

GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICS

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE BULGARIAN CONTEXT



**Presenting the Results of the Roundtable on the
Role of Parliament and Political Parties in Promoting Equality
and Good International Practice**

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1

INTRODUCTION

Equality in decision-making processes for all members of society is a matter of justice, human rights, and the proper functioning of democracy. Despite there being no formal barriers to equal participation by women and men in political processes, in Bulgaria there is no equal representation and the reasons must be sought and addressed.

This was the motive for the Ekaterina Karavelova Foundation, supported by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Bulgaria, to hold a Roundtable on the Role of Parliament and Political Parties in Promoting Equality in September 2022 at the city of Plovdiv. The focus was on parliament as the leading institution in a parliamentary republic and on political parties as key factors in the functioning of representative democracy. The event attracted seven of the political parties in the 47th National Assembly, all of them invited: the BSP Bulgarian Socialist Party, Da Bulgaria Yes Bulgaria [DB], the DPS Movement for Rights and Freedoms, the

DSB Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria party, the *Zeleno Dvizhenie* Green Movement, the *Ima Takav Narod* There is Such a People party [ITN], and the *Prodalzhavame Promyanata* We continue the Change party [PP], along with civil society representatives. Special guests of the event included *Chargée d’Affaires ad interim* Irene Plank of the Federal Republic of Germany Embassy to Bulgaria and Ms Corien Jonker, former Netherlands’ parliamentarian and international expert in the political empowerment of women.

This publication outlines briefly the significance of gender equality in politics, the current picture in Bulgaria after the last general elections in October 2022, and the results of the Roundtable. After summarising the challenges before female and male equality as identified by the Roundtable and strategies to address them, it describes some best international practice that applicable in Bulgaria to boost female participation. A list of recommendations appears in Appendices.

2

WHY GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICS MATTERS AND WHY INCREASING WOMEN'S NUMBERS MATTERS

The right of all women and men to participate equally in public life and politics is of key significance to gender equality and sustainable development and integral to democratic governance. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights embodies the principles of non-discrimination and equality in politics, including everyone's right to participate in their country's governance¹. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women pays attention to the significance of women's political participation in attaining peace and calls on nations to take all necessary measures to remove discrimination against women in public life and politics². Equality is also a principle embodied in the European Union's founding agreements. The European Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, which concretely commits the European Commission to promote women's participation as voters and candidates in the 2024 European Parliament elections, also affirms equal political participation opportunities as significant for the functioning of representative democracy³.

Many of the **traditional arguments** for promoting women's participation in politics and political parties rest precisely on the need to adhere to the international framework of human rights, calls to reinforce democratic achievements, and the wish to boost democratic institutions⁴, and especially parliaments⁴, representativeness⁴.

Those traditional arguments emerge from a concept of formal representation which seeks to attain equal-

ity by removing legal obstacles to it. This is also the reason why it is sometimes hard to defend the proposition that there is no gender equality in Bulgaria. When voiced, it immediately invokes the arguments that the national constitution and law guarantee equal opportunities to women and men, and that there are national equality and anti-discriminatory mechanisms. The lack of formal legal barriers to equal participation for women and men, however, does not guarantee such participation.

That is why it is valuable to assess other concepts of representation: ones providing added arguments in support of gender equality in political participation.

Representation proportionate to population make-up (descriptive representation) calls for elected authorities to share certain key characteristics with the citizens who elect them⁵. Such representation in the Bulgarian context would mean women making up 52 percent of the National Assembly: women's share of the overall population⁶.

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action Platform declares: "Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account"⁷. This view of representation relates to the idea that the best representatives of the interests a group of people with similar fates and social positions are members of that group. In this sense, improving conditions for women's participation gives them the chance to represent themselves and others like them. Though it is possible for men to champion women's causes, this cannot be complete unless women themselves are represented.

1 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted 10 December 1948 by UNO General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III), Article 21

2 The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women adopted 18 December 1979 by UNO General Assembly Resolution 34/180, Article 7

3 A Union of Equality: Strategy for Gender Equality 2020 – 2025 (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 5 March 2020) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/BG/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152&from=EN>, (accessed 31 October 2022)

4 OSCE/ODIHR, Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties, osce.org, 2014, p. 26, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/f/120877.pdf> (accessed 27 October 2022)

5 S. Franceschet, M. L. Krook, and N. Tan, *The Palgrave Handbook of Women's Political Rights*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 36

6 National Statistical Institute, Population according to statistical regions, age, residence and gender, <https://bit.ly/3A2scKv> (in Bulgarian); accessed 31 October 2022)

7 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (adopted 15 September 1995 by The Fourth World Conference on Women), par. 181

The concept of **representation addressing women's issues and defending their interests (substantive representation)** further develops the idea of representation relating to population makeup and places the focus on advocacy in the name of women⁸. In the context of gender equality in politics and the need to boost women's representation, this means having a set politician expounding women's issues and helping address them with concrete measures.

Symbolic representation puts a focus on the significance of a visible presence of women in politics and elected posts as a signal to women in society that the field is open to them and not set aside for men. This may lead to an increase in the number of women who wish to participate in political processes and stand for election. Women in politics have the potential to be role models and to affect girls' educational and career

choices, civic participation, and self-confidence. Other arguments in favour of symbolic representation relate to broader benefits like changes to public and stakeholder perceptions of women's capacity.

The visible presence of a greater diversity of participants on the political stage may also have a positive effect on public perceptions of the quality of a country's democracy and civic participation and commitment⁹.

Overall, complete participation by representatives of diverse social groups in democratic processes raises their quality and influences the political agenda by broadening it with topics that would otherwise remain unaddressed. In this sense, political participation by more women of different ages and origins offers a potential to address a broader circle of social issues better.

⁸ S. Franceschet, M. L. Krook, and N. Tan, *The Palgrave Handbook of Women's Political Rights*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 36

⁹ Ibid.

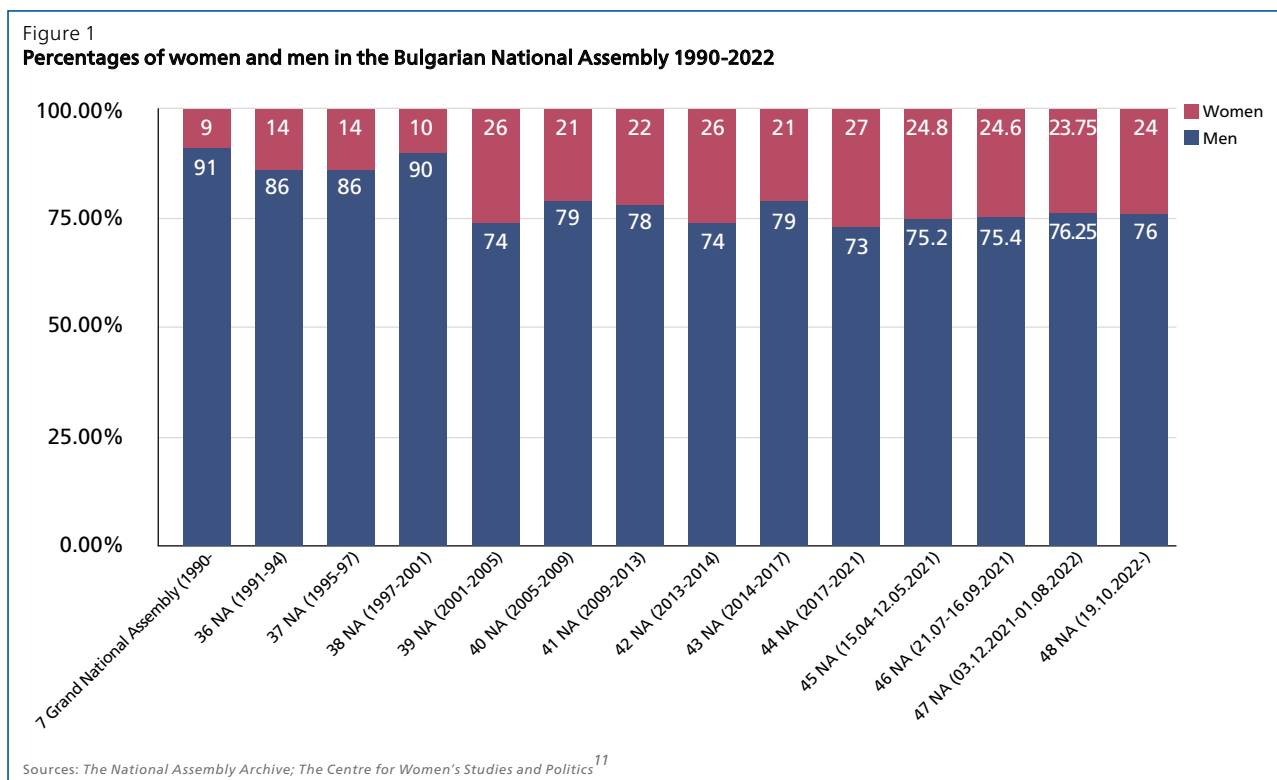
3

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN BULGARIA

Alongside equality's embodiments in international and European law, the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and diverse national statutory instruments also embody it. The national institutional mechanism for women and men's equality emerged in 2004 when the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy set up a dedicated unit. That year the Council of Ministers set up a National Gender Equality Council to act as consultative and coordinating body with representatives from the executive branch and civil society. The Act on Equality between Women and Men entered the statute book in 2016 to lay the basis for the National Strategy for

Promotion of Gender Equality. The current strategy, timeframed 2021 to 2030, has five priority areas, one of which is promoting women and men's equality in decision-making processes. The National Strategy calls for biennial National Action Plans for Promotion of Equality between Women and Men¹⁰.

This national mechanism has failed to improve gender equality in decision-making, however. The current picture in Bulgaria shows a sustained trend to low women's representation in elected posts both at the local and national levels.

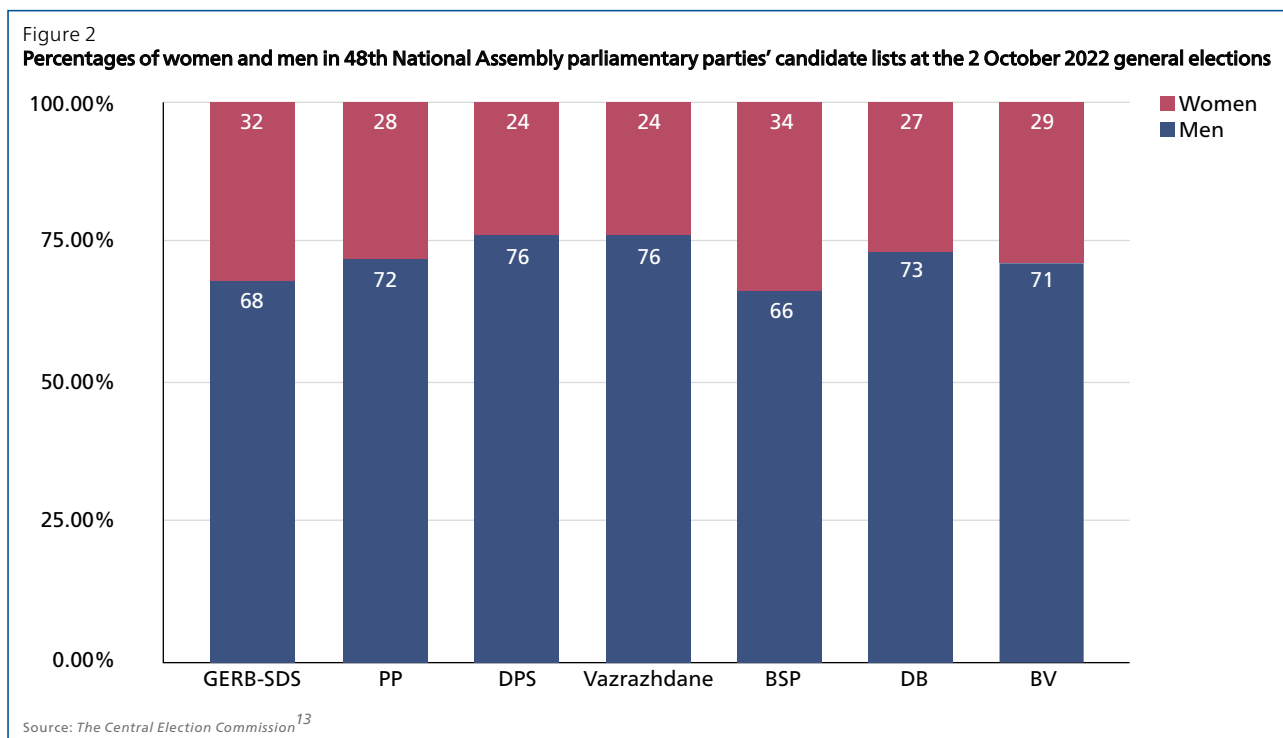


¹⁰ National Strategy for Promoting the Equality of Women and Men 2021-2030, <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/uploads/41/test/strategy2021-2030.pdf> (in Bulgarian; accessed 3 November 2022)

¹¹ Archive of the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, <https://parliament.bg/bg/archive> (in Bulgarian; accessed 17 October 2022); K. Hristova-Valcheva, Women in Politics, Center of Women's Studies and Policies, http://cwsp.bg/upload/docs/women_in_Bulgaria.pdf (in Bulgarian; accessed 17 October 2022)

Early general elections on 2 October 2022, the fourth in just under two years, affirmed the trend. The percentage of female and male candidates among political parties in the 48th National Assembly was best for the *BSP Za Balgaria* coalition [BSP] (34 percent women candidates) and worst for the DPS Movement

for Rights and Freedoms party and the *Vazrazhdane* party (24 percent women candidates). Women headed only 20 percent of parliamentary party candidate lists, with the GERB-SDS and *Demokratichna Balgaria* [DB] coalitions leading with 11 and 10 percent and *Vazrazhdane* trailing at just 3 percent¹².



The lack of more women in electable candidate list positions expectedly led to low women's representation in the new parliament: barely 58, or 24 percent of all parliamentarians. These numbers may change in time. At the 47th National Assembly's inauguration, it had 57¹⁴ women MPs, declining to 54 (reasons range from leaving parliament for the executive branch to resigning for personal reasons).

Seven of 31 multiple-representative constituencies (MIRs) failed to return a single female MP: Gabrovo, Kustendil, Razgrad, Silistra, Smolyan, Sofia Oblast, and Yambol¹⁵. In four of them (Gabrovo, Kustendil, Smolyan and Yambol) parties represented in the 48th National Assembly did not field a single female list leader. At the same time, all six seats from

8 MIR in Dobrich went to women from six different parties, each leading her candidate list¹⁶. This yet again demonstrates the significance of list sequencing and the fact that gender equality calls for women to be in electable positions. These were also the observers' recommendations from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) after the April 2021 early general election¹⁷.

The situation at the local level causes even more concern, with just 40 of 265 Bulgarian municipalities led by women: only 15 percent¹⁸.

In comparison, women parliamentarians in the rest of the European Union average 33 percent, while wom-

¹² Central Election Commission, Parliamentary elections 2 October 2022/ Candidate lists, <https://www.cik.bg/bg/ns02.10.2022/canlist>, (in Bulgarian; accessed 17 October 2022)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ International Election Observation Mission, Republic of Bulgaria, Early Parliamentary Elections, 2 October 2022/ Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/c/527526.pdf> (accessed 31 October 2022)

¹⁵ Central Election Commission, Decision № 1564-HC from 7 October 2022 r., <https://www.cik.bg/bg/decisions/1564/2022-10-07> (in Bulgarian; accessed 17 October 2022)

¹⁶ Central Election Commission, Parliamentary elections 2 October 2022/ Candidate lists, <https://www.cik.bg/bg/ns02.10.2022/canlist> (in Bulgarian; accessed 17 October 2022)

¹⁷ OSCE ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission, Republic of Bulgaria, Parliamentary Elections 4 April 2021, Final Report, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/3/502104.pdf> (accessed 31 October 2022)

¹⁸ Integrated Information System of the State Administration, Mayors of municipalities, https://iisda.government.bg/ras/governing_bodies/gb_municipality_administrations (in Bulgarian; accessed 15 September 2022)

en local councillors average 29.4 percent (against 27.2 percent in Bulgaria)¹⁹.

Barriers before equal political representation for women and men in Bulgaria abound. Arguing that women have no interest in political processes is impossible since they comprise the greater share of voters²⁰. Alongside candidate list sequencing, challenges include traditional gender roles and the impossibility for women to combine work, housekeeping, and caring for children or elderly relatives with a political

career²¹, the lack of political party recognition and support of and for women's problems, and systemic factors like economic inequality. Equality in the political sphere is hard to achieve if it is lacking in the social and economic ones.

The next part of this Report reviews the results of the Roundtable on the Role of Parliament and Political Parties in promoting Equality. This outlines the challenges before attaining equality as shared by participants, and strategies to address them.

19 European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index 2022, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2022/EU> (accessed 3 November 2022)

20 Data from opinion pollsters Trend show women comprised 52 percent of voters at the 2 October 2022 early general elections: "Trend", Voter's profile (exit poll from the parliamentary elections in October 2022), <https://bit.ly/3UHojm7> (in Bulgarian; accessed 29 September 2022). Gallup International data show women comprising 55 percent of voters at the 2017 general election: "Gallup International", Parliamentary elections 2017 – detailed demographic profile and some observations, <https://www.gallup-international.bg/35992/general-election-2017-demographic-structure-for-bulgaria/> (in Bulgarian; accessed 29 September 2022)

21 The most recent edition of the Gender Equality Index ranks Bulgaria bottom of the EU in the Time Score criterion which looks at how equal the time which women and men spend on care and housekeeping on the one hand and on rest, the arts, sports, and voluntary work on the other: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index 2022. Comparing Time scores in 2022 edition, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2022/compare-countries/time/bar>, (accessed 3 November 2022)

4

RESULTS OF THE ROUNDTABLE ON THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN PROMOTING EQUALITY

The late September 2022 Roundtable on the Role of Parliament and Political Parties in promoting Equality at the city of Plovdiv gathered participants from seven invited parties in the 47th National Assembly: the BSP, the *Da, Bulgaria* Yes Bulgaria party, the DPS Movement for Rights and Freedoms, DSB, the *Zelesno Dvizhenie* Green Movement, the *Ima takav narod* There is such a People party and *Prodalzhavame pro-myantata* We continue the Change party, alongside civil society representatives.

The event aimed to identify challenges before gender equality in politics and outline strategies to address them. Ekaterina Karavelova Foundation Executive Director Ms Marina Kisyova de Geus and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Bulgaria's Ms Kalina Drenska opened the Roundtable. They presented the troubling trends

to sustained low representation of women in elected posts and declared their two organisations' commitment to working for solutions.

Event special guests included the Federal Republic of Germany Embassy to Bulgaria's *Chargée d'Affaires ad interim* Irene Plank and former Netherlands' parliamentarian and international expert in the political empowerment of women Ms Corien Jonker. Ms Jonker is familiar with Bulgaria's political scene and the topic of gender equality in Bulgarian politics, having headed the OSCE international election observer mission in April 2021. Addressing the Roundtable, she outlined the significant factors creating equal opportunities for women and men to assume elected posts based on many years of personal experience.



Ms Jonker began by outlining some general trends in equality in politics:

Rather too often, women are each other's harshest critics and this does not help attract, commit, and train other women to and in politics.

The responsibility for balanced gender representation should not be left to party women's structures. The very presence of a women's structure might even lend a false sense that a party is doing enough for equality and that the responsibility to offer solutions rests entirely with women (particularly among those who fail to see the sense of an active equality policy or who openly oppose it).

Often, the integrated approach in decision-making is not formalised, leading to two parallel structures, with the women's wing sometimes left unheard or out of decisions.

The major responsibility for attaining balanced representation for women and men rests with party members in leading executive body positions.

After outlining the above trends, Ms Jonker presented the main factors of significance in reaching balanced political representation.

The prime factor is seeking and attracting women interested in standing as candidates for elected posts. This is a job for women and men in leading party positions at the local, regional, and national levels, who are genuinely committed to gender equality and support it. In this sense one of the questions circulated to Roundtable participants: **"Is information available on party membership breakdown by gender; if so, what is the percentage of women?"** is exceptionally relevant. It is possible for political parties to seek women candidates who are not members of their structures, but the chances of committing candidates who share party principles and are motivated to participate in political processes are greater when they are also party members.

It is important to **formalise the makeup of candidate lists and genuinely balanced female and male representation.** The time for waiting and seeing what might happen is over. Many women are capable of taking up elected posts, just as there are many competent women judges, prosecutors, directors, and board members.

Political parties have to assume the responsibility for this, and for that to happen, we need a huge additional impetus. Whether that means introducing a national quota system or internal party quotas aligned to electoral law, the important thing is to achieve **equality of outcomes.** Quotas function differently under different electoral systems. If they only gave symbolic results,

they would soon lose support. The outcome of a quota system must be critical mass of at least

30 to 40 percent of women in elected posts for real change to take place.

The idea of quotas often encounters opposition because of the claim that there are no formal barriers to equal opportunity. Despite this, **direct discrimination and a complex system of invisible barriers impede women's selection as candidates and their attaining a fair share of political influence.**

Formal equal treatment alone cannot achieve equality. This places the entire burden of achieving change on women. If barriers exist, as they do in Bulgaria, compensatory measures must be introduced as a means of achieving outcome parity. In this sense, quotas do not discriminate against men, but rather compensate the structural barriers facing women in the electoral process.

The second factor of significance for achieving balanced representation noted by Ms Jonker was **the introduction of open selection procedures** in which committees with balanced female and male representation assess candidates to uniform criteria. It has been shown that selection committee members are biased in favour of candidates with profiles close to their own. For this reason, such committees should comprise members with different profiles if they are to offer women and men equal opportunities. For the same reason, a group with balanced female and male representation should define selection criteria and required competences.

Without commitment to balanced female and male representation by party leaderships and without open and fair candidate selection procedures, elected officers cannot represent society in its entirety and this subverts the foundations of representative democracy.

The third factor includes **training and mentoring.** This relates both to women at different party structural levels and to women and men in elected posts, at the local or national level. Nobody can become an effective politician without in-depth knowledge of political system rules and procedures, alongside other skills like communication and media relations. An awareness of the tools at hand is required to transform ideas into new policies.

In conclusion, Ms Jonker stressed that measures to promote equality must take account of local realities and each political party's specifics. It is important to analyse the extent to which a party is sensitive to equality between women and men.

In this connection, Ms Jonker expressed support for party gender auditing using the Gender Audit Tool

developed by the OSCE ODIHR, detailed in the good practice part of this publication.

The event continued with presentations of internal party policies on equality and the percentages of women and men in the memberships and leaderships of the seven political parties represented at the Roundtable.

There followed a discussion on challenges to attaining gender equality in politics, possible strategies to overcome them, and public benefits.

The participants outlined **three challenge levels**:

Individual: women often assess themselves more harshly and doubt whether they have the necessary knowledge and skills. They are also less inclined to take risks and tend to worry about how putative political careers and electioneering would affect their families.

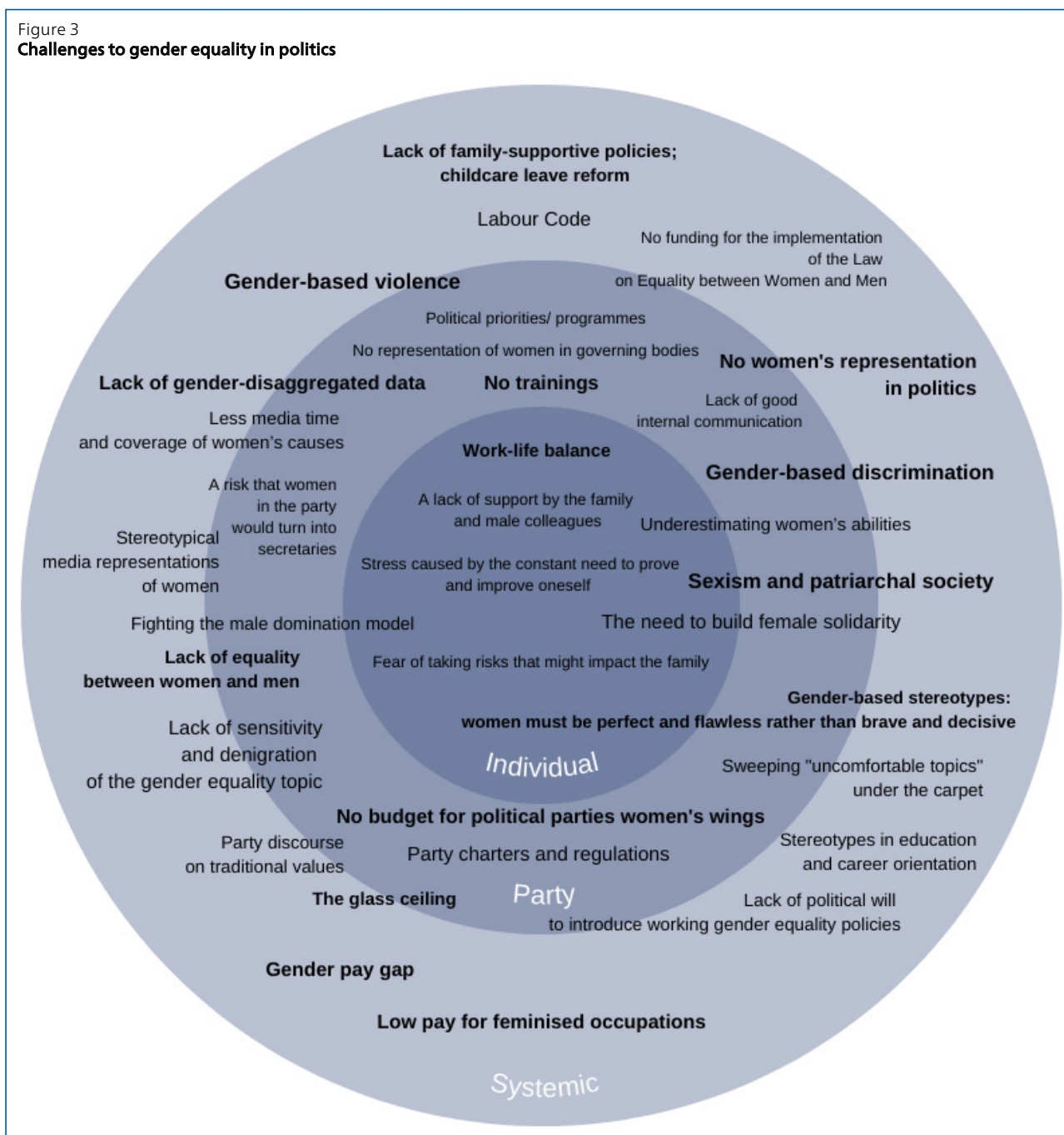
Party: there is a lack of sensitivity to equality and women's issues. Party women's organisations do not get funding, women election candidates – especially in smaller communities – find accessing resources harder: not only funds but also media coverage are much scarcer. No work is done to build capacity and

train people. Good internal communication, continuity, and transmitting experience across generations are lacking. In drawing up candidate lists for elections, women often end up in unelectable positions.

Systemic: economic inequalities between women and men and differences in pay and money impede women's political participation. Stereotyped education and careers advice hinder the development of both women's and men's potential and result in the feminisation of set business sectors which often offer lower pay and status, while others end up employing too few women. Family assistance policies are missing, with women largely continuing to care for children and dependent elderly family members. Problems of gender-based discrimination and violence are failing to be addressed and the political will to tackle issues of equality is generally lacking. This is also apparent in parliament, where women's issues and questions of equality rarely make it to the agenda and where dialogue between parties is missing.

These three levels are not independent of each other but are linked and affect each other. The diagram below presents the specific challenges identified by the discussion, at the different levels with cross references.

Figure 3
Challenges to gender equality in politics



The discussion also talked the issue of low women's representation on local authorities: something rarely discussed and falling outside the scope of statistics. Women's local level representation is much weaker than the national one, and the reasons for this were pondered. One opinion was that patriarchal culture is much more prominent and tangible in smaller communities. The time and resources needed for electioneering were also noted. In a context where women carry the main burden for house and family, they find electioneering absences much harder to manage. Po-

litical parties also fail to provide proper canvassing materials and expect candidates to foot campaign bills themselves. Women often cannot assume such material burdens as they would upset their family budgets (especially at single-parent families) and this bars their participating in elections.

After discussing the challenges before gender equality in politics, Roundtable participants proposed possible solutions which could be set out across three categories:

Table 1

Legislative	Educational	Party
<p>1. Introducing a legislative duty to devote a part of political party subsidy into training;</p> <p>2. Changing childcare leave provisions to balance caregiving between women and men;</p> <p>3. Changing the national equality mechanism to ensure efficient National Gender Equality Council performance;</p>	<p>1. Reviewing the school curriculum to purge it from gender and other stereotypes and discriminatory content;</p> <p>2. Stressing gender equality more broadly in civic education lessons and ensuring teachers are properly briefed on the topic.</p>	<p>1. Adopting internal party quotas as a temporary measure to boost equality;</p> <p>2. Improving capacity and conducting in-house training in topics like negotiation, media relations, policy development, public speaking, and human rights;</p> <p>3. Ensuring that women's representation in leadership structures reflects the percentage of women party members;</p> <p>4. Promoting women's political participation at the local level.</p>

The event ended with expressions of will and readiness by all participants to continue cooperating in gender equality in politics.

Ekaterina Karavelova Foundation Executive Director Ms Marina Kisyova de Geus expressed a conviction that the participants were of like minds and

that the Roundtable was only the first of a series of events that would produce concrete results. Ms Kalina Drenska of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Bulgaria thanked everybody for the productive meeting and multitude of ideas and stressed that topics like equality are fundamental and overcome ideological divisions.

5

GOOD INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE IN PROMOTING EQUALITY AND ENHANCING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

This part of the Report presents some good international practice promoting gender equality in politics. Many of the examples relate to measures to boost women's participation given their disproportionately low representation compared to men.

First comes the methodology of gender audits with the conviction that it is important to begin with an analysis of the current situation in the political parties. Subsequent examples of good practice may help promote equality with reference to the requirements identified in an audit.

The examples are from publications by the EIGE European Institute for Gender Equality, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) who have developed methodologies to assess gender equality and practices to attain it.

This Report attempts to have the selected practice in some way address challenges to attaining equality in politics and decision-making processes as outlined by the participants in the Roundtable on the Role of Parliament and Political Parties in promoting Equality and Good International Practice. Some of the concrete examples illustrating good practice are from Central and Eastern European countries, with the idea that parallels may be drawn and the actions described could have positive effects in the Bulgarian context. It is important to make clear that giving examples of successful application of one practice or another in a set country must not be viewed as an assessment of overall gender equality in that country.

5.1 GENDER AUDITS

Theory and practice know two terms: gender audit and gender analysis; despite some overlap, they cover different things. The table below, adapted from the European Institute for Gender Equality website, makes the differences stand out:

Table 2

Gender Analysis	Gender Audit
<p>Critical examination of how differences in gender roles, activities, needs, opportunities and rights/entitlements affect women, men, girls and boys in a given policy area, situation or context.</p> <p>Gender analyses may rest on qualitative information and methods and/or quantitative information provided by gender statistics.</p>	<p>Assessment of the extent to which gender equality is effectively institutionalised in policies, programmes, organisational structures and proceedings (including decision-making processes), and in corresponding budgets.</p> <p>A gender audit considers, normally in a participatory manner, whether internal practices and related gender mainstreaming support systems are effective and reinforce each other, and whether they are applied. It establishes a baseline, identifies critical gaps and challenges, and recommends ways of addressing them, suggesting possible improvements and innovations. It also documents good practices towards the achievement of gender equality.</p>

Source: *The European Institute for Gender Equality* ²²

There are different methodologies for gender auditing in organisations and institutions, but the OSCE ODIHR has developed a specialised online Gender Audit Tool for political parties. It offers political parties the means to assess their internal processes, procedures, structures, culture, and actions from the vantage of gender equality. The purpose of gender auditing is to identify discriminatory practice, direct or indirect, formal or informal, which may harden gender inequality and hinder women's participation in politics. Gender auditing gives political party leaderships the information necessary to correct policies, programmes and campaign strategies to promote gender equality.

Equal participation by women and men in politics is before all a question of human rights, yet it offers other benefits to political parties who make efforts to

²² European Institute for Gender Equality, Glossary & Thesaurus, <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1145> (accessed 3 November 2022)

adhere to international human rights standards and recommendations on gender participation. Diversifying the makeup of a political party expands electoral support for it and widens reach to a broader circle of voters and potential candidates. Gender auditing offers political parties an opportunity of defining both the strengths and the weaknesses of their gender representation. Gender auditing can show whether a political party is sensitive to gender issues and where it can improve. It also offers specific recommendations to strengthen party commitment to promoting equality.

To date, the ODIHR has applied its gender audit methodology in working with 43 major political parties in eight OSCE member states. As a result, these parties have taken measures to increase women's participation in political life and increase sensitivity to internal policies and procedures from the vantage of gender. Examples include creating local branches of women's

organisations, advocacy for introducing election quotas for women candidates and conducting analyses of women's representation in party structures, alongside developing measures to promote gender-sensitive language and targeted initiatives to boost women party members' capacity²³.

The Gender Audit Tool for political parties contains 51 questions and is available online in English and Russian²⁴.

Before a political party representative begins the audit process, the entire necessary information ought to be available.

The preparatory questions number 29 and are available in an Appendix to this Report.

Examples of positive results from gender auditing at political parties²⁵:

Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan:

- After auditing, many political parties decided to adopt action plans to promote gender equality. These plans are practically orientated for periods of between two and four years. Party women's organisations adopted some and party leaderships adopted others.
- To implement action plans, some parties set up leadership gender equality groups of up to ten members each, comprising several leadership members, women's organisation leaders and/or members, parliamentarians, and other party members. Their role is to monitor gender equality action plan implementation and report to the party leadership on progress.
- Some parties, which previously had no women's organisations, created them after audits and ensured they have a voice and place in party leaderships.
- Many follow-up actions aimed at capacity building to ensure that parties had genuinely included gender equality in their training programmes. Some parties even created political academies, part of them focused entirely on gender equality training. Parties which already had political academies changed their curricula to boost awareness of gender equality issues.
- Many parties only realised after auditing how blind their programmes had been as regards gender equality and took decisions to develop party programmes on gender equality or include gender equality issues in their overall party programmes.
- Internal party statute reviews led many parties to adopt gender equality quotas for key party bodies such as party leaderships. Many also introduced a mandatory deputy leader post for the under-represented gender, this being women in all cases.
- Some parties decided to take their women's organisations more seriously and give them budgets, alongside beginning to regard them as strategic structures.
- In many parties, gender audits were decisive in boosting leadership awareness of complex gender equality issues and the meaning of party sensitivity to equality issues.
- In some cases, parties opened to the possibility of advocating legal mandatory quotas and to the overall idea of legislating in favour of gender equality and women's rights.

²³ OSCE ODIHR, About Gender Audit [website], <https://genderaudit.osce.org/about-gender-audit/> (accessed 4 November 2022)

²⁴ OSCE ODIHR, Gender Audit [website], <http://tool.genderaudit.osce.org/> (accessed 4 November 2022)

²⁵ S. Gavric, 'Examples of the positive impact of using the Gender Audit Tool' [email to M. Spasova], 8 November 2022 (accessed 8 November 2022)

Gender auditing in parliament

Not only political parties or organisations, but also institutions may be audited for gender equality.

In October 2022, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights published a handbook on gender auditing parliaments using a participation-based approach. The handbook assesses parliaments' three basic functions: representative, legislative, and directing, and proposes a four-stage repetitive process: **1. Assessment** (audit); **2. Implementation** (action planning); **3. Resource provision** (budgeting to implement

action plans); **4. Review** (regular reviews of action plan implementation)²⁶.

5.2 GENDER EQUALITY ACTION PLANS

Auditing political party or institution gender equality in not an end in itself. Lapses and challenges identified can form the basis for political party gender equality action plans. These plans are detailed strategy documents presenting clear road maps of future moves to adapt political parties' internal policies and procedures and boost women's participation.

Here are the key elements of such an action plan:

Table 3

Action type	Action
1	Gender auditing in internal party procedures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-assessing or gender auditing key party procedures and practice, and distributing work and leadership resources based on membership gender profile.
2	Formulating and developing party leadership support for a gender equality action plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a party-specific gender equality action plan based on audit results; Ensuring party leadership consent for not less than four-yearly action plan discussions and adoption of new action plans based on interim advances.
3	Reinforcing party constituent documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing party charter provisions ensuring minimum women's representation in the party, especially in decision-making processes and bodies; Introducing party internal policies or behaviour codes or reinforcing current ones to ban gender-based discrimination and harassment.
4	Including women's organisations in party charters and rules: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting up or reinforcing existing autonomous party women's organisations/structures ('women's wings'); Introducing regulations requiring women's structure representation in decision-making bodies and processes in party charters or rules.
5	Supporting party gender equality mechanisms as regards women's structures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing set possible initiatives for women's structures, like mentoring programmes, training, fora, and open debates; Ensuring resources for women's structures to conduct these actions.
6	Gathering gender data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gathering and maintaining party membership gender statistics at both the local and regional levels.
7	Improving party democracy through transparent and fair processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy for introducing or implementing existing clear, transparent and democratic internal party procedures regulating member recruitment, promotion to more senior posts, election candidate selection, decision-making and resource allocation; Framing party procedures in clear and gender-sensitive language; Introducing the practice of induction training for all women and men new party members.
8	Introducing internal party measures to promote women as leaders and election candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopting a top executive level operations plan to gradually increase the proportion of women in all party bodies and key party posts to reflect the proportion of women members; Setting voluntary timetabled reference values, targets, or quotas for attaining higher representation of women in the party.
9	Organising training and leadership skill development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing training for women party members (leadership skills development, election candidate preparation and similar).
10	Internal party awareness raising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raising awareness among all members regarding party equality policies; Holding internal party awareness raising seminars on equality objectives and policies for all party activists, members, and public post holders.
11	Developing formal party positions on gender equality issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining priorities and preparing concrete party positions addressing specific gender equality issues and challenges.

²⁶ OSCE ODIHR, Participatory Gender Audits of Parliaments: A Step-By-Step Guidance Document, 2022, p. 5, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/f/120877.pdf> (accessed 9 November 2022)

12	Linking current and potential member recruitment and development with their efforts to achieve equality:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making respect and support for equality among women and men a requirement or condition for party membership; • Linking development within the party (leadership posts, listing candidates in electable candidate list positions and fielding them in safe seats, promotion to senior posts) to commitment and obtaining results in promoting gender equality by both male and female candidates and party members.
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Source: OSCE ODIHR, *Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties*, 2014²⁷

Examples of the effect of developing and implementing gender equality action plans by political parties:

Georgia

Three Georgian parliamentary political parties developed equality action plans that include holding internal party meetings to discuss gender equality both within their parties and in society, improving coordination between party women parliamentarians to raise questions of import to women voters, countering negative media presentations of women candidates, and developing more active women's structures.

Armenia

Four Armenian parliamentary represented parties undertook similar processes. Some already had women's organisations and had to consider how better to integrate them in the party for greater influence over policy development. Communication with voters was a key aspect of action planning, including the idea of public opinion polling to gain better understanding of both women's and men's views. It was particularly important that some parties assessed how better to support women election candidates and use their experience to inspire and support other women striving for elected posts.

Source: OSCE, *Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women's Political Participation in the OSCE Region*, 2016²⁸

5.3 BUILDING CAPACITY, TRAINING, AND MENTORING

Offering opportunities of training, mentoring and overall capacity development matters to both women and men deciding to move into politics. For diverse reasons, however, women feel insufficiently prepared or have been denied the opportunity to develop set skills, like those necessary to stand for

election. To this end, it is important for political parties to assess the needs of women in their ranks and make available resources and opportunities for specialised training. Training is also a sphere offering excellent opportunities for partnering with civic organisations²⁹.

An example of the effect of training and mentoring programmes for women in politics:

²⁷ OSCE/ODIHR, *Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties*, 2014, pp 53-54, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/f/120877.pdf> (accessed 27 October 2022)

²⁸ OSCE ODIHR, *Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women's Political Participation in the OSCE Region*, 2016, p. 50, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/1/224206.pdf>, (accessed 4 November 2022)

²⁹ OSCE/ODIHR, *Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties*, 2014, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/f/120877.pdf> (accessed 27 October 2022)

The Czech Republic

As in Bulgaria, women's political representation in the Czech Republic is stably under the 30 percent minimum set as a target as early as the Beijing Platform in 1995, despite some slight improvement and a rise of women members of the lower house of parliament from 22 to 25.5 percent after the last elections in 2022.

In 2014, when women in the lower house of the Czech parliament numbered barely 19.5 percent, the Fórum 50 % non-governmental organisation decided to address this issue with the conviction that it had a negative impact on the development of Czech society and democracy. The organisation launched an initiative for **training and mentoring** in partnership with the Nordic Chamber of Commerce in the Czech Republic.

At the time, Czech political parties had neither tools to promote equality in politics, nor offered training and mentoring to support women's political participation. The objective of the Fórum 50 % and the Nordic Chamber of Commerce was to transmit successful Danish and Norwegian women politicians' knowledge and skills to politically active Czech women. The initiative stems from an understanding of mentoring as building stable relationships for studying and sharing.

The project set criteria for mentors and mentees and formed pairs according to experience, interests, and political focus. The mentorship programme lasted 18 months, divided into three six-month blocks. Each block was dedicated to a set political topic, seminars at the beginning and end of the period having experts look at the topic from a variety of vantages. Seminars had two parts: closed, with only mentoring pairs, and public.

The mentoring programme included two meetings for each thematic block: one in the Czech Republic and one in the mentor's country, plus an online meeting every two weeks, regular email communications, and exchanges of documents and publications serving as bases for discussions on the different topics.

The programme developed based on the KVINFO Danish Center for Research on Women and Gender gender and diversity mentoring model. KVINFO launched its Mentoring Network in 2002 to help the social integration and employment of women migrants and refugees in Denmark. The initiative inspired mentoring programmes in other sectors and countries, with KVINFO and the OSCE publishing a practical handbook on launching mentoring networks in 2014.

Alongside the mentoring programme linking Czech, Norwegian, and Danish women politicians, Fórum 50 % also launched a training course for 15 female candidates for the European Parliament elections in 2014. Participants in the training course had to meet two criteria: a clear vision of their work in the European Parliament, and support for gender equality. The course includes training for working in the European Parliament, negotiating, media work, and individual coaching sessions. Participants also held a discussion with Czech MEP Zuzana Brzobohatá.

Mentoring programme participants state they found the programme mutually enriching and that it enabled them to broaden their network of political contacts, share experience and prospects, acquire new viewpoints, and learn about the functioning of political systems in other countries.

Feedback from the training sessions for European Parliament candidates was also very positive.

Source: The European Institute of Gender Equality, *Advancing gender equality in political decision-making in the EU*, 2016³⁰

The Czech mentoring and training programme described here constitutes good practice easily applied in Bulgaria and meets the needs identified by the Roundtable on the Role of Parliament and Political Parties in promoting Equality.

5.4 VOLUNTARY PARTY CANDIDATE SELECTION MEASURES TO PROMOTE EQUALITY

As illustrated by this Report's part on the current state of women's political representation in Bulgaria, one of the reasons for women's sparse presence in elected posts is the sequencing of candidate lists where women are either missing, or given unelectable positions.

One way to address the problem is for political parties to introduce temporary special measures to promote women's participation. These measures usually involve voluntary (party) quotas for more equal representation by women and men in the candidate lists; parties themselves formulate the quotas without legal mandates. Voluntary quotas would normally be written into party charters or statutes and may require 25 to 50 percent of candidates in party electoral lists to be women. Some parties opt for gender-neutral language and specify set percentages of the underrep-

³⁰ European Institute of Gender Equality, *Advancing gender equality in political decision-making in the EU*, 2016, pp 33-37, <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/advancing-genderequality-political-decision-making-good-practices> (accessed 28 October 2022)

resented gender or minimum participation levels by each gender.

Party quotas have a greater effect on the ultimate percentage of elected women when they meet several conditions:

- 1) That many parties, or else several large parties, introduce voluntary quotas;
- 2) That the quotas set require a relatively high number of women represented in lists and contain requirements about specific list positions;
- 3) That quotas are introduced in a manner that is understood and accepted in the prevailing cultural context;

- 4) That parties have formal nomination procedures requiring party authorities to monitor their implementation³¹.

Sweden, often seen as an example of advanced women and men's equal participation, has implemented party quotas particularly successfully³². There are, however, also Southeast European examples which show how party quotas are more effective in boosting women's representation than statutorily mandated ones in set historical contexts.

An example of the effect of inner party quotas:

Croatia

As a rule, voluntary party quotas are not as effective as statutory ones in boosting women's parliamentary representation, though this does not obtain in all cases and all countries. Before 2008, Croatia's Social Democratic Party applied voluntary internal quotas in the absence of legal candidate list quotas. At the time, the Party had a strong women's presence in parliament. After 2008, the country introduced statutory quotas without specific requirements about women's positions in lists or serious sanction; the number of women in Social Democratic Party lists dropped significantly. This shows that once the gender balance of power within a party changes, party quota legislation that is not very carefully formulated cannot lead to positive change.

Source: E. Nacevska and S. Lokar, *The Effectiveness of Gender Quotas in Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia, 2017*³³

5.5 ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND FUNDS

Economic inequalities between women and men, difficult funding access for women in politics, and the lack of funding for party women's organisations comprise a significant challenge which hinders equality. This was also the conclusion of the participants in the Roundtable on the Role of Parliament and Political Parties in promoting Equality.

While gender-based stereotypes, sexism, and a deep-rooted patriarchal culture and attitudes are harder to overcome and take longer, unequal access to funds can be addressed by specific measures which yield results in the foreseeable future.

Improving access to resources for women in politics

To create a supportive environment for women's participation in politics (in view of the challenges they face), political parties have to undertake purposeful action to facilitate women's access to party and campaign funds. Such action might include:

- creating a list of potential donors who would like to support women candidates;
- earmarking a proportion of party funds (including public subsidy) for party women's structures, training women candidates for elective posts;
- presenting non-monetary support like access to party infrastructures, opportunities to en-

ter training programmes, media participation and the like;

- holding fund raising training;
- presenting monetary support to women candidates' children who might experience hardship;
- placing women in electoral list positions whose capture does not entail enormous outlay (i.e., placing them higher in lists or in safe seats)³⁴.

Alongside improving women's access to resources, promoting gender equality in politics may also involve measures related to political party funding.

Linking political party public funding to gender equality criteria

A 2018 report by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance looks at different types of **gender-targeted public funding for political**

³¹ P. Norris, M. L. Krook, *Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan*, 2011, p. 35, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/8/78432.pdf> (accessed 4 November 2022)

³² Ibid., p. 36

³³ E. Nacevska and S. Lokar, "The Effectiveness of Gender Quotas in Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia," *Teorija in Praksa*, Vol. 54, No. 2, 2017, p. 397, https://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/docs/defaultsource/tip/tip_02_2017_nacevska_lokar.pdf?sfvrsn=2/ (accessed 4 November 2022)

³⁴ OSCE ODIHR, *Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties*, 2014, pp 77 – 78, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/f/120877.pdf> (accessed 27 October 2022)

parties³⁵. The concept behind this relates to public funding which links political parties' entitlement to part or all of their public funding to gender equality criteria, or where the extent of funding relates formally to gender equality criteria. Such criteria might include female/male ratios in party candidate lists for set elections or the ratio of elected women and men. The purpose of this type of public funding for political parties is to encourage them to nominate more women candidates by linking the extent of subsidy with the extent of gender equality in candidate lists, thus giving more balanced parties more funding, without setting specific requirements on how to disburse it. To

stimulate parties to place women in electable list positions, funding might not just relate to the ratio of female to male candidates, but also to the percentage of women party candidates who end up elected.

Another type of public funding related to gender equality criteria involves **earmarking part of the party subsidy for equality promotion**. Thus, there may be a statutory requirement for political parties to expend a set percentage of their subsidy on gender equality awareness campaigns, training, or **directly on women's structures**. This type of funding can give results over a longer term³⁶.

Table 4

Types of gender-targeted public funding for political parties:

Type of political party public funding linked to gender equality criteria	Description
Funding based on party eligibility as subsidy recipients	In this system, parties may receive some or all of their public funding only if they fulfil set gender equality criteria. These may include attaining a set level of gender balance in candidate lists or elected candidates. At its ultimate, this measure denies any public funding to parties which fail to fulfil equality criteria.
Differential subsidy disbursement	In this system, the extent (disbursement) of funding depends on the level of equality among party candidates. Such a system may motivate (subsidy rises alongside equality) or penalise (parties may lose funding if they fail to attain gender equality among candidates).
Earmarked funding proportions	In this system, a set public fund percentage has to be spent on promoting gender equality. Such measures may run parallel with differential fund disbursement, but monitoring implementation may be challenging.

Source: M. Ohman, *Gender-Targeted Public Funding for Political Parties: A Comparative Analysis*, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), 2018³⁷

Examples of the effect of gender-targeted public funding on political parties:

Albania

Albanian law requires political parties to have at least 30 percent of either gender represented in both their governing bodies and their electoral candidate lists. Parties failing this requirement lose some public funding. Since Albanian political parties get the greater proportion of their funding from the state, they have a greater stimulus to adhere to the 30 percent gender requirement.

In 2009 – the first elections since this legislation came into effect in 2008 – the percentage of women among candidates was 32: a significant rise on the 9 percent at the 2005 elections. The percentage of elected women was rather lower than that of candidates, indicating lower placement in lists, yet even so the number of women in the new parliament doubled. Women comprised 40 percent of candidates at the 2013 elections and 42 percent in 2017, with the number of women elected then rising to 28 percent.

At the most recent elections, in 2021, the main political parties made efforts to boost women candidates' visibility, with the mandatory 30 percent quota surpassed in most lists.

This boosted the women's share of the new Albanian parliament to over a third.

It may be claimed that gender-targeted public funding for political parties and costly penalties for parties failing to fulfil criteria have proved their worth with a significant change in gender proportions in the Albanian parliament.

Sources: M. Ohman, *Gender-Targeted Public Funding for Political Parties: A Comparative Analysis*, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), 2018, pp 30 – 33
ODIHR, *Limited Election Observation Mission, Final Report, 2021*³⁸

³⁵ M. Ohman, *Gender-targeted Public Funding for Political Parties: A comparative analysis*, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), 2018, <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/gender-targeted-public-funding-for-political-parties.pdf> (accessed 4 November)

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 18 – 24

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19

³⁸ OSCE ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission, Republic of Albania, Parliamentary Elections 25 April 2021, Final Report, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/1/493687.pdf>, (accessed 4 November 2022)

Finland

Most Finnish political parties have women's organisations. These organisations' work is funded by the political parties' public subsidy, part of it mandatorily set aside for actions in support of women. The percentage of this funding is set by cabinet negotiations following general elections every four years. Over time, the figure has moved between 8 and 12 percent, but as early as the Eighties, Finnish political party women's organisations, alongside their Swedish contemporaries, were the best funded. Finnish political life also features a high proportion of women in the legislature and the executive from the start of the Nineties, with 38.5 percent of parliamentarians being women in 1991.

Source: J. Kantola, *Women's Organizations of Political Parties: Formal Possibilities, Informal Challenges and Discursive Controversies*, 2019³⁹

5.6 PARLIAMENTARY STRUCTURES FOR WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

Special parliamentary structures for women parliamentarians are informal formations which comprise parliamentarians from diverse political parties and aim to create a consensus and implement policy in support of women's rights and equality. Their work is not usually covered by parliamentary rules, this being a point of difference with permanent committees⁴⁰.

Such structures exist in 15 European countries, with some bicameral parliaments having dedicated ones for women members of both the lower and upper chambers, as in Poland, while others have several such structures tackling different topics, like in the United Kingdom⁴¹.

Special women's parliamentary structures can be very different, reflecting the specifics of their creators' political culture, parliamentary system, and needs. These factors also define their aims, spheres of competence, organisation, and decision-making mechanisms. Membership is not always limited to women parliamentarians.

Creating special parliamentary structures for women parliamentarians can bring many benefits:

- They encourage both a level of representation corresponding to population makeup and representation that addresses the problems of women and defends their interests;
- They stress the significance of equality issues in the functioning of parliaments;
- They ensure that equality issues form part of legislation and policy development;
- They may advocate adopting legislation to promote equality.
- They assist inter party dialogue and influence cross-party legislative initiatives and policies;
- They provide members with training, mentoring, and support⁴².

As pointed out above, parliamentary structures for women parliamentarians may function differently and have different foci. The table below presents the seven basic criteria according to which they may be categorised:

³⁹ J. Kantola, "Women's Organizations of Political Parties: Formal Possibilities, Informal Challenges and Discursive Controversies", *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, vol. 27, no.1, 2019, p. 4 – 21, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08038740.2018.1529703>, (accessed 9 November 2022)

⁴⁰ K. Gonzalez and K. Sample, *One Size does not fit all: Lessons learned from Legislative Gender Commissions and Caucuses*, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2010, p. 20, <https://bit.ly/3TF9rUB> (accessed 4 November 2022)

⁴¹ IPU - Global Data on National Parliaments, Specialized bodies, [website], <https://bit.ly/3G1RpbR> (accessed 4 November 2022)

⁴² OSCE ODIHR, *Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region*, 2013, pp 17 – 19, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/0/105940.pdf> accessed 4 November 2022)

Table 5
Types of special parliamentary structures for women parliamentarians

Criterion	Available options
Mandate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal advocacy of set themes and awareness raising; • Informal discussion forum; • Information gathering mechanism; • Legislation and policy review mechanism; • Legislative initiatives; • Empowering and capacity building for women parliamentarians; • Research.
Formality:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal parliamentary body following parliamentary rules and enjoying set powers and privileges. • Informal group recognised by parliament; • Informal group not recognised by parliament.
Work method:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted action plan; • Regular meetings (more than three a year); • Irregular ad-hoc meetings (fewer than three a year); • Keeping minutes of meetings; • Consensus decisions; • Voted resolutions.
Leadership:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led by the ruling party; • Led by all parties in rotation; • Co-chair leadership; • No leadership posts (no hierarchical leadership structure); • Set term leadership posts.
Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff, budget, and meeting rooms provided by parliament; • Staff and budget partially provided by parliament and partially by other organisations; • Staff and budget entirely provided by other organisations; • Budget reliant on membership dues; • Meetings held outside parliament.
Membership:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women only; • Men may also participate; • Women (and men) of all parties; • Women (and men) of one party or the ruling coalition; • Civil society representatives and international organisation representatives may also participate; • Former parliamentarians may also participate.
Functions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter-writing, general advocacy; • Policy and legislation studies; • Preparing and tabling legislative initiatives; • Monitoring the implementation of gender equality legislation and national duties under international treaties; • Holding social events; • Mentoring current and future parliamentarians; • Advocacy for gender equality-sensitive parliaments.

Source: OSCE ODIHR, *Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region, 2013*⁴³

⁴³ OSCE ODIHR, *Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region, 2013*, pp 21 – 21, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/0/105940.pdf>, (accessed 4 November 2022)

Examples of the effect of parliamentary structures for women parliamentarians

Serbia

The 2012 general elections returned an increased percentage of women to the Serbian parliament at 33 percent. This was partly due to legislative changes requiring at least one representative of each gender among every three candidates fielded in political party lists.

The parliamentarians in the new parliament grasped the opportunity to start discussions on a new parliamentary structure for women to tackle legislation supporting women's rights and gender equality.

The level of support for such a parliamentary structure varied, not only among women of different political parties, but also among those with more or less experience of parliament and of the broader Serbian women's movement. To select the most suitable type of structure, they consulted international and civic organisations supporting women's political empowerment. Specialist seminars and meeting with foreign parliamentarians were held. This work helped the dialogue between the generations and the emergence of understanding and solidarity. The opportunity to understand different models of parliamentary structure (formal and informal) and successful examples of their work helped the decision as to the most suitable structure.

The Serbian parliament's Women's Parliamentary Network came together on 14 February 2013, comprises representatives of all parliamentary political parties, and serves as an example of successful overcoming of political division on key themes like equality and women's rights.

The structure's formal constituent session adopted a resolution on the four basic aims it would pursue (updated over the years):

- Affecting legislation and promoting gender equality;
- Monitoring the implementation of statutes of significance to women in society;
- Promoting women's education;
- Promoting women's solidarity and empowering women at all levels of government;

In addition, a resolution gave the structure a more informal character and shared leadership.

Over the years, the Serbian Parliament's Women's Parliamentary Network has developed as a major factor for improving local women's status, adopting legislative initiatives, strategies, and agreements for women's economic and political empowerment, removing all forms of discrimination, and waging decisive struggle against all forms of violence against women.

The Women's Parliamentary Network holds annual national conferences at the Serbian parliament on the state of gender equality, the last one in 2021.

Sources: OSCE ODIHR, *Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region, 2013 UNDP, Not in My Parliament – The Seventh National Conference of Women's Parliamentary Network National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Conference of Women's Parliamentary Network*⁴⁴

⁴⁴ OSCE ODIHR, *Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region, 2013*, p. 31 – 32, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/0/105940.pdf> (accessed 4 November 2022)

North Macedonia

The Republic of North Macedonia Women Parliamentarians' Club convened in 2003 with the support of women's civic organisations in the framework of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe.

The Club is an informal group comprising all women parliamentarians, regardless of party affiliation. Women form 41.6 percent of the current North Macedonian parliament for the 2020 to 2024 term. The Club's new members hold an inaugural meeting up to two months after a parliament convenes pursuant to elections. Constituent meetings elect a chair and deputy chair to balance ruling and opposition parties, and a collective presidency of 10 to 15 women which always includes the chair of the parliamentary gender equality committee.

The Club convenes ad-hoc but not less than monthly, adopting resolutions by consensus. Information on its structure and activity is available on the Republic of North Macedonia Parliament website, along with the Club's entire archives.

The mission of the Club of Parliamentarian Women is, through legislative change, to achieve gender equality, affirm women's rights, actively include women in national decision-making processes, and reinforce democracy in all spheres of Macedonian society.

The Club's strategic aims include:

- Boosting women's participation and influence in political and decision-making processes;
- Ending gender-based discrimination and violence;
- Empowering women economically and boosting their participating in the labour market.

The Club also tackles topics like attaining a balance between women's family and work lives, improving women's health and emancipating women through education.

Through the years, the Club has succeeded in establishing itself as a significant factor in the Republic of North Macedonia's unicameral parliament and in contributing to important legislative change in favour of women and equality.

Sources: OSCE ODIHR, *Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region, 2013 Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, The Women Parliamentarians' Club*⁴⁵

⁴⁵ OSCE ODIHR, *Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region, 2013*, p. 42 – 43, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/0/105940.pdf> (accessed 4 November 2022); Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, *The Women Parliamentarians' Club*, <https://www.sobranie.mk/for-theclub.nspix> (accessed 4 November 2022)

6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender equality in decision-making processes is a matter of justice, human rights, and complete functioning of democracy, as well as an opportunity to defend the interests of different social groups properly.

As this Report makes clear, attaining such equality in the Bulgarian context faces a multitude of challenges. They cannot be overcome without purposeful effort and concrete measures by institutions and political parties and the active participation of civil society. For this reason, we propose a list of recommendations for action that could address the challenges and contribute to attaining gender equality.

General recommendations:

- The Political Parties Act ought to be amended as regards state subsidy disbursement by introducing a duty for a portion of it to go to women's organisations or, where there is none, for training to promote equality;
- Gender impact ought to be included in preliminary assessments of Bills;
- The syllabi of all classes in primary and secondary schools ought to be analysed and gender stereotypes removed (alongside those based on ethnicity, religion, disability and others) along with discriminatory language;
- Gender equality education and discrimination awareness training ought to be included in

the mandatory curricula of media and communications teachers and professionals.

To political parties:

- To conduct gender audits and develop action plans based on audits;
- To develop membership capacity through mentoring programmes and training, including specialised sessions, to meet specific needs;
- To offer funding for the development of women's structures;
- To guarantee equal access to funding to all members and pay special attention to resource access by women from small communities;
- To develop internal regulations and procedures for promoting equality as a whole;
- To introduce temporary special measures guaranteeing balanced representation for women and men in candidate lists for different types of elections.

To the National Assembly:

- To conduct a gender audit;
- To create a parliamentary structure for women MPs;
- To publish on its website easily accessed gender data not only for its current composition, but also historic ones.

7

APPENDICES

**7.1 GENDER EQUALITY AUDIT
PREPARATORY QUESTIONS**

Before party gender auditing using the OSCE online audit tool, it is important to obtain answers to the following 29 questions:

Participation:

- What is the percentage of women party members?;
- Does the party database have membership gender information?;
- Are party membership recruitment procedures clearly set out and publicly accessible?;
- How many women have led the party?;
- What is the percentage of women in supreme party bodies?;
- Is there a strategy for selecting female candidates?;
- How many women have been party candidates for president?;
- What was the percentage of party women candidates at the last general elections?;
- What was the percentage of women party candidates at the last local elections?;
- What is the percentage of women among parliamentarians representing the party?;
- What is the percentage of women mayors representing the party?

Access and support:

- What are the appointment procedures for party leadership posts?;
- What is the percentage of women in the party body responsible for electing the party leadership?;
- Are there any voluntary party quotas?;
- Are there party women's structures and what is their role in the party?;

- Are there party budget funds earmarked for women's structures?;
- Is there information on gender distribution of funding or other material support?

Internal policies:

- Is gender equality mentioned in party charters or declarations?;
- What measures promote an inner party working environment sensitive to gender differences?;
- Are there party capacity-building programmes relevant to gender issues?;
- Are there strategic documents regarding gender equality and its application?

Promoting gender equality:

- Is gender equality a topic in party advocacy?;
- How does the party mark symbolic dates like 8 March International Women's Day or 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence in November?;
- How are events promoting gender equality organised?;
- What are the party's public reactions to sexist statements and gender-based threats?;
- Does the party use gender-sensitive language?;
- Does the party pay attention to gender-balanced party media representation.

Partnerships:

- Does the party cooperate with organisations promoting and defending women's and human rights?;
- Does the party cooperate with international organisations promoting human rights and/or gender equality and similar?

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ABBREVIATIONS

ODIHR	the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
EU	The European Union
UN	The United Nations' Organization
GA	The UN General Assembly
OSCE	The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Ekaterina Karavelova Foundation works to enhance gender equality and women’s self-confidence in their skills through activities in three main areas: community, development and policy. The organisation creates and maintains supportive women’s communities through the social format “SHE in...”, supports the development of women in Bulgaria – personally and socially through the original training programme for personal development “SHE is ME” and active citizenship trainings, and advocates for evidence-based gender equality policies.

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