



Fast Facts:

Gender equality in the Commonwealth

Overview

The Commonwealth is made up of 56 independent countries working together to pursue common goals, which promote **development, democracy and peace**. Our combined population is 2.7 billion, of which more than **60 per cent** is aged 29 or under.

The past century has witnessed the greatest advances for gender equality in human history. From **New Zealand** becoming the first self-governing country in 1893 to allow **women to vote** in parliamentary elections to **Sri Lanka** electing the world's first **female prime minister** in 1960, the gender gap has never narrowed so quickly. However, there is still much ground to be gained for a girl born today to be on an **equal footing** with a boy.

To assess and accelerate progress, the Commonwealth measures the progress made by its 56 member countries in four areas: women in leadership, women's economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls and gender and climate change.¹

Women in leadership

- In the parliaments of **15 Commonwealth countries**, **30 per cent** or more of members are **women**.
- **Rwanda and New Zealand** are among the six countries worldwide to have achieved **gender parity** in parliament.
- Only **one in five** Commonwealth parliamentarians is a woman.
- The parliaments of **Europe, Africa and the Caribbean and Americas** region are on average almost 25 per cent female.
- **Nineteen** Commonwealth countries have achieved the target of **30 per cent or more women ministers**.
- In the **Caribbean and Americas** region, nearly **40 per cent of seats in local government** are held by women, which is significantly higher than the Commonwealth average of **27 per cent**.
- Across the Commonwealth, women now hold nearly **38 per cent of management roles**.

Women's economic empowerment

- In the Commonwealth, girls are as likely to attend primary school as boys.
- In the Commonwealth, for every 100 men engaged in the labour market, about **77 women are also participating in the workforce**. **Africa** has the most inclusive labour market, with 85 per cent of women engaged.
- **Mozambique** has the highest percentage of

women's participation in the labour force at **98 per cent**, followed closely by Papua New Guinea at **96.5 per cent**, and **The Solomon Islands** at **96 per cent**.

- Four Commonwealth countries - **Canada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Barbados, and Singapore** - have achieved universal female enrolment in secondary schools.
- Nearly **eight** out of every **ten** girls in the Commonwealth attend secondary school.
- **Thirty-eight** member countries have legislation on sexual harassment in employment, while **34** have criminal penalties or civil remedies for it.
- **Twenty-two** countries mandate equal pay for work of equal value.
- In **49 Commonwealth countries**, women and men have equal ownership rights to immovable property.
- In **52 Commonwealth countries**, there are no restrictions on a woman opening a bank account, and in **53** countries, there are no restrictions on women signing legally binding contracts.

Ending gender-based violence

- Only **two of the 56 Commonwealth countries** for which data were available were still to introduce legislation to protect women and girls from male violence.
- In the Commonwealth, **38** countries have legislation against sexual harassment.

Gender and climate change

- According to the United Nations, **4 in 5 people displaced by climate change** globally are women.
- **Women are more likely than men to hold jobs in sectors** which are more vulnerable to climate change.
- **Nearly 21 per cent of Commonwealth countries** included women's groups and/or institutions in the development of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in 2021.
- **Africa and the Pacific** regions were the most gender inclusive, with women's groups participating in **37 per cent** and **22 per cent** of their respective NDCs.

Our work

- Our partnership with the **Global Strategy for Equality in Law for Women and Girls** by 2030 aims to eliminate discriminatory laws and provide full legal protection for 50

- million women and girls in 100 countries.
- Our work alongside the Government of **Seychelles** has revealed that **violence against women and girls costs the country USD 65 million annually**. Based on one of the report’s recommendations, we assisted Seychelles in finalising a new Domestic Violence Bill, which was passed in 2020.
- Through our collaboration with the Government of **Lesotho**, we have determined that violence against women and girls costs the country approximately **USD 113 million every year**.
- We have helped more than **25 Commonwealth countries develop gender-responsive budgeting**, which is vital for both gender justice and fiscal justice. Recently, we have trained ministries, parliamentarians and senators in Lesotho to pilot
- Recently, we have trained **60 senators, parliamentarians and ministry officials** in Lesotho to coordinate gender-responsive budgeting within the budget planning processes of the Ministry of Finance and four pilot ministries.
- Our **‘Commonwealth Says NO MORE’** campaign raises awareness and promotes action to reduce cases of domestic and sexual violence, which affects one in three women in their lifetime.
- Our efforts to develop **campaigning skills among women candidates** ahead of the 2019 elections in **Malawi** helped to increase the number of parliamentary seats held by women from 16 to 23 per cent.
- We evaluate how **gender is integrated into the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** of Commonwealth countries. Our 2021 review shows a **79 per cent** increase in the integration of gender in the second round of new or updated national plans.
- Our **guide on gender integration in NDCs** helps Commonwealth countries mainstream gender equality in climate action.
- Through our partnership with the International Trade Centre (ITC), we **deliver digital bootcamps to enhance the skills of women-owned micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises**. Hundreds of women business owners are expected to benefit from this programme.

¹ Data against some parameters is missing in a few countries. Findings come from the World Bank, Parliamentary Union Open Data, UN Women, Commonwealth Secretariat, and UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner.

2. Partners of the Global Strategy for Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030: UN Women; The African Union; Commonwealth Secretariat; Inter-Parliamentary Union; Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie; Secretaria General IberoAmericana; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; Equality Now; Global Citizen; Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights; Global Campaign for Equality in Family Law; International Association of Women Judges; International Development Law Organization; Muslims for Progressive Values; Women’s Learning Partnership; The International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute; Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; Girls Not Brides; and the World Bank.