action by delegation missions abroad, through targeted interactions and personal peer-to-peer dialogue. These varied interactions between MEPs and parliamentarians, business representatives and CSOs from the partner countries or regions can have an indirect gender transformative effect if they inspire the EP's interlocutors to challenge unfavourable domestic societal norms on gender equality. This therefore confirms that not all influence is exerted through legal means, which are only one part of the different parliamentary diplomacy processes.

All of these personal initiatives by EP delegation missions abroad, however, depend on the motivation of the members involved and the degree to which they are willing to take ownership of the issue of gender equality. To quote one interviewee, it is important to 'use the little power you have to change the little you can'. In addition, as pointed out by a number of interviewees, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused considerable disruption to the organisation of missions abroad, although some delegations have managed to organise IPMs online.

3. Main bottlenecks encountered by delegations when promoting gender equality. Other than the three survey respondents who have noted that there are no obstacles to delegations' gender equality promotion, both the survey and numerous interviews have highlighted the following bottlenecks which prevent delegations from being more effective in promoting gender equality:

- Lack of interest, political will, understanding, emphasis and/or awareness on the part of the chair, members, substitute members, bureaux and/or secretariats of delegations concerning the use of delegations as a tool to promote gender equality (9 respondents);
- prioritisation of other issues (especially acute when salient foreign events occur, such as US elections and the Capitol attacks, which can take over delegation agendas), including the lack of time and too few meetings for time to be devoted to issues that are not at the top of the political agenda (3 respondents);
- partner country's unwillingness to recognise the existence of problems concerning gender equality, counterparts' poor reception of delegations' efforts, and adverse situation in the partner country (e.g. politics, violence, poverty, terrorism, corruption, external interventions, etc) (3 respondents);
- discrimination of women in law and practice in the region, including a hostile environment for LGBTQI community (2 respondents);
- limited capacities, competences and impact of delegations, not least because gender equality is a cross-cutting structural problem (2 respondents);
- patriarchal/conservative attitudes both in the EU and in third countries (2 respondents);
- insufficient invitation of female speakers to delegation events (e.g. hearings, public debates, interparliamentary meetings), which is in some cases caused by the fact that the delegation chair is not very inclusive but prefers to invite the same experts, on the same topics and mostly men, often without consulting the delegation bureau;
- no formal meetings with parliamentarians of the partner country/region;
- general dominance of men in politics.

Interviews have strongly emphasised both political will and the attitude and knowledge of delegation chairs as being decisive to the level of each delegation's engagement on gender equality issues, both within a given delegation and in delegations' interparliamentary meetings with partner countries/regions.

Another obstacle stressed in the interviews is that MEPs, often within the same delegation or even within the same political group, are not always in agreement about different gender issues (e.g. abortion, gender and identity, gender and trade), which erodes the action that the EP could take on these issues in external relations.

Moreover, while gender equality to a significant extent depends on the activism of political groups, the latter by no means have the same level of enthusiasm about gender issues. Some political groups are keen to collect political points by supporting gender equality when discussions are held in public, while they are much more sceptical when sessions are held in private.⁵¹⁰ Also, not all political groups have appointed persons to be in charge of gender equality, which reduces the amount of attention that such a group is likely to devote to gender equality in its initiatives.

When asked how some of the obstacles could be overcome, our interviewees have underlined, in no particular order, the desirability of:

- Organising tailor-made training on gender equality for all political and administrative members of delegations, given the widely-shared impression about the lack of gender equality know-how on the part of MEPs.⁵¹¹ At the same time, it is important to ensure that information about training opportunities is widely disseminated within the EP. An example of good practice, which could be adapted to suit the specific purposes of EP delegations, is the training on 'Gender impact assessment and gender budgeting', which FEMM organised in collaboration with EIGE on 17 June 2021. This training placed particular emphasis on gender-sensitive drafting of amendments to EU legislative files, with the Directive on minimum wages having been used as a tool for practising. The MEPs attending the training were also given a checklist for gender-sensitive screening of proposals for EU directives. However, this otherwise very well-received training is also an example of a bottleneck, because it was reported only to have been available to MEPs and MEPs' assistants, but not to political group advisors. Training at the level of political groups can indeed be organised by the groups themselves, and some groups have done so (e.g. the Greens/EFA);
- devising concrete measuring tools and benchmarks to assess compliance with gender-oriented commitments, while ensuring that any toolkit designed remains a 'living' document that can evolve and change over time to take account of the developments in political practice. This should be coupled with periodic reporting on gender-related achievements by EP delegations (e.g. bi-annually, annually or otherwise);
- preparation of a centralised intranet webpage with collated resources on gender equality (e.g. historical development, practical information) so as to make gender equality more easily accessible and more visible within the EP;
- wider power for delegations to adopt their own reports in which they could raise gender equality issues in EP external relations;
- better synchronisation of committees' and delegations' calendars and agendas so as to improve their mutual coordination, especially given the lower frequency of delegation meetings compared to those of committees, which gives delegations fewer opportunities to raise matters for debate;
- paying greater attention to gender in all the steps of all appointment processes within the EP. Two particular aspects have been highlighted. On the one hand, it would be advantageous to mobilise gender equality promotion within delegation bureaux by ensuring that there is a requirement that at least one

⁵¹⁰ Similarly, when the inclusion of a gender dimension is discussed by email, interviewees have noticed that gender considerations are more easily rejected than when the same are discussed in person.

⁵¹¹ On at least one occasion, the delegation chair had to train one of the colleagues in charge of protocol so that the latter would notice gender equality issues in the first place.

bureau member is gender-conscious, knowledgeable and/or passionate about gender equality. Therefore, if, as interviews show is often the case, the delegation chair is not particularly interested in gender equality issues, this would be counterbalanced by the appointment of a gender-conscious vice-chair. On the other hand, gender should be an important consideration at 'sub-MEP' level too, by ensuring that MEPs' assistants (e.g. Accredited Parliamentary Assistants - APAs) are trained and motivated about gender equality issues, as this can have an important effect on the MEPs who receive their assistance;

- more frequent discussions of the work of EP delegations within the GMN;
- better articulation and greater clarity of the objectives of EP delegations along the lines of the description of the objectives of committees, which is clearly enumerated in Annex VI to the RoP, but which is not done for delegations. Specifying each delegation's remit, goals and expected outputs explicitly could lead to better structure and focus in delegations' work and enable monitoring of their work against a clearer set of parameters. We have heard from one interviewee that delegation secretariats lack the centrally-agreed framework within which to embed the work of delegations, but are keen to implement any framework that may be agreed in the future. Another interviewee pointed out that because delegations' work is not very well known across the EP, MEPs in charge of a salient matter (e.g. within a committee) can be more likely to take the matter up directly with a third country parliament (e.g. the US Congress) rather than to channel it via the EP delegation for relations with that third country;
- considering a more regularised inclusion of gender equality on the agenda of interparliamentary meetings (e.g. a yearly guaranteed agenda point);
- taking regular stock of the gender-related work of delegations (e.g. in the form of a yearly exchange or a yearly report by each delegation on gender equality promotion, which in turn could incentivise inter-delegation learning through the sharing of best practice and peer pressure);
- rewarding deserving MEPs and administrative staff for their gender equality activism and achievements so as to give greater visibility to gender equality (e.g. by setting up a gender equality prize which could be awarded annually and which could take into account success in ensuring gender equality is incorporated in EU proposals, amendments or in parliamentary diplomatic activities);
- ensuring that there is adequate cooperation with and oversight by bodies external to the EP with respect to the EP's gender equality work (e.g. European Women's Lobby or the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), as they can provide first-hand insights into the problems experienced by the addressees of the EP's gender equality initiatives;
- better staffed, better trained and more knowledgeable delegation secretariats;
- developing partnerships in multilateral parliamentary fora as a helpful way to share expertise and join forces towards achieving the objectives of gender equality (e.g. the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights was a good partner when organising an event within the framework of Euronest Assembly);
- ensuring that EP delegations are closely involved in the implementation of GAP III in partner countries/regions.

5.2.3.5 Peer learning

Lessons about gender equality promotion which the EP could learn from other parliaments: In the survey, most of the replies received have either agreed or disagreed with the proposition that the EP could learn from its counterparts abroad without any further elaboration, while other ones have provided general suggestions which do not necessarily concern parliamentary diplomacy (e.g. gender quotas for

electoral lists, the promotion of women in top jobs, gender parity in political parties, equal pay legislation). A few other replies used the opportunity, once again, to emphasise how important it is to 'force' delegation chairs to put gender equality on the agenda.

However, a couple of replies are specifically relevant to parliamentary diplomacy. The first one suggests the use of the IPU self-assessment toolkit on the gender sensitivity of parliaments, which is presented in greater detail in Section 3 and Annex 2 of this study. The second one sheds light on an important, and in our view insufficiently mainstreamed, approach to addressing gender equality—the **Barbershop concept**. This concept was jointly developed by Iceland and Suriname in 2015 in the context of the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (see also subsection 3.3.).⁵¹² This concept is also very closely connected with the UN's HeForShe global solidarity movement for gender equality. As defined by Iceland's Foreign Ministry, the concept posits that achieving gender equality requires 'men to mobilise and motivate other men to address discriminatory stereotypes of masculinity' by identifying 'ways for men to talk about gender equality in comfortable and safe environment'.⁵¹³ The goal is to include men and boys in the process of transforming social norms and helping men to change traditional discourses about women among other men. The Barbershop concept also provides a toolbox. Barbershop conferences have been held in various formats both within Iceland (e.g. in the organisation of the Iceland's parliament and foreign ministry) and within international organisations (e.g. the UN, NATO, OECD, and the Council of Europe). We learnt from the interviews that the organisation of a Barbershop event by the EP was proposed during a visit by an ambassador of Iceland to FEMM, but that this was never taken up by the EP. It was pointed out that feedback from male participants in Iceland-led Barbershop events was very positive. It would thus be worthwhile revisiting this idea. The role of male parliamentarians as 'sympathetic advocates' in gender equality promotion has also been highlighted in the literature,⁵¹⁴ and also in our interviews.

5.3 Conclusion

The preceding assessment demonstrates the breadth of parliamentary diplomatic activities undertaken by the EP, its committees, subcommittees, the DEG and delegations. It shows that the EP is a sophisticated gender equality protagonist. As a large institution, the EP has put a tremendous effort into incorporating gender not only in its governance mechanisms, policy documents, practices and personnel, but also in its interactions with partner countries/regions abroad. The EP is uniquely placed to act on gender equality in external relations owing to the leverage that the EU possesses in many, albeit certainly not all, countries; as well as owing to the variety and resources of the delegations focused on maintaining international relations with EU partners abroad. Albeit to varying degrees, most of the delegations engage on gender equality issues and, in most cases, gender is considered not only as a standalone issue, but also as a consideration that intersects with other policy areas such as security, trade and environment. The EP has also proven to be a highly innovative institution, frequently initiating measures aimed at enhancing the gender dimension of all of its activities, including external relations.

Despite this, a series of bottlenecks has been identified. Although they are multi-faceted, their essence can be summarised by grouping them in accordance with their nature. From that perspective, the bottlenecks appear broadly threefold.

First, the majority of the bottlenecks concern the MEPs' **political culture and personal attitude**, such as the presence or absence of political will, interest or proactive approach, especially on the part of

⁵¹² Erlingsdóttir, Irma. 'Trouble in Paradise? Icelandic gender-equality imaginaries, national rebranding and international reification', in Eirinn Larsen et al. (eds), *Gender Equality and National Branding in the Nordic Region* (Routledge 2021) 90-112, at 103.

⁵¹³ Government of Iceland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Barbershop', <https://www.government.is/topics/foreign-affairs/international-affairs/barbershop/>, accessed on 25 July 2021. See a broader overview of Iceland's gender equality policy in: European Parliament, Note 'The Policy on Gender Equality in Iceland', doc. no. PE 425.633, September 2010.

⁵¹⁴ Palmieri, Sonia. 'Sympathetic Advocates: Male Parliamentarians Sharing Responsibility for Gender Equality', (2013) 21(1) *Gender & Development* 67-80.

delegations' leadership. While acknowledging the slow and incremental nature of achieving change in gender equality, it is essential to establish well-designed processes aimed at mainstreaming and awareness-raising among MEPs and administrative staff. This would help to build internal gender expertise, which, in the spirit of co-creation, would be facilitated by recourse to external experts (e.g. EIGE, international organisations, civil society, think tanks, academia). This carries the potential, over time, to generate greater responsiveness to gender issues in the EP's internal and external affairs alike, and thereby amplify the authenticity of the Parliament's diplomatic engagements. This could in turn increase the degree to which gender forms part of the collective consciousness, regardless of the MEPs' political colour, position, or responsibility.

Second, another considerable set of bottlenecks relates to ***institutional organisation and governance***. Insufficiencies are most tangible with respect to the definition of the competences and objectives of delegations, which is an issue larger than gender equality and needs attention in order to avoid policy goals slipping through the cracks of institutional vagueness and confusion. It is paramount to ensure EP-wide clarity regarding: the exact tasks and expected outputs of each delegation; the powers and duties of gender focal points; as well as the content and expected impact of gender action plans. In parallel, the unevenness of knowledge about gender equality among MEPs and administrative staff, as well as irregular information flows, are further significant obstacles which hinder delegations' efficacy in promoting gender equality abroad. Addressing these bottlenecks corresponds to the principle of pragmatism in parliamentary diplomacy, which requires the setting of clear and realistic objectives and their monitoring.

Third, and a matter widely diagnosed by interviewees and survey respondents, concerns the level of ***implementation*** of gender equality commitments undertaken by the EP both in its internal processes and in its dealings with partner countries/regions. Deficiencies of implementation (e.g. incomplete, incorrect, delayed or complete failure of implementation) affect the legitimacy of the Parliament's claims in external relations, reducing their authenticity. It is critical in this regard to review the procedures for the monitoring of the implementation of gender action plans, and promote greater pragmatism by agreeing clear review plans, setting actionable criteria, identifying specific targets. The implementation of the commitment to appoint gender focal points concerns both a clear identification of their institutional status and their tasks, but also a periodic review of their work on gender equality promotion. Positive and negative measures of peer pressure, such as rewarding achievements and highlighting non-implementation, are equally important to stimulating gender equality promotion.

6 Lessons from other parliaments for EP gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy

In Section 3 practices from other parliaments and interparliamentary institutions as well as international organisations working with parliaments were presented. Based on these, and the overarching EU strategy presented in GAP III making gender a priority of EU external action, the criteria for assessing the effectiveness of gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy were determined. The criteria coincide with 5 main pillars of the GAP III⁵¹⁵: Integration of the gender perspective in 85 % of new actions taken regardless of the topic resonates with the **joint venture** criterion of making sure that all relevant actors are involved in the process and all elements of external action are bringing a gender equality aspect. Close cooperation, especially at the country level, with relevant stakeholders, is in line with the **co-creation** criterion. Focusing on key areas of engagement by understanding what is most needed in respective countries/regions relates to the **contextualisation**. Leading by example can be achieved only if fulfilling the criterion of **authenticity**, while the monitoring system goes in line with the **pragmatism** criterion.

As already mentioned, the EP has put a very significant effort in incorporating the gender equality principle in its external interactions, implementing various practices and tools, as demonstrated in chapter 5. Bearing in mind the EP practice and the EU general framework, the practices from other parliaments and interparliamentary institutions were analysed to identify relevant lessons and potential additional tools which could be used in the EP's practice.

6.1 Internal dimension

6.1.1 Gender-specific objectives or obligations in the rules and procedures of parliaments or interparliamentary institutions

The gender-specific objectives in the context of internal rules and procedures of parliaments and interparliamentary institutions presented in subsection 3.3 are to a great extent related to gender balance among parliamentarians and parliamentary officials promoting gender equality in external action. The presence of women in parliamentary bodies interacting with stakeholders from third countries is very important, because it increases the chances of crucial topics for women being raised. From the point of view of the authenticity criterion mentioned above, ensuring gender balance among its own representatives seems like a powerful tool. However, for the EP guaranteeing its own commitment as an institution is a first step that should be complemented with promotion of such a measure among Member States, since the national electoral laws have the ultimate impact on the composition of the EP. The research also proved that the promotion of gender quotas on electoral lists is one of the ways in which EP delegations seek to contribute to the promotion of gender equality abroad.

The rules of gender composition depend on each institution, but usual parliamentary practice comes down to soft (customary) or hard (regulated) quotas. The customary quotas, which do not impose any rigid rules, but reflect a commitment towards increasing gender balance, seem to work more effectively in the social and political environment where gender equality constitutes a commonly shared value⁵¹⁶. According to EIGE research from 2019,⁵¹⁷ the EP is a pioneer among EU parliaments, achieving the highest scores in the dimension of gender mainstreaming of the parliamentary agenda and the gender-balanced composition of parliamentary bodies. However, some Member States have been facing strong gender backlash, which also should be taken into consideration when deciding on the approach to be adopted. The experts

⁵¹⁵ GAP III, at 3.

⁵¹⁶ Compendium of good practices for advancing women's political participation in the OSCE region, OSCE/ODIHR 2016, accessed on 29 September 2021.

⁵¹⁷ European Institute for Gender Equality (2019), *Gender equality in national parliaments across the EU and European Parliament*. https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0419527enn_002.pdf, accessed on 4 July 2021.

interviewed for the purposes of this study confirmed that the most effective tools for advancing gender equality in parliaments are usually connected with clear and inevitable sanctions, as in the case of the IPU's approach towards composition of the delegations. Such solutions may eliminate the risk of putting in place instruments which will not ultimately be implemented because they are not in line with the current political agenda.

The key lesson learnt from inter-parliamentary institutions establishing gender targets for the composition of delegations of national parliaments is the need to introduce clear and inevitable sanctions (IPU), which allows those measures to have a real impact. Following this example, in the case of the EP the gender balance should not be a question of political will only, but a regulated requirement in terms of composition of inter-parliamentary delegations as well as delegations sent on missions abroad.

Another practice, with reference to gender-balanced representation, is making efforts towards favouring the under-represented gender when inviting guests to speak during official meetings between interparliamentary institutions, parliaments, or parliamentary bodies with external stakeholders. Such an approach is present within the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and is also adopted by numerous organisers of conferences all around the world.

6.1.2 Gender Equality Groups or Committees within parliaments or interparliamentary institutions

Specific groups and committees devoted to gender equality or women's rights, operating within various parliaments and interparliamentary institutions, play an important role in promoting gender equality in external relations. The advantages of creating a dedicated committee dealing with gender equality issues, according to experts from INTER PARES interviewed for the purposes of this study, consist mainly of the concentration of gender expertise in one place within the institution, which serves as a support to other committees and parliamentary bodies for mainstreaming gender in all policy areas. Therefore, such a body has a greater opportunity to analyse the gender impact of decisions made across all policy areas. It also creates strong links with other national and international institutions responsible for gender equality, as well as with representatives of civil society dealing with women's rights. On the other hand, according to experts, such a solution can have some drawbacks, mainly potential marginalisation of the topic as an issue pertaining only to this dedicated committee. What is more, in some parliaments gender equality committees act only in an advisory capacity, having lesser status than other committees. It should also be underlined that in some cases, concentration of women MPs in one, gender equality committee prevents them from having major influence in other committees. This way, the gender mainstreaming of all policy areas may be difficult to achieve. In the EP the main body responsible for implementing gender mainstreaming across policy sectors is the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), while the HLG is in charge primarily of promoting gender equality within the EP and its administration.

There are some other configurations, outlined by experts, which constitute an alternative to a separate committee dealing with gender equality. A multi-portfolio committee that combines gender equality issues with others, such as human rights or social policy, can be another possible solution. However, it brings a risk of labelling gender equality as 'women's issues', not relevant to other policy areas (this risk is also visible in the case of a dedicated committee, when gender mainstreaming in all policy areas is not taking place effectively). Mainstreaming gender throughout all committees seems at first the ideal solution, however in practice it can mean less consistency and focus on the issues analysed. Women's caucuses, as another option to consider, in which all women MPs, from all political parties, can participate on a voluntary basis (sometimes they include male MPs too) proved to be influential bodies in various countries. What needs to be underlined, however, is that they often lack parliamentary resources and may have lower status than traditional parliamentary committees.

The analysis of good practices from other parliaments and interparliamentary institutions shows that up to now there has been no parliamentary group devoted solely to the issue of promoting gender equality in diplomacy. However, an interesting solution implemented for example by PACE, is a parliamentary body devoted specifically to one aspect of women's rights. It strengthens the influence of the activities undertaken and enables the creation of a strong, international network of parliamentarians around the topic, which seems essential from the point of view of promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy.

6.1.3 Providing gender expertise to MPs and parliamentary officials

The survey performed for the purposes of this study showed that only 57 % of respondents involved in the EP's external action as MEPs or parliamentary officials have 'very strong' or 'strong' understanding of the concept of 'feminist foreign policy'. Therefore, providing gender expertise and showing how gender equality might work in the context of foreign affairs is extremely important.

Lessons learnt from other parliaments indicate that Handbooks or Roadmaps which not only present a certain set of data and bring context to the problem, but also provide guidelines for implementation of solutions from the parliamentarians' perspective, might work well and increase usability of such publications. 'Checklists', 'Key questions to ask before taking action', 'Charts' [UNDP, OSCE] make them not only reports about specific aspects of gender equality, but a tool for use by every single parliamentarian or parliamentary official. In this way, people who are going to promote gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy will be better aware of what actions work best, and will be able to apply gender mainstreaming in their actions, which relates to the criterion of contextualisation.

Experts' interviews clearly indicated access to data as an important precondition to drive any further parliamentary action in the field of feminist foreign policy. This is in line with the contextualisation criterion for assessing the effectiveness in gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy. Having access to data also allows the selection of topics that are most relevant at the moment for the local community, and the possibility of addressing the most pressing needs in terms of gender equality on the ground. A small steps approach, in which the entire gender bias is not tackled at once, rather specific elements that are the most important at a given time, fulfils the pragmatism criterion.

6.2 External dimension

6.2.1 Support women candidates

Supporting women parliamentarians in the national parliaments can bring real change in the long term by increasing substantial representation of women. The first step is obviously the support for women candidates. Experts pointed out in the interviews that pre-electoral training is often organised on an *ad-hoc* basis and there should be a more sustainable approach, by working with a cohort of female political leaders over a longer period of time.

Lessons learnt from the practices of parliaments and interparliamentary institutions regarding the support of women candidates and MPs include:

- involving role models as speakers for the female community – the trainers should have hands-on experience in running for office and performing a political role [OSCE];
- cooperating with local women's rights organisations to be able to identify women with political potential in the local community [ParlAmericas];
- openly addressing key barriers towards women's political participation such as VAWIP [PACE, IPU].

Desk research on good practices from other parliaments, as well as interviews with experts, confirmed the hypothesis that training around gender equality in politics focuses mostly on supporting women rather

than teaching parliamentarians of all genders how to be more gender-sensitive in their parliamentary work. In order to change the focus from ‘fixing the women’ to ‘fixing the system’, more training for MPs and parliamentary officials is required.

The EP performs this aspect of parliamentary diplomacy through the Simone Veil programme, which is one of the key good practices presented in Section 5. Lessons learnt from other parliaments and interparliamentary institutions, which could bring added value to the programme, are involvement of the local CSOs in designing the training modules for women parliamentarians from specific countries – to make it as relevant as possible for the participants - as well as involving female role models not only from the EP but from the local political culture (not necessarily from the same country, but from a different country in the region). That way the participants could better identify themselves with successful women in politics who have had to overcome similar cultural barriers.

Another lesson learnt in the general context of training offered for parliamentarians, regardless of gender, would be inclusion of a gender sensitising module into the training curricula to follow the Gender Transformative Approach.

6.2.2 Training MPs and parliamentary officials through seminars and workshops

Gender-sensitive training is available to all parliamentarians regardless of sex. However, it is a challenge to promote this among men. So far, some success has been achieved by involving men during events where they can discuss their role in advancing gender equality (such as Barbershop events). This is the first step in engaging them in the movement towards gender-sensitising parliamentary work. Nevertheless, as the practices from other parliaments still show, gender mainstreaming training is mostly attended by women, although progress is being made in this regard [INTER PARES].

Lessons learnt in terms of keeping training both efficient and effective include:

- adjusting the format to the target group – in case of parliamentary officials, a few-day intensive training with experts might be the best solution [UNDP], while the politicians might prefer an e-learning format, due to travel to constituencies and being in meetings through the day [UNDP/IPU/IDEA/UN Women];
- organising sessions on very concrete aspects of gender mainstreaming in parliaments with parliamentary staff responsible for that field, such as gender budgeting training for the officials from the Parliamentary Budget Office rather than general technical and administrative staff [UNDP];
- a practical approach by organising training based on real case studies from the parliament, which result in draft amendments or organisational changes in the institution. In that way participants see the real impact of the training, and it contributes to the pragmatism criterion for assessing the effectiveness of gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy [INTER PARES].

6.2.3 Events and conferences addressing gender equality organised within parliaments or interparliamentary institutions

Events and conferences are still one of the most commonly-used tools by parliaments and interparliamentary organisations to promote certain values, including gender equality and women’s rights. Good practices from other parliaments prove that organising events is a good way to produce innovative approaches to gender equality, to identify allies and create international networks. The EP has been using this tool actively as documented Sections 4 and 5. To increase the promotional effectiveness of such events, in line with the criteria of co-creation and contextualisation, the organisers should focus on maintaining a dialogue and involving all relevant stakeholders from the country or region (key role of local CSOs), as well as selecting such good practices to promote, that can be transformative in a specific context

in which promotional activities take place. That way an important risk of doubling the efforts and repeating initiatives without coordination can be mitigated.

There are various forms of conferences, popular among the parliaments analysed. The study results suggest that events engaging men could be an interesting path for the EP to follow. Bringing men to discussion on gender equality is crucial to achieve change and therefore the concept of Barbershop event offers a great opportunity for parliaments and interparliamentary institutions looking for innovative ways of promoting gender equality. A toolbox with ready-to-apply concepts of events makes the implementation of such a project feasible in very different contexts. The very positive feedback from male participants from Iceland will encourage wider use of the tool described.

6.2.4 Peer-to-peer exchanges

According to the survey conducted for the purposes of this study, the most common way in which delegations seek to contribute to gender equality promotion abroad is by 'Raising awareness about gender equality among parliamentarians of the partner country' and by 'Effecting the introduction of gender equality issues on political agendas in the partner country (e.g. those of political parties, governments, parliaments, ombudsperson, etc)'. Both are strictly connected with peer-to-peer exchange practices. Other parliaments are performing those mostly through bilateral meetings and visits abroad, as well as attending conferences for parliamentarians.

Based on the interviews and overview of practices from other parliaments and interparliamentary institutions, peer-to-peer exchanges should be mutual. Presenting good practices from both sides allows the communication of specific solutions without 'preaching' or imposing values which may be seen as controversial in certain national contexts. In the case of presentation at conferences, the contextualisation criterion is crucial for the tool to be effective in terms of gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy. Without adapting the message to the audience, there will not be any transmission of ideas, only their announcement.

6.2.5 Gender audits

One of the main criteria of effective diplomacy, set within the framework of this research, is authenticity, which consists of making sure that values promoted in external relations are in line with the principles respected inside one's internal rules and principles. Therefore, if the EP is willing to reinforce its efforts towards more gender equality activities in external relations, it has to guarantee its own commitment as an institution. According to EIGE research from 2019,⁵¹⁸ the EP is a pioneer among EU parliaments, achieving the highest scores in the dimension of gender mainstreaming of the parliamentary agenda and the gender-balanced composition of parliamentary bodies. Additionally, the EP is taking action against VAWIP, a topic rarely raised when speaking about gender-sensitive parliaments. The self-assessment of the *status quo* of gender equality, with the use of tools provided by such organisations as OSCE/ODIHR or EIGE, can be performed individually by each parliament. Promoting such gender audit tools among the parliaments of third countries and offering assistance in the process could be a good way for the EP to show its commitment towards gender sensitive parliaments in the external context. However, in order to be authentic while suggesting such a process to parliaments outside of the EU, the EP could also first recommend such gender audits to parliaments of all Member States, and offer expert assistance. In this way the EP would increase its authenticity when asking third countries' parliaments to go through an audit.

⁵¹⁸ European Institute for Gender Equality (2019), *Gender equality in national parliaments across the EU and European Parliament*. https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0419527enn_002.pdf, accessed on 4 July 2021.

6.2.6 Cooperation with local actors

Assisting in transformation towards gender equality at the global level may be achieved by parliamentary diplomacy through cooperation with local actors. In line with the criteria established within this study, contextualisation and pragmatism seem crucial in these types of initiatives: tailoring the diplomatic action to the specific local context and being realistic at the time of planning. The Gender Transformative Approach requires involvement of local stakeholders in order to ensure that diplomatic actions can bring real change based on the needs of society.

6.2.7 Providing statements on the situation of women's and children rights in other countries

Addressing gender equality, mostly in the context of women's rights violations, is done by parliaments and interparliamentary bodies mostly through adopting resolutions, issuing official letters and interpellations of individual MPs. While these activities are mainly aimed at raising awareness and calling for specific change in third countries, this aspect is very important for diplomatic endeavours.⁵¹⁹

Lessons learnt from the analysis of practices by other parliaments show that the statements issued should be:

- evidence-based: clearly showing the situation based on the current data;
- timely: issued in connection with recent developments in the country;
- actionable: including a clear call to action from the third countries' authorities to improve the situation on the ground.

6.2.8 Communication activities

Traditional public affairs techniques, such as media relations and social campaign tools, are widely used in promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy. National parliaments and interparliamentary institutions organise press conferences and issue press releases on the most pressing problems at a given moment. Also awards, such as the Sakharov Prize, increase visibility of the gender equality issues that need special focus and attention from international stakeholders.

Analysis of good practices from other parliaments, carried out within this study, shows that focusing on one topic (at least for a certain period of time) and promoting it among other countries, can bring spectacular results. Not only does it bring attention to concrete issues, which goes in line with the Gender Transformative Approach (such as gender-based violence, a topic to which special attention is given by PACE), it also increases the visibility of projects implemented by one parliament/parliamentary body/institution, and helps to build community around the issue (e.g. the topic of parental leave promoted by Sweden) and create a network of experts that can communicate and strengthen each other's efforts, multiplying the results achieved regionally and globally.

⁵¹⁹ Jönsson C., Hall M., *Communication: An Essential Aspect of Diplomacy*, Lund University, 2002, available at <https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/CDS02-Session7-03.pdf>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

The promotion of gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy requires a twofold approach: advancing gender equality internally to ensure the gender sensitivity of the parliament itself and gender mainstreaming in the external action taken by parliamentary bodies. It is crucial for parliaments to maintain credibility as institutions promoting values abroad and the EP succeeds in doing so with respect to its internal gender mainstreaming, which is reflected in its high ranking in the EIGE Gender-Sensitive Parliaments tool.⁵²⁰ To wit, the EP scored 75.8 and placed third best, outstripped only by Finland (score of 76.9) and Sweden (score of 88.2).

Gender sensitive parliaments include a gender perspective in the following ways:

- at the level of **entering the parliament** (examining the electoral process);
- at the time of **constituting parliamentary bodies** (ensuring gender balance);
- in the **day-to-day operations of parliament as a workplace** (establishing work-life balance policies);
- by ensuring the **safety of everyone within the parliament** (establishing anti-harassment policies);
- at the level of **parliamentary outputs and deliverables** (by including a gender aspect in drafted laws and documents produced in the parliament in gender neutral language); and
- at the **symbolic and spatial levels** (by making physical and virtual spaces of the parliament equally accessible and acknowledging both sexes).

Gender mainstreaming in external action to a considerable extent depends on the regional and global trends in terms of the equality between women and men. A strong gender-focused backlash, visible all around the world, including in several EU Member States, hinders the achievement of gender equality. What is more, the Covid-19 pandemic has widened the already existing gender gaps. However, as highlighted by the experts we interviewed, the post-pandemic environment also presents an opportunity for a more sustainable response to the existing global crisis and the inclusion of gender equality values in international and national recovery plans.

Gender mainstreaming in foreign policy, as a fairly new concept developed from the need to secure women's rights in conflict areas, can be a powerful tool for strengthening the position of the EP on the international stage. Our analysis of the already existing gender mainstreaming strategies in foreign policy and interviews with experts provided clear fundamental guidelines for efficient gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy:

- **authenticity** in the parliament's own actions (not promoting values that the parliament is not committed to internally);
- **co-creation** of policies with all relevant stakeholders (making it a participatory process, both internally by involving parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, as well as externally, by engaging with local CSOs and the parliaments of third countries/regions);

⁵²⁰ EIGE, Gender Sensitive Parliaments Toolkit, available at <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-sensitive-parliaments>, accessed on 20 September 2021.

- **contextualisation** of diplomatic activities by adapting transformative action to local needs (being aware of the local milieu and identifying the tools that will work in a specific third country given the specific socio-cultural circumstances);
- understanding own limitations (being **pragmatic** and making even small steps towards gender equality, especially in countries with limited internalization of women's rights); and
- making gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy a **joint venture** by involving all relevant parliamentary actors in designing and deploying actions and projects around gender mainstreaming in external action.

Although FFP is still predominantly performed by the governments of a select group of countries, legislative institutions are making efforts to include gender equality in relations with other parliaments and while engaging in third countries.

Our analysis shows that the EP is one of the pioneers in promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy owing to a very intricate set of procedures and mechanisms aimed at mainstreaming gender in its relations with partner countries/regions. With its crucial role in adopting EU legislation, holding EU institutions to account, voting on EU budgets, and wielding the power of consent to EU international agreements, the EP has significant leverage to enable it to influence the extent and manner in which gender equality is promoted in EU external relations. But the study has also shown how other parliaments and international parliamentary institutions are increasingly engaging on gender equality in external relations, providing access points and lessons learnt which the EP bodies can build on.

The investigation of the institutional framework and current practices of the EP bodies that are key to this institution's external action—committees/subcommittees, the DEG and delegations—shows that gender is indeed being actively mainstreamed both within the EP and in the EP's relations with partner countries/regions.

Within the EP, evidence of this is found in the high level of gender responsiveness seen through the adoption of gender-sensitive legal and policy documents that govern the work of these bodies. These documents have been adopted at the level of the Parliament as a whole (RoP), at the level of the EP Bureau (the GAP and the Roadmap), at the level of the Conference of Presidents (decisions on implementing provisions), and the levels of committees/subcommittees and delegations (gender action plans and gender focal points). While gender considerations are present in the RoP, it is critical for both the 2015 and 2019 Conference of Presidents decisions to be amended in order to explicitly incorporate a gender dimension. Our interviewees have advised how important it is for their daily operation that formal documents that guide the work of externally facing EP bodies are gender-sensitive and provide clear instructions on gender issues that they face.

At a more practical level, the mention of different categories related to gender equality and women's rights in delegation meetings shows a certain degree of correlation between the political salience of gender equality in the country/region concerned and the level to which the gender equality situation in such a country/region is discussed in delegation meetings. The graver the gender equality situation is, the more likely it is that delegations will address it in its meetings. However, there are still delegations that have not paid much attention to gender equality and women's rights in the country/region that falls within their remit and this requires attention, because this is not necessarily an indication that the gender equality situation in the country/region concerned is favourable.

In the EP's relations with partner countries/regions, our analysis demonstrates that there is overall a good level of cooperation between committees/subcommittees, the DEG and delegations on gender equality promotion and women's empowerment in the partner countries/regions.

The **committees** have been the key engines for gender mainstreaming in EP external action. The committees/subcommittees in charge of external relations and FEMM have demonstrated a very firm commitment to gender equality promotion abroad. This is achieved by ensuring the inclusion of general reflections on gender and country-specific demands in EP pronouncements that concern EU external relations. Our analysis of the plenary resolutions adopted in the period 2014-2021, which are informed by reports and opinions prepared by committees and subcommittees, shows that gender is consistently mentioned across the key external EU policies such as security, trade, development, enlargement and environmental protection. Committees and subcommittees have also been important players when it comes to public opinion forming. This was achieved through the organisation of public events with stakeholders (e.g. hearing and seminars) and the commissioning of studies by external experts. These events have strongly contributed to the exchange of views and information on gender equality and women's rights (e.g. by exchanging statistical data, by discussing the obstacles to gender equality posed by cultural and societal norms in the partner country or region, or by receiving feedback on the manner in which EP action abroad is perceived by the local population) and thus to greater contextualisation and co-creation. More attention, nevertheless, should be paid to achieving a more even representation, in terms of geographical coverage, among the stakeholders and representatives invited to speak in these events in order to ensure that the criteria of contextualisation and co-creation are fully realised. Committees and subcommittees have also actively engaged in addressing gender issues on missions abroad. However, while taking into account that not all missions reports have been available for analysis, the documentary evidence suggests that, except for FEMM-led delegations, gender equality is not always mainstreamed during these missions. This is therefore an area of committee/subcommittee work that requires further improvement so as to enable their missions not only to act as fact-finding mechanisms but also as mechanisms for an active promotion of gender equality where this is merited by the situation in the country/region concerned. Also requiring attention is the lack of coherence in the content and level of implementation of the committees' and subcommittees' gender action plans.

The **DEG** is also an essential piece of the gender equality promotion puzzle. This body has made a strong contribution to gender equality promotion abroad through capacity-building programmes (e.g. in the form of joint parliamentary meetings and gender-oriented conferences for parliamentarians and stakeholders). Even more importantly, the DEG has taken important steps in recent years to devise programmes (e.g. the Simone Veil programme) specifically focusing on women's empowerment above all in the priority countries/regions. That said, the DEG's role of political mediation and dialogue, especially through Jean Monnet dialogues, has proven to be a less significant instrument for gender equality promotion abroad. However, because Jean Monnet dialogues enable the EP to have access to key political parties from the partner country/region, they should be reviewed so as to determine whether and, if so, how they could become more utilised for gender equality promotion.

As confirmed by the survey and interviews, the **delegations** are indispensable for raising the awareness of gender issues in partner countries/regions. No other EP official or body has such a direct contact with counterpart parliaments as delegations do. This puts them in a unique position to raise gender issues with counterpart parliamentarians, put gender on the agendas of interparliamentary meetings, discuss gender with government representatives and non-governmental organisations, and relay the EP's message abroad. Most of our interviewees have emphasised the importance of the informal personal relationships built through parliamentary diplomacy, something which reliance solely on formal legal rules cannot achieve. Our survey and interviews have identified important strengths of delegations, such as the ability of proactive MEPs to exert influence on interlocutors abroad on a personal peer-to-peer level, but also through direct liaison with human rights activists, women's rights defenders, and representatives of the non-profit sector. The weaknesses and limitations of the delegations lie not only in the low levels of interest and political will on the part of some MEPs and EP political groups, but also in the variable degrees of influence which the EU exercises in partner countries/regions. In addition, the bottleneck widely shared by

our interviewees are: the lack of clarity in defining the tasks and objectives specific to each given delegation, including with respect to gender equality promotion; and the lack of specification of the exact roles and duties of gender focal points, the latter being a challenge which has prompted the commissioning of this study.

7.2 Policy Recommendations

The promotion of gender equality through EP parliamentary diplomacy has internal and external dimensions. The internal dimension concerns the procedures, roles and structures which are in place to enable administrative and political EP bodies to engage in gender equality promotion beyond the EU. The reform of the internal dimension is ongoing and the consistent implementation of the Roadmap mentioned in Section 4 will contribute to making the EP more gender sensitive. The external dimension is more complex, because its implementation and effectiveness to some extent hinges on cooperation with the EP's partners abroad.

The policy recommendations provided below encompass both the internal and external dimensions, while placing greater emphasis on the more challenging external dimension where EP parliamentary diplomacy could make a direct contribution to gender equality promotion in the EU's external relations with partners from third countries and regional organisations. This group of recommendations is sub-categorised into those that apply to committees, delegations and the DEG, and are structured with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of the existing toolkit, and proposing potential new tools. We provide recommendations that flow from the empirical findings of this study but also that build on those findings and go beyond them.

The two dimensions are meant to complement each other, because the effectiveness of external action is often predicated on strong internal institutional arrangements. The policy recommendations are designed to be comprehensive and ambitious, independent of potential resource implications, which may however have an impact on the feasibility in the short term.

7.2.1 Internal Dimension

- The EP Rules of Procedure could be amended to stimulate the utilisation of multilateral assemblies for the mainstreaming of EP values, including gender equality, through: (a) discourse (e.g. in debates and in the assemblies' official documents); and (b) institutional arrangements (e.g. by promoting the establishment of a women's forum or caucus where this does not exist).
- The Conference of Presidents' Decisions on delegations and missions abroad and on the DEG activities should include clearer reference to gender equality as a value that is core to the EP's external relations, and one that is not to be amalgamated under the overarching category of human rights.
- Ensure that the respective agendas and calendars of the delegations and EXPO committees are timetabled in such a way that delegations have sufficient time to exchange views with committee members before missions are dispatched. This would address the shortcoming identified in the interviews that such an ex ante exchange is not always possible due to timetabling clashes and might hinder the effectiveness of action taken during interparliamentary meetings.
- Create and maintain a centralised EP database on the state of gender equality in the EP's partner countries and regions. This database should also present the best practices identified by international institutions (e.g. OECD, IPU, etc.) and collect gender-disaggregated data on various sectoral policy impacts on gender and women's rights (e.g. in trade, security and environment policies). Access to the database should be given to all political and administrative members of the EP, including EP political groups. Since access to the EP's own intranet is generally reserved for EP staff, we recommend considering the creation of separate databases or online platforms jointly: (a) with the Commission and

the EEAS owing to their external relations expertise in the spirit of joint venture; and (b) with parliamentarians and administrative staff from the EP's partner countries or regions in the spirit of co-creation. Updating of the databases should involve the EPRS to draw on its expertise. Quicker access to one-stop-shop information about gender equality in their partner countries and regions would facilitate the drafting of EP documents (e.g. resolutions, reports, opinions, communiqués) and the preparation of interparliamentary meetings.

- Require each EP political group to have an officially designated representative (an MEP or at least a staff member) specifically in charge of gender issues, who would drive the group's work on gender issues, including in EP external relations. Some political groups already do this on their own initiative or informally, but requiring it formally would help to mainstream gender across the EP political spectrum more consistently, including where gender equality issues arise in EP external relations. This would address the fact that the current RoP do not require political groups to incorporate any gender-related functions within their members and staff. This would also respond to the concerns expressed during interviews that there is an inconsistency in the degree of attention which EP political groups pay to the gender dimension of policy making.⁵²¹
- Pilot an Inter-Group Dialogue on Gender Equality Promotion in External Relations, in order to address potential disagreements between the EP political groups about gender equality promotion abroad and devise common approaches to the different external dimensions of gender equality (e.g. security, trade, environmental protection, ratification of international instruments by partner countries and regions, facilitating joint missions of political group delegates, etc). The outcomes of this Dialogue could be submitted to the EP governing bodies for consideration and could take the form of a set of political undertakings (e.g. in the form of a joint statement). This recommendation is inspired by the fact that the DEG organises inter-party dialogues with partners abroad, but has so far not organised this within its own midst to address challenges highlighted by interviews where EP political groups cannot always agree on a common approach to gender equality promotion abroad. This would follow the 'leading by example' principle.
- Invite EP political groups to encourage MEPs, in the processes of hiring their assistants (e.g. APAs), to ensure that at least one of them is selected using the following criteria: (a) formal training in gender equality; or (b) commanding a solid understanding of and/or demonstrated interest in gender equality issues acquired through work experience (e.g. in a relevant civil society organisation) or through practical engagement (e.g. the organisation of or attendance at relevant conferences or seminars).
- Ensure that meetings of the GMN have a standing agenda point dedicated to a discussion on the most important activities of delegations (e.g. this could be based on an oral report by the Conference of Delegation Chairs).
- Organise a pilot Iceland-style Barbershop conference on gender equality for male MEPs, which would include a parliamentary diplomacy dimension. Minutes of the conference should be published and feedback assessed, with a view to organising such an event more regularly.

7.2.2 External Dimension

7.2.2.1 Committees and subcommittees

- Design a tailor-made Ex Ante Impact Assessment Questionnaire to analyse the gender dimension of draft EU international agreements (especially trade agreements before deciding whether the EP should give or withhold consent). This questionnaire would assist MEPs and their staff in scrutinising the said

⁵²¹ In this content, women's associations led by EP political groups can be highly significant in furthering gender equality and should be given greater visibility and opportunity for input in the given group's policy-making processes.

agreements and verify whether and, if so, how they incorporate a gender dimension. The questionnaire could be divided into sections that address different gender equality aspects. These sections could include: (a) institutional aspects, such as verifying how the European Commission's impact assessment addresses gender impacts of a given agreement under negotiation; whether governance structures foreseen under the agreement ensure gender parity; and whether gender equality is taken into account in the political aims of the agreement; and (b) substantive aspects, such as whether gender equality promotion commitments sufficiently address the differential impacts that the policies agreed have on women and girls; whether gender equality promotion is adequately resourced through funding arrangements; whether the current and future economic, social and political position of women in the partner country or region is considered and, if so, how. The results of this assessment would feed into the existing processes of adopting committee reports and opinions that lead to the adoption of resolutions by the plenary, thus helping to mainstream gender in EP external relations. The EP's Impact Assessment Handbook could be updated specifically to state the EP's role in conducting gender equality assessment of EU international agreements (beyond the general impact assessment of such agreements by the EPRS). Similarly, it would be helpful to organise training on gender mainstreaming for the EP Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value. This would be in line with the Roadmap's focus on enhancing impact analysis and in turn assist delegations by providing them with information needed to carry out "the assessment of international agreements concluded between the EU and third countries" foreseen in Article 4 of the Conference of Presidents' Decision on the Implementing Provisions on Delegations and Missions of 2015.

- Improve gender action plans by: (a) further developing the aspects of the plans that concern external relations; (b) increasing coherence across gender action plans; (c) identifying, in accordance with the principle of pragmatism, clear objectives and targets which these plans seek to achieve; (d) reviewing the mechanisms of monitoring the implementation of gender action plans; (f) involving civil society and private sector stakeholders in the processes of drafting and implementing gender action plans, so as to increase co-creation and contextualisation while benefiting from gender expertise.
- Establish mechanisms for the periodic review of the implementation of the EP's, committees'/subcommittees' gender action plans (e.g. bi-annual or yearly review). This could be done by creating a digital KPI monitoring tool similar to the EIGE Gender-Sensitive Parliaments Toolkit. It should be ensured that this Toolkit is a 'living' document capable of being adapted in the future. The review process could be coordinated by the Bureau in cooperation with the Conference of Committee Chairs and the Conference of Delegation Chairs and the GMN. The outcomes of the periodic reviews should be published by adopting gender action plan implementation reports.
- Based on the existing self-assessment tools, provided by EIGE, the EP could recommend gender audits not only to the parliaments of the EU Member States but also to the parliaments or parliamentary institutions of the partner countries and regions, offering expert assistance where such audits are pursued.
- Create gender tools for oversight over the financing of external action through resources from the EU's multiannual financial framework, trust funds and other off-budget sources of funding. This is in line with the Roadmap's objectives regarding gender budgeting and could build on the work initiated by the FEMM and the budget and budgetary control committees. It would be aimed at monitoring whether EU funds for external action are distributed in a way that promotes gender equality and women's rights, and ensuring that EU foreign policy is not gender-blind, in accordance with the benchmarks set by the EU's GAP III and the relevant provisions in the external financing instruments.
- Ensure greater publicity of the gender-related work carried out during missions abroad. This can be done by ensuring, firstly, that all missions abroad are reported on through the EP Press Room (e.g. not all of

them are currently reported on), identifying at least the themes addressed during a given mission if greater detail would jeopardize security and confidentiality. Delegation heads should use the instrument of post-mission communiqués more frequently to mainstream delegations' accomplishment abroad, including those that concern gender. Where such communiqués are indeed regularly issued, we recommend increasing their gender sensitivity through more consistent reporting on the gender aspects of the relations with the partner country or region. This is particularly important where a full-blown mission report is classified for security and confidentiality reasons.

- Committee missions abroad should regularly raise gender equality issues in meetings with foreign counterparts, government officials, and representatives of CSOs. Recommendations below concerning delegations' interparliamentary meetings and links with CSOs, stakeholders and external experts apply *mutatis mutandis* to committees (especially where joint meetings or events are held).
- Where committees and subcommittees organise meetings whose purpose is to exchange views on a particular region, and a decision has been made to invite external speakers from the countries and/or territories belonging to that region, we recommend that either of the following is ensured: (a) equal representation of all such countries and/or territories, if necessary by postponing the meeting until all regional views can be represented in person, or by moving the meeting online to secure the speakers' presence; (b) adjusting the territorial scope in the title of the meeting; or (c) explaining the selection of views to be represented in the meeting. This would help to ensure that the pursuit of the criteria of co-creation and contextualisation through such meetings also adheres to the principle of 'leading by example'.

7.2.2.2 Delegations

General

- Explicitly specify the core objectives, competence and expected outputs of each of the 44 interparliamentary delegations. This can be done by: (a) inserting an Annex in the RoP similar to current Annex VI ('Powers and responsibilities of standing committees that determines the competences of standing committees and subcommittees'); or (b) by inserting an Annex in the Conference of Presidents' Decision on the Implementing Provisions on Delegations and Missions of 2015 so as to specify how each delegation is to "contribute to the work of and systematically provide material for discussions in the parliamentary committees and other Parliament bodies" (Article 4 thereof); or (c) by requiring that each delegation adopt 'Terms of Reference', which would provide in greater detail how the objectives laid down in the RoP and the Implementing Provisions will be accomplished. Currently, delegations' objectives are mentioned in a very general fashion on each delegation's webpage by means of the chair's welcome message or as part of a general introduction to the work of the delegation. However, a formal statement of delegations' objectives and expected outputs is not in place. Additionally, the remit of some delegations is partially determined in international agreements between the EU and a partner country or regional organisation. However, such agreements establish the competence and tasks of a bilaterally established interparliamentary body (joint parliamentary committee, parliamentary cooperation committee or a multilateral assembly). This does not specify the objectives to be achieved by the EP delegation to such a bilaterally established interparliamentary body, given that the EP delegation to such a body is only one component of the latter. Implementing this recommendation is therefore important because different countries and regions require the setting of different policy goals, and the determination of different approaches and methods of achieving them. This is in line with the 'contextualisation' principle and seeks to adapt delegations' action to the specific socio-cultural circumstances in the partner country or region. This recommendation would help to address the shortcoming repeatedly identified in the interviews that, in the absence of clearly delimited responsibility of each specific delegation, it is not always clear to MEPs and administrative staff exactly what their delegation is seeking to achieve in external relations, including on matters of gender equality. In addition

to better guiding and structuring the work of delegations, this recommendation would increase delegations' institutional visibility within and beyond the EP, and enable clearer identification and monitoring of the outcomes of delegations' activities. In turn, this would facilitate the production of delegations' annual reports and priority agendas proposed below.

- Introduce stricter gender quotas in the EP bodies working in the field of external action, above all in the membership and leadership of delegations.
- Delegations should be given greater formal powers of ex ante pronouncement on matters within their remit. Under the Implementing Provisions of 2019 (Articles 18(1), 19(2) and 21(4)), delegation chairs currently have the obligation to report to relevant committees after interparliamentary meetings and ad hoc missions with a possibility of proposing follow-up action. This only enables ex post action to be taken by delegations. We propose that delegations should be given the right to propose action towards the EP's partner countries and regions not only after the said meetings but at any time that they deem relevant for achieving the delegations' objectives (see below on the need to clarify these). The possibility for delegation chairs to send informal letters to any EP body has insufficient institutional weight as it carries little political weight and is usually not made public. Extending delegations' right to pronounce on action to be taken abroad would, first, address the shortcomings identified in the interviews which highlight the limitations of the current ability for delegations to act towards other EP bodies and have their voice heard; and, second, increase delegations' institutional standing. This is particularly important for gender equality promotion, because interviews have shown that, in practice, gender issues can be vulnerable to being neglected in favour of pressing issues of foreign policy. The right to adopt autonomous 'delegation reports' for submission to committees and subcommittees, which would not have to be related to post-mission reporting, could stimulate delegations' activity beyond and between missions, allowing matters, including gender equality, to be put on the agenda and mainstreamed to a greater extent.
- Each delegation should prepare an annual report of their activities, including a section on gender equality promotion. This would help to share their practices, achievements and challenges with other EP bodies. In particular, this would facilitate a review of their work by committees and subcommittees in charge of external relations as it would be clear which planned activities and objectives have been achieved and which have not. In turn, delegations could have an insight into other delegations' work and thus engage in mutual learning. This would also assist the process of drafting a gender action plan for delegations as this would be informed by the actual previous achievements and failures.
- Strive to ensure gender balance in the composition of delegations sent on missions abroad ('leading by example' principle), and where this is not possible, consider keeping a note of why the delegation did not achieve gender balance (e.g. could be included in the mission report as a footnote, especially where gender was indeed discussed during the mission). This was highlighted in the interviews as an important obstacle in promoting gender equality in EP external relations.
- Organise gender equality training, potentially in cooperation with EIGE, for all EP members and staff who are involved in parliamentary diplomacy activities, with a specific focus on delegations as the EP bodies most closely interacting with partner countries/regions. The training should be strongly encouraged for all political and administrative members of delegations (members of delegation bureaux, members of delegation secretariats, ordinary and substitute members of delegations, MEPs' assistants). Particular attention should be paid to making training available to EP political groups. The certificates issued after the successful completion of the training could be valid for a pre-determined period of time (e.g. 1 or 2 years). The requirement of periodic renewal would allow training to be adapted to the latest developments and participants' knowledge to be updated accordingly. Refresher training could also be offered based on demand. The training should furthermore have a multicultural component so as to

address not only gender mainstreaming as such, but also how it is interpreted in different socio-cultural contexts.

- Organise a yearly individual award for the most deserving MEP and/or a collective award for the most deserving EP political body (e.g. a committee, subcommittee or an inter-parliamentary delegation) based on their achievements in the area of gender equality promotion in the previous year. The panel of judges who would select the winner could include representatives of external bodies (e.g. gender equality experts from CSOs, international institutions, think tanks, academia, etc). The award could be handed out in different categories, which would include a parliamentary diplomacy dimension aiming to motivate Members, including members of inter-parliamentary delegations to engage in gender equality promotion abroad. Concretely, in addition to ‘gender lawmaker of the year’ and ‘gender political group champion’, there could be a ‘gender parliamentary diplomat of the year’. Implementing this would complement the existing Simone Veil Award for Equality and Diversity, which is a prize for EP staff.
- Organise a conference celebrating both female and male politicians and officials from EU institutions involved in gender equality promotion in external relations (among which MEPs and EP administrative staff).

Inter-parliamentary meetings

- Consider formalising relations with international parliamentary institutions beyond PACE, such as with the IPU, the NATO-PA, the OSCE-PA, but also regional international parliamentary institutions such as the Mercosur Parliament. This can be done by concluding bilateral partnership agreements or memorandums of understanding with these institutions, which would include provisions undertaking to collaborate on the promotion of gender equality in general (e.g. IPU) or in more narrowly defined areas such as the intersection between gender and security (e.g. the NATO-PA and OSCE-PA), or the intersection between gender and trade (e.g. Mercosur). The collaboration could concern a periodic exchange of information and data on gender mainstreaming in different policy areas and an exchange of good practices in gender equality promotion aimed at sharing experiences and devising solutions to the problems of common concern. These institutional links would help to mainstream gender more widely across the political agendas and raise awareness of the importance of gender-sensitive decision making. This would address the bottleneck identified in the interviews that gender equality is not often on the agenda and is sometimes politically difficult to mainstream in external relations.
- Consider giving formal recognition in the RoP and/or Implementing Provisions to the role played by the EP’s multilateral assemblies (the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean) in promoting gender equality in the partner countries and regions. This would raise awareness among the EP bodies of the importance of these venues as hubs where gender equality can be promoted.
- Organise periodic meetings between women representatives of delegations and women parliamentarians from third countries, who have already been involved in the interparliamentary exchange with EP, in order to strengthen the gender equality aspect in joint activities of parliaments.
- Before interparliamentary meetings (both abroad and in the EU), it is good practice to liaise with women parliamentarians to establish informal ties and follow up on these social connections after formal meetings both face-to-face (where possible) and through electronic means (email, social media accounts, smartphone apps).
- During interparliamentary meetings, it is important, whenever possible, to strive for a guaranteed agenda point on gender equality (e.g. on an annual basis). Where this is not possible, it is recommended for gender-related topics to be linked to other sectoral policy discussions. This could help to enhance gender

mainstreaming in interparliamentary meetings and pursue a gender transformative approach, which is critical given that our interviews have shown that MEPs attach differing levels of significance to gender equality in their work. This is also important because our empirical findings have shown that, as a 'low politics' issue and despite formal commitments to gender equality promotion, gender is often side-lined (both in the EP's public communications as well as in interparliamentary meetings) in favour of matters of 'high politics', such as peace and security.

- Interparliamentary meetings should be utilised to stimulate bilateral and multilateral dialogue on international standards of gender equality contained in global and regional instruments (e.g. conventions, treaties, declarations, covenants, and resolutions) to a greater extent. The dialogue could address matters such as: (a) the state of implementation of these standards; (b) the maintenance of reservations and objections; (c) the ways to improve the standards in the future; (d) the ways to address the discrepancies and overlaps between different instruments on the same topic (e.g. the similarities between the Istanbul Convention and the Belém do Pará Convention).
- Facilitating peer-to-peer exchange between MEPs with experience in gender equality promotion and interested members of third country parliaments through the establishment of 'mentoring' or 'pairing-up' programmes, consisting of periodic virtual or in-person one-on-one sessions for the purpose of sharing gender equality know-how, advice and good practice in the areas of gender equality promotion of particular interest in the partner country/region.
- MEPs going on missions abroad should ensure that they are aware of the impact of different symbols in their conduct. When it comes to seating, attention should be paid to women being positioned equally to men (e.g. not agreeing to women parliamentarians being seated on the margins or side-lines) and that they are given adequate furniture to sit on if the venue contains non-standardised types of seating (e.g. a reception). Both female and male MEPs sent abroad should be alive to seating arrangements and should intervene if any deficiencies are detected. When it comes to clothing, attention should be paid to the symbolism of colours (e.g. a bright coloured dress or suit could signal liberalism and gender freedoms) and could be used as a means of expressing support for a cause (e.g. gender equality) so long as rules of formal dress are followed. When it comes to RoP, it should be ensured that women are given equal opportunity to speak and voice their opinions. Where women parliamentarians from counterpart parliaments wish to speak but feel reluctant to do so due to local culture (e.g. Saudi Arabia), members of the EP delegation should address them directly to seek their view and thus prompt them to speak.
- Encourage the parliaments of partner countries or regions to send to interparliamentary meetings delegations which are as gender balanced as possible. This could be achieved by initiating proposals: (a) to agree appropriate arrangements in the form of memorandums or terms of reference where the equivalent of these do not already exist (e.g. for bilateral interparliamentary meetings); or (b) to agree or amend the RoP (e.g. of a multilateral parliamentary assembly).⁵²²

Meetings with civil society organisations, stakeholders and external experts

- Strive to achieve more regular cooperation between delegations on the one hand and representatives of CSOs and individual experts abroad (independent researchers, think tank members or academics) on the other by inviting them to speak on gender equality issues at inter-parliamentary meetings as part of delegations' official agendas. Regular involvement of the said representatives and experts would help to ensure that delegations' engagement on gender equality promotion abroad is more context-specific and that local expert contributions are not sporadic but that they continuously inform the conclusions reached by the EP and partner parliamentarians.

⁵²² See the text accompanying footnote **Error! Bookmark not defined.** above.

- When meeting representatives of CSOs abroad during or on the margins of interparliamentary meetings or during *ad hoc* missions, delegation members should ensure more consistent follow-up with these organisations so as to verify whether any commitments undertaken during interparliamentary meetings or in EP resolutions have been implemented, and if not, what the obstacles are from the viewpoint of these organisations. This may provide new perspectives compared to the official positions adopted by counterpart parliamentarians or government officials of the partner country.
- Maintain up-to-date lists of CSOs operating in the field of gender equality in the partner country or region. This could be performed by delegation secretariats. The list could be used when delegations organise debates on gender-related subjects and when delegations send missions abroad. The compiling of such lists could be done with the assistance of EU Delegations in third countries. These lists could also be shared on the centralised database on gender equality mentioned above under the “Internal Dimension”.
- When organising public events on gender equality with civil society representatives, stakeholders and external experts, delegations (as well as committees and subcommittees where a joint event is held) should consistently publish a summary of the discussions and an outline of the speakers’ interventions after meetings. The aim is to increase the transparency of these meetings and enable the exchanges to be more visible and more widely accessible. This could take the form of extended minutes or session transcripts.
- The input provided by external experts in public events on gender equality issues (e.g. hearings, expert seminars, public debates) should be more traceable in EP documents. This can be done by referring, where relevant and appropriate, to the views, assessments and data provided by the said experts in delegation communiqués and the opinions and reports adopted by committees and subcommittees. This could address our empirical findings which show that the outcomes of delegations’ and committees’/subcommittees’ consultations with external interlocutors are often given little follow up.
- Greater visibility should be given to the positions of CSOs in all EP pronouncements (e.g. resolutions, reports, opinions, communiqués), as our empirical findings indicate that the EP can be critical in raising their profile in their home country, thus assisting the achievement of gender equality objectives abroad.
- Maintain gender balance among the speakers at the public hearings and other meetings concerning foreign affairs, in line with milestones identified in the Roadmap.

Requests for studies and external research

- Committees and subcommittees requesting the commissioning of studies and reports on the EU’s and the EP’s external relations should indicate to a greater extent that a gender dimension should be incorporated even where the study requested does not specifically address gender equality or women’s rights (e.g. a hypothetical study on security in the Middle East should address the particular impact of security arrangements on women). This is important to achieve greater gender mainstreaming in EP external relations, as these studies are part of the information base that may be used by MEPs and staff in forming their opinions on external policies.

Delegation communiqués

- Active effort should be put by delegation chairs into mainstreaming gender in the communiqués issued following interparliamentary meetings as well as in communiqués issued when responding to current affairs. The empirical findings have shown that some delegation chairs consciously incorporate gender in their public statements, but that others do not. Similar efforts should be put into ensuring a more consistent inclusion of gender equality in statements jointly issued by the EP’s delegation chair and the chair of the delegation of the partner country or region.

EP resolutions and reports and opinions of the committees/subcommittees

- Delegations should regularly use interparliamentary meetings to raise gender equality issues detected in EP resolutions, and report on this in their mission reports. This is important because while EP resolutions are effective in identifying the shortcomings in gender equality promotion in the EP's partner countries and regions, they are less so if they are not followed up.

Social media and other online platforms

- Develop delegations' online presence beyond the EP website. Depending on the resources available, it is recommended either for each delegation to set up their own Twitter account, or for one Twitter account to be set up to cover the activities of all delegations. The current practice of delegations tweeting about their activities through committee accounts is unsatisfactory as it does not give adequate credit and visibility to the work of delegations, which, although linked to the committees, have an institutional status within the EP that is separate from committees. This would enable delegations to share updates on delegation meetings, outcomes of and insights gained during interparliamentary meetings, and other plans and activities of the chairs and members. This would address the fairly low level of usage of social media by delegations revealed by the survey, while Twitter is already effectively used by EP committees and individual MEPs. This is an important untapped resource through which delegations can promote gender equality in EP external relations.
- Where there is willingness to do so, MEPs from delegations could consider creating informal networks to discuss gender equality problems encountered in the more day-to-day parliamentary affairs (e.g. a WhatsApp group, or another instant messaging platform, which could for instance be managed by MEPs' assistants) with interested women parliamentarians from the partner countries, where advice could be exchanged and updates provided on progress on the matters discussed in interparliamentary meetings. This could strengthen the personal relationships aspect of parliamentary diplomacy. This recommendation is similar to but far more informal than the recommendation above proposing mentoring and pairing-up programmes.

Gender focal points

- Explicitly specify the role, duties, workload and expected outputs of delegations' gender focal points. The existence of gender focal points should be formally recognised in the governance documents of the EP (RoP and Conference of Presidents' Decisions) in order to increase their institutional visibility and status. The procedure for appointing gender focal points should be clearly outlined to enable delegation secretariats efficiently to coordinate appointments. The appointment procedure should specify not only the role and duties as mentioned above, but also the requirements which need to be fulfilled by the applicants in order to successfully perform this role (e.g. having completed gender equality training as a prerequisite for the role, and a demonstrated interest in gender issues). This aims to avoid having gender focal points who are not interested in or not knowledgeable about gender equality. All of these recommendations seek to address the bottleneck widely acknowledged across delegations as to the vagueness about the gender focal points' tasks and expectations, which prevents the latter from being fulfilled effectively.
- Gender focal points could be tasked with liaising with CSOs abroad to ensure greater follow-up and acquire first-hand information about gender equality developments in the partner country or region that would not otherwise be available to MEPs due to absence of liaison officers on the ground.
- The Network of Gender Focal Points should monitor international and EU developments in the area of gender equality and report on this to each delegation via the designated gender focal point. The Network could draft annual or medium-term agendas setting out policy priorities to be achieved by all

delegations, each within their own remit. These agendas could serve as the gender action plan that would apply to all delegations and could be endorsed by the Conference of Delegation Chairs. This could increase inter-delegation coherence in the implementation of the overarching EP gender action plan and facilitate cooperation and exchange across EP delegations on matters of gender equality promotion abroad. This process of planning could help delegations to provide ex ante input in their effort to “contribute to the implementation of Parliament’s political and legislative priorities”, which is laid down in Article 5 of the Conference of Presidents’ Decision on the Implementing Provisions on Delegations and Missions of 2015.

- Gender focal points could be put in charge of ensuring that delegations’ annual reports on delegations’ activities include a section on gender equality. The gender-related content of these annual reports could be reviewed by the Network of Gender Focal Points with a view to identifying best practices as well as deficiencies in the approaches to gender equality promotion abroad. The results of this review could be published by the Conference of Delegation Chairs and announced by the Chair of this Conference in an annual statement on delegations’ gender equality promotion in EP external relations. Such a statement could highlight delegations’ achievements and identify areas where further work is needed.
- Ensure that any outputs of the EPRS and DG EXPO (e.g. policy briefs) on the situation of gender equality and women’s rights both in the partner countries/regions and in the EU member states are sent directly to gender focal points in EP delegations.

7.2.2.3 Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG)

- In order to reinforce the message around gender equality in parliamentary diplomacy, EP democracy support activities could have a clear focus each year on a specific aspect of women’s rights. This way, the activities performed would be more impactful. In order to take into account the different needs of contextualisation and co-creation, the annually chosen focal aspect of gender equality would be adapted to the particular context of a given partner country (e.g. focus could be placed on methods of achieving a good record on gender equality where this has not yet been achieved, or on sharing best practice where goals in terms of policy or societal norms have already been achieved to a satisfactory level).
- Capacity-building activities (e.g. interparliamentary conferences, seminars, study visits) should ensure greater mainstreaming of gender in the programmes of these events where they do not have gender as the main theme. For example, a seminar on security should endeavour to address impacts on women and girls too (e.g. through the concept of gender-based violence). Recommendations on delegations’ public events apply to this aspect of DEG’s work *mutatis mutandis*.
- If the Sakharov Prize were to have a stronger focus on the promotion of gender equality and women’s rights, it could be agreed that one of the three finalists shortlisted by AFET and DEVE committees should be reserved for a gender equality champion.
- Jean Monnet Dialogues should ensure they have a gender dimension. The focus on fostering dialogue between key political parties in the partner country is ideal for gender mainstreaming and placing gender equality on the latter’s political agenda. The potential for these discussions directly to influence internal party-political decisions and the wider political process in the partner country is tangible.

The Simone Veil programme, which focuses on empowering women parliamentarians, could expand the selection and content of the training modules currently offered. First, the programme could include a module on good practices of parliamentarians’ cooperation with CSOs, as this has been identified in the survey conducted for the purposes of this study as one of the MEPs’ preferred means of action in partner countries and regions. Second, there could also be more instruction on women’s participation not only in legislative processes (currently included) but also in foreign policy making, international relations and

parliamentary diplomacy. This would help not only to raise awareness among the participants in the programme about the important place of women in foreign affairs, but would also equip them with concrete advice on how to implement this within their parliaments. Third, the programme could include a practical aspect by not only providing training on general case studies regarding gender equality, but also working on specific cases relevant for current legal changes taking place in specific countries (e.g. as a result of the training process, news measures on combating GBV would be introduced on the Penal Code).

Annexes

Annex 1 - Gender equality in governments' external actions (selected cases)

Sweden: Feminist Foreign Policy

In 2014, Sweden proclaimed a new approach to its foreign policy, calling it a **feminist foreign policy (FFP)**. Gender equality was not considered merely a priority objective in its own right, but became a tool to advance other foreign policy priorities such as:

- foreign and national security policies,
- development cooperation,
- trade and promotion policy.

In the words of the representative of Swedish administration, interviewed for the purposes of this study, proclaiming FFP meant that gender equality became a specific goal of the whole of Swedish foreign policy.

The proclamation of the new approach to foreign policy made by Margot Wallström, then Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Swedish government, was not just another suggestion on how to define Sweden's role in its international relations, but a thought-out strategy fully presented five years later in the publication **Handbook: Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy**.⁵²³ It outlines the main pillars of the FFP based on the rule of the four "Rs":

1. Rights
2. Representation
3. Resources
4. Reality

Sweden's main aim in the foreign policy is to promote equal *rights* of women and men. That can be achieved through balanced *representation* of both sexes in the decision-making processes at all levels and areas of policy making – economic, social, political – in order to guarantee that women have access to *resources* similar to those available to men. Sweden places emphasis on the economic empowerment of women, which strengthens their agency and independence. Last but not least, all activities implemented within the FFP framework need to be adequate to the circumstances and cannot ignore the *reality*. This is especially important in countries with a strong gender backlash or conservative approach to women's rights, which require different forms of promotion of gender equality than more progressive societies. Bearing this in mind, the rule of four 'Rs' is applicable to every bureaucracy.

The above-mentioned four rules of FFP are implemented by the Swedish administration through the following mechanisms:

- Leadership

Promoting the values of gender equality in all foreign policy activities and all levels of the foreign services, with the best practices from top down.

⁵²³ Government Offices of Sweden, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019), *Handbook: Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy*. <https://www.government.se/492c36/contentassets/fc115607a4ad4bca913cd8d11c2339dc/handbook---swedens-feminist-foreign-policy---english.pdf>, accessed on 26 June 2021.

- Ownership

Internalisation of a gender-mainstreaming approach by all employees and officials. Adopting a collaborative mode of defining priorities and designing policy which includes everyone, regardless of their level in the hierarchy.

- Guidance

Ongoing evaluation of the implementation of the FFP and yearly reports. Each member of the government and administrative staff responsible for a certain issue or policy is also responsible for this issue or policy to be gender mainstreamed.

- Support

A dedicated coordination team led by the Gender Equality Ambassador within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Norway: Foreign and Development Policy for Gender Equality

Norway is another example of a Scandinavian country promoting gender equality through external actions, although not explicitly calling it feminist foreign policy. The country's **Freedom, empowerment and opportunities. Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Foreign and Development Policy 2016-2020**⁵²⁴ indicates the following main areas of action for the Norwegian government in the field of promoting equal rights:

- Access to education
- Political empowerment
- Economic empowerment
- Gender-based violence
- Sexual and reproductive health

The document is complemented by the **International Strategy to Eliminate Harmful Practices**⁵²⁵ published in October 2019. The strategy sets two main objectives:

1. increasing aid through relevant global programmes and integrating already existing initiatives for eliminating harmful practices into development aid targeting education, health, gender equality and human rights;
2. strengthening Norway's efforts in international arenas where norms and guidelines are set.

Norway has created a framework for gender mainstreaming in foreign policy by designing targeted strategies and action plans.

⁵²⁴ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2016), Freedom, empowerment and opportunities. Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Foreign and Development Policy 2016-2020, available at https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/Norway_Action%20Plan%20for%20Women%E2%80%99s%20Rights%20and%20Gender%20Equality_2016-2020.pdf, accessed on 26 June 2021.

⁵²⁵ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019), *International Strategy to Eliminate Harmful Practices*, available at https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/fc55501761024732bc7b13d82346e313/eliminate_harmful_practices.pdf, accessed on 26 June 2021.

Canada: Feminist International Assistance Policy

In 2017, Justin Trudeau presented a new approach to international assistance and proclaimed Canada's **Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP)**.⁵²⁶ It is organised thematically and includes six priority areas:

1. gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment;
2. human dignity, including access to health care, education, nutrition and the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance;
3. women's economic empowerment, including access to and control over resources and services;
4. climate action;
5. women's political participation;
6. WPS (promoting inclusive peace processes and combatting gender-based violence).

In contrast to the Swedish approach, FIAP is limited to international aid and therefore addresses only those countries to which Canada is providing assistance. However, there are other initiatives taken by the Canadian government, such as **National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on WPS 2017-2022**⁵²⁷ or the **Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations**, through which Canada:

- supports the development of a systematic approach to deploying more women in peace operations;
- designs tailored technical assistance support for countries that contribute peacekeepers to ensure the right conditions are in place for the deployment of women;
- provides assistance to designated UN missions to improve their ability to support and benefit from women's increased participation in peace operations;
- has launched a global fund to support the deployment of women peacekeepers;
- monitors and evaluates its activities so the Elsie Initiative can be adjusted as needed, and helps build a solid base of evidence for the development of a more comprehensive approach that could be fully integrated within the UN peacekeeping system.

By implementing the above-mentioned elements, Canada is addressing an important aspect of gender mainstreaming in foreign policy, namely peace and security. At the same time, endeavours are also taken by the Canadian government to promote gender equality through trade policy. Mainstreaming gender by including gender-related provisions throughout a free trade agreement is an approach taken in the Canada-Chile FTA and the modernised Canada-Israel FTA. Such gender chapters in trade agreements concern the following:

- reaffirmation of the importance of **incorporating a gender perspective** into economic and trade issues;
- reaffirmation of **commitment to international agreements** on gender equality and women's rights;
- providing a framework for parties to agree to undertake **cooperation activities** on issues related to gender and trade;

⁵²⁶ Government of Canada (2017), *Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy*, available at https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/iap2-eng.pdf?_ga=2.249148291.505998678.1624794259-1743789267.1620552337, accessed on 26 June 2021.

⁵²⁷ Government of Canada (2017), *Gender Equality: A Foundation for Peace*, available at <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/cnap-eng.pdf>, accessed on 26 June 2021.

- establishment of a dedicated **trade and gender committee and other institutional provisions**.

Canada is, in fact, implementing FFP in all three aspects distinguished by the Swedish approach, although its main focus is on international assistance mechanisms.

France: Feminist Diplomacy

Canada was followed by France with its **International Strategy on Gender Equality (2018-2022)**.⁵²⁸ The document was openly supported by the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, and the Secretary of State for Equal Treatment of Women and Men, Marlene Schiappa. The strategy provides a comprehensive approach to including gender throughout France's external action. It covers the following objectives:

- promoting gender equality in the internal processes and practices of the French foreign service;
- involving gender equality in political advocacy;
- including a gender perspective in the country's ODA, with a special emphasis on gender budgeting;
- improving the monitoring of the implementation of gender mainstreaming in external action;
- collaborating with various stakeholders (civil society, research institutions and business) to accelerate efforts towards achieving gender equality.

⁵²⁸ French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (2018), *France's International Strategy on Gender Equality 2018-2022*, available at https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/meae_strategie_-_en_cle076525.pdf, accessed on 26 June 2021.

Annex 2 – Gender equality in parliaments: selected approaches

The Inter-Parliamentary Union: Gender-Sensitive Parliament

For the IPU, a key element in promoting the concept of gender-sensitive parliaments is to drive the change by the parliaments themselves, which is why in 2016, a self-assessment toolkit on evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments was published.⁵²⁹ It covers seven action areas:

1. the number of women in parliaments and parliamentary bodies;
2. gender mainstreaming in legislation;
3. establishing gender mainstreaming structures and mechanisms within parliamentary work;
4. gender-sensitive infrastructure and parliamentary culture;
5. responsibility carried by all parliamentarians, regardless of sex;
6. the involvement of political parties in the process;
7. gender equality among parliamentary staff.

The Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights: Gender Equality in Elected Office

Around the same time that IPU worked on the concept of gender-sensitive parliaments, the OSCE/ODIHR published its Six-Step Action Plan⁵³⁰ that became a reference for many parliaments from the OSCE countries to advance gender equality.

The Plan envisions the following steps:

- guaranteeing equal rights for women and men in the constitution;
- maximising opportunities for women to enter parliament through electoral system reform;
- adopting legal gender quotas;
- reviewing political party rules and recruitment procedures;
- capacity development of women in the pipeline for elected office;
- reforming the rules and internal procedures within parliament.

In order to implement changes in the above-mentioned spheres, the OSCE/ODIHR has been supporting selected parliaments (especially in the Balkans) for the last few years in conducting a self-assessment on gender sensitivity looking into all aspects of the parliament's regulatory framework, practices and performance. As a result of such exercises, in which ensuring parliaments' ownership of the whole process seems crucial, Gender Action Plans have been prepared covering concrete recommendations and steps to be taken to further improve the current situation.

⁵²⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments. A self-assessment toolkit*, 2016, available at <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/gender-toolkit-e.pdf>, accessed on 3 July 2021.

⁵³⁰ Norris P, Krook, M.L. (2011), *Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan*, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, available at <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/8/78432.pdf>, accessed on 3 July 2021.

The United Nations Development Programme: Gender Mainstreaming in Legislatures

In 2013, the UNDP introduced their approach to gender mainstreaming in parliaments.⁵³¹ The authors defined **gender mainstreaming within the Legislative Branch** as “the internal transformation of the institution (‘how work is done’), of its results (‘what is legislated’ and ‘what content the legislation has’) and of its links (‘who it has a dialogue with’, ‘who it controls’, ‘to whom is it accountable’).”⁵³² UNDP clearly states that gender mainstreaming in legislature cannot be reduced to the basic issue of the number of women in parliament or adopting laws on gender equality between women and men. It is about making a difference through the adequate representation of women and implementing policies that will allow women and men to fully develop their potential in various spheres of economic, social and cultural life.

The UNDP approach also provides a framework for the role of parliament in promoting gender equality:

- **De jure equality:** Parliament as a guardian of non-discriminatory legislation.
- **Inclusive representation:** Keeping equal representation of women and men in all parliamentary bodies and administration.
- **Effective auditing:** Auditing the actions of other public institutions according to gender equality criteria (see below: IDEA: Gender-sensitive scrutiny)
- **Acknowledgment, enjoyment and exercise of the human rights of women:** Responding to the needs of women and men and introducing measures for equal treatment, equal opportunities and equal results in gender relations.

The European Institute for Gender Equality: Gender-Sensitive Parliament

Following the IPU approach of involving parliaments in a self-assessment process of their internal policies and the external outputs of parliamentary work according to the gender equality principle, in 2018 the EIGE launched its Gender-Sensitive Parliaments tool⁵³³. It is aimed at building competencies of the parliamentary administrations of the EU Member States in the area of gender equality and collecting empirical data on the participation of women and men in political decision making and, in particular, on gender sensitivity in the parliaments. The data collected through self-assessment are confidential and serve primarily to sensitise parliamentary staff and MPs to specific aspects of parliamentary work in the gender context. The role of raising awareness is considered most important in relation to this tool.

The EIGE approach consists of the following assessment areas:

- **numerical representation;**
- gender-balanced **composition of the parliamentary bodies;**
- gender issues in **parliamentary debates;**
- gender mainstreaming of **adopted legislation;**

⁵³¹ United Nations Development Programme (2013), *Parliaments and Gender Equality. Gender mainstreaming in legislatures*. <https://www-dev.undp.org/publications/parliaments-and-gender-equality-gender-mainstreaming-legislatures>, accessed on 3 July 2021.

⁵³² United Nations Development Programme (2013), *Parliaments and Gender Equality. Gender mainstreaming in legislatures*. <https://www-dev.undp.org/publications/parliaments-and-gender-equality-gender-mainstreaming-legislatures>, accessed on 3 July 2021.

⁵³³ European Institute for Gender Equality. Gender Sensitive Parliaments Toolkit. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-sensitive-parliaments>, accessed on 3 July 2021.

- gender mainstreaming in the **infrastructure, facilities and physical space**.

Apart from the individual analyses made by each Parliament, the EIGE is also running its own comparison of the state of gender sensitivity in EU Member State parliaments.⁵³⁴

Inter Pares: Gender-Sensitive Scrutiny

The EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments funded by the EU and implemented by IDEA is currently working on the concept of a new approach to gender-sensitive parliaments, namely gender-sensitive scrutiny. Bearing in mind that one of the main roles of legislature is oversight and control, this approach brings valuable input into the real impact that parliaments may bring to relations with other parliaments. The purpose of this project is to strengthen the capacity of parliaments in partner countries by enhancing their legislative, oversight, representative, budgetary and administrative functions. These goals are pursued by the following activities⁵³⁵:

- peer-to-peer parliamentary strengthening activities between EU Member State parliaments and partner parliaments;
- peer-to-peer assistance to MPs, in particular in their capacity as members of parliamentary committees;
- promotion of sustainable inter-parliamentary cooperation;
- production and promotion of research, knowledge-sharing and parliamentary innovation.

According to Inter Pares, "Gender-sensitive scrutiny is the **deliberate exploration of how laws, policies, programmes and budgets will affect, or are affecting, women and men** based on their experiences, needs and contributions to society."⁵³⁶

This concept examines scrutiny at different phases:

1. Legislative scrutiny

Making sure that laws take account of and cater to the different needs, interests and experiences of women and men.

2. Post-legislative scrutiny

Finding out how a law has worked in practice since it came into force and whether it is achieving its original aims in terms of gender equality.

3. Financial scrutiny

Analysing how and why decisions are taken to spend money, how wisely the money is spent, and the effectiveness of the outcomes of the spending.

4. Oversight

A way of holding the government to account for its actions and monitoring the quality of its work.

The Inter Pares approach to gender-sensitive scrutiny is based on the following elements:

⁵³⁴ European Institute for Gender Equality (2019), *Gender equality in national parliaments across the EU and European Parliament*. https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0419527enn_002.pdf, accessed on 4 July 2021.

⁵³⁵ <https://www.inter-pares.eu/en/what-we-do>, accessed on 26 September 2021.

⁵³⁶ Inter Pares (2021), *Gender-sensitive scrutiny: a guide to more effective law-making and oversight*, manuscript.

- the **embedding of gender equality from the very beginning** of parliamentary action;
- understanding the full picture by **gathering all evidence** relevant for the situation of women and men;
- **asking gender-sensitive questions** during the decision-making process;
- **intervening in cases where the law/policy/programme/budget discriminates** against women or men;
- **monitoring** the level to which gender-equality promises are being delivered.

Annex 3 – List of keywords related to gender and women

Overarching category	Keywords and topics
1. Economic dimension	women's participation in economic life, economic inequalities for women, female-owned businesses/women entrepreneurs, economic autonomy for women, female unemployment, economic development and the role of women, bank accounts for women, microcredits for women's committees, economic performance of female-owned companies (during a crisis), trade and gender, empowering women farmers, role of women in the reinstatement of land, leadership roles for women (business), gender pay gap
2. Peace and security dimension	women in the peace process, women in conflict zones, women in peacekeeping operations, women's contribution to resolving crisis, female victims of conflict
3. Political dimension	women's participation in political life, enabling women to be more active in politics, women elected to (or running for) political positions (not internal), female voters, parity democracy, right to vote, territorial and knowledge management, female presence in public life, political representation, leadership roles for women (political), parliamentary committee on women's affairs, governments' respect for women, ministry for gender equality, austerity policies affecting women
4. Violence against women	violence against women in general, forced labour, forced marriage, child marriage, gender based harassment, enslavement of women / sexual slavery, trafficking of women, kidnapping of girls, domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual violence on children, marital rape, rape, politicians' reactions to violence against women, disappearing women, crimes against women, abuse of domestic workers, women describing atrocities of the Muslim brotherhood, femicide, sex tourism, prevention and protection of gender based violence, increase in complaints about domestic violence, legal aid for female victims of domestic violence, enforced sterilisation, enforced prostitution
5. Social dimension	lack of specialised doctors to treat traumatised women, maternal mortality, child pregnancy, maternal health, women's reproductive rights/health, underage marriage, equal inheritance rights for women, marriage outside of faith for women, childcare facilities, women's education, women's sensitivity and the fights against social inequalities, women and the right to drive, social status of women, freedom of women to dress as they wish, decriminalising abortion, social standing of women, imprisoned mothers and their young children, particular needs for women, women's social rights, statistics on democrats and republicans that shows polarisation by asking about who they would not like their daughter to marry
6. Gender equality (general and miscellaneous)	gender equality in general, gender parity in all spheres of life, gender parity in education, gender parity in politics, equal participation of women in conflict resolution, women's organisations / organisations for women's rights / equality, gender equality should not only be discussed by women, gender quotas in politics, gender quotas in education, gender quotas in employment, promotion of gender policies, gender balance, gender perspective, social movements against women, gender gap (exacerbating inequalities), female empowerment, promotion of gender / women's rights, focus on situation of women, gender / women's issues, misleading debate on gender by conservative forces, gender issues in the financing context, equal opportunities for women and women's rights, women's rights in general, gender rights, gender mainstreaming, ensuring equal rights of women in politics
7. Legal dimension	gender discrimination, making legislation more inclusive, legal discrimination against women, including a chapter on gender in association agreement, protection of women's rights, protection of women, equal treatment of men and women as a fundamental right

8. Internal administration	FEMM Committee or other Committees / Forums or international organisations, all-female bureau, gender equality council of the parliament, conference on gender topics (internal), internal administration involving women, administrative terms / positions including the word gender / women, internal election (electing gender and diversity responsible bureau), network of female parliamentarians
9. Intersectionality	intersectional issues for women, religion and barriers for women, gender component to human trafficking, women's place in Africa, Yazidi women, women and Covid-19, rehabilitation of women, women prisoners, women migrants / refugees, adding gender in the decision of COP20, gender point on basic rights, women's role in rural development, disabled women

Annex 4 – List of stakeholders interviewed

- Bernarding Nina, Co-Director, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy;
- Bernes Ann, Ambassador for Gender Equality, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden;
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