

ICPS newsletter®

How to ensure gender equality in politics

Gender inequality is amply evident in Ukraine today. It manifests itself in the disproportional representation of women and men in various walks of life, differences in their salaries, persistent gender stereotypes, and actual sexual discrimination. One of the more troublesome issues is the extremely unequal representation of women in government and administrative office. As part of the "Policy Campaign to Promote Gender Equality in Ukraine" project, ICPS analysts are working on possible options to bring about more balanced gender representation in elected office

Why Ukrainians need gender equality

Among the main indicators of a democratic society, equal rights and opportunities to exercise these rights for all groups of society are a keystone. Art. 24 of the Constitution of Ukraine specifies that the equal rights for men and women are supported by providing women with equal opportunity to participate in public and political activity.

The fact that, of 450 National Deputies, only 39 women or 8.7% of deputies made it into the legislature in the 2006 Verkhovna Rada election is an eloquent sign of the lack of equal opportunity for Ukrainian women to participate in political life.

This indicator puts Ukraine at one of the lowest ranks in Europe, where the average indicator is 19.8%, and 106th in the world.

Meanwhile, global experience has proved that only those countries that have politically resolved the issue of empowering women and ensuring equal opportunities for women and men have also established the necessary conditions for sustainable economic development. European countries with the highest places in the UN Human Development Index are also those that are best in terms of ensuring balanced representation: Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, Austria, and Germany.

Conventional commitments

At the international level, several documents express international recognition of this problem and identify

approaches to resolving it. These are, among others, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

According to Art. 7 of the Convention, signatory states "shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life." The Declaration on the Millennium Development Goals is more specific, calling on governments to maintain a gender ratio from 30% to 70% for either gender in elected bodies and top executive bodies by 2015. Having signed these documents, Ukraine has recognized the existence of the problem and committed itself to resolve it.

The issue of equal representation of women and men in elected bodies is also raised in European Union documents, which is important, given Ukraine's efforts towards European integration. The Council of Europe Resolution on the balanced participation of men and women in decision-making calls on EU Member States to ensure balanced representation of women and men in political life as a priority policy objective related to equal rights and opportunities for women and men.

The European Parliament Resolution on women in decision-making states that under-representation of women in the political arena is unacceptable in a democratic country and calls for the use of quotas as a transitional measure to help even up the involvement of men and women both at the party level and at the electoral level.

"Booster" mechanisms

The most important institutional mechanisms for actually establishing equality between women and men include using "affirmative action" policy, a form of positive discrimination.

Broadly used by western politicians and legal specialists, this concept emerged to justify the existence of a series of legal standards that, formally at least, could be categorized as discriminating against or restricting men. However, it actually provides for a system of quotas, the development of a program to train female leaders and measures to help women combine family and professional life.

Affirmative action constitutes a way to move from formal equality to actual equality. It commits both Governments and political parties to providing women with equal opportunity to participate actively in the work of governing structures, specifically in decision-making.

Ways to ensure equal representation that are used in global practice include:

1. Legislated quotas for party electoral lists with mandatory ordering.

This option allows for the size of the quota for each gender to be specified, requirements to alternate men and women in party lists, a mechanism for enforcing these requirements, and culpability for not adhering to them. Establishing the requirement to alternate genders ensures balanced representation throughout the entire list of candidates, including in the part that is most likely to pass.

2. Legislated quotas for party electoral lists without mandatory ordering.

This option leaves significant possibilities regarding the formation of their lists at the discretion of individual parties and, therefore, is likely to be acceptable to the majority of political forces. Legislated quotas for party lists without mandatory ordering will not necessarily lead to an

immediate or significant increase in the representation of women in the legislature. However, it should guarantee an increase in the participation of women in the election process itself.

3. Quotas for seats in the elected body

With this option, a certain number of seats in the elected body are allocated to women and to men. Political parties submit separate lists of candidates for "male" and "female" seats. This system offers the maximum guarantee that an established ratio of women and men will be elected to the legislature.

The drawback to this option is that it seriously complicates the electoral process because of the need for parties and blocs to submit two separate lists, one for each gender.

4. Voluntary party quotas

In this approach, political parties identify gender quotas in their statutes and observe them in the process of drawing up their lists of candidates during elections. The advantages of this option are greater flexibility and more possibilities for parties themselves to establish the quotas that they think are necessary.

Voluntary party quotas are the most widespread in Europe. Such quotas for equal representation are used by political parties

in Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and many other countries. Altogether, 160 parties from 69 countries do so today.

How to remove the stumbling blocks

Removing obstacles to the more active participation of women in the political life of the country is a key government policy area, whether quotas are adopted or not. The main priorities have already been identified in the Law "On ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men" and in the State Program for Instituting Gender Equality in Ukrainian Society for the Period up to 2011, approved 27 December 2006 by Cabinet Resolution №1834.

Building a "gender balanced" society is a long-term process. It requires, firstly, financial and legal support and, secondly, educational measures to stir public opinion on issues of equal representation of women and men in public and government institutions. One useful step would be to establish a training program or professional development courses for educators at various levels that would consider the correctness of gender issues in teaching practice. The practice of a gender-sensitive approach in planning the work

of organizations, government and non-government institutions is something also worth instituting.

In this area, one important point is the work of the media, which should appropriately present gender problems in Ukrainian society. For instance, one step might be to immediately produce a series of periodicals on gender issues, working closely with professional authors, authoritative academics, prominent politicians, and public figures. ■

The goal of the "Policy Campaign to Promote Gender Equality in Ukraine" project is to increase the equal participation of women in political processes and decision-making. This project is being implemented by ICPS jointly with the Center for Ukrainian Reform Education (CURE) with the financial support of the European Commission.

As part of this project, analysts will prepare a Green Paper and a White Paper on gender issues in Ukraine, including the equal participation of women in political processes and decision-making. For more information about this project, visit the ICPS website at <http://www.icps.com.ua/eng/project.html?pid=122>.

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Leading Economic Indicator: Rapid economic growth will continue in Q3'07

Over Q1'07, the Leading Economic Indicator, which is calculated by ICPS to evaluate short-term economic development trends in Ukraine, continued to grow rapidly. This kind of acceleration is evidence of a foundation for maintaining a rapid pace of economic growth during Summer 2007

In Q1'07, the Leading Economic Indicator continued to grow rapidly. Annual growth of the Indicator was 22.03 in March 2007, against 20.69 in February 2007. This is noticeably above the minimum value for 2006, 19.87, which was registered in December.

In March 2007, all LEI components made a positive contribution to its growth, except for the rates for hryvnia term deposits.

The main factors behind the LEI's growth are the favorable situation on world steel markets, low inflation and active borrowing.

The upswing in the LEI in Q1'07 is the evidence of powerful positive factors for the country's economic development in Q3'07. Retrospective analysis of this Indicator shows that the insignificant slowdown in economic growth over Q1'07

was determined by a downward trend in two monetary components, long-term loans and rates for deposits, in H2'06. ■

The Leading Economic Indicator system is one contemporary instrument for making short-term forecasts for a country's economic development. The indicator that ICPS economists have developed should make it easier to assess the prospects for short-term economic development in Ukraine. For additional information, contact Oleksandr Zholid by telephone at (380-44) 272-1050 or via e-mail at ozholud@icps.kiev.ua.

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