

Chapter Five

Strategies and Campaigns of Women's Rights Organisations for the Encouragement of Women's Political Participation

Lucija Dežan

University of Maribor, Slovenia
lucija.dezan2@um.si

Suzana Košir

University of Maribor, Slovenia
suzana.kosir1@um.si

Women's rights organisations, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), advocate for women's rights and empowerment globally. Operating across local to international levels, these organisations address diverse challenges impacting women's lives, focusing on eliminating discrimination and promoting gender equality. Concurrently, governments and public agencies are tasked with implementing inclusive policies to advance gender equity. State administrations play a crucial role by integrating policies that prevent discrimination and facilitate equal opportunities. These policies encompass promoting women's leadership roles, addressing wage disparities, supporting workforce participation, ensuring educational access, diversifying recruitment practices, helping working parents, combating violence against women, and enhancing political participation through quota systems and similar supportive measures. Through policy advocacy, public awareness campaigns, research, and service provision, women's rights organisations shape policies and foster environments conducive to women's empowerment and gender parity globally and locally. This dual effort by civil society and governments underscores a comprehensive approach to advancing gender equity and inclusivity in societal structures worldwide.

Keywords: women's rights organisations, promotion, strategies, campaigns, women's political participation, gender equality

Introduction

Women's rights organisations are dedicated entities focused on advocating for and advancing the rights and empowerment of women and

girls across diverse societal contexts. Operating at multiple levels, from local grassroots initiatives to expansive international networks, these organisations address various issues that profoundly influence women's lives.

Governments and public agencies are responsible for designing and implementing policies and programmes that do not discriminate against any group in society. Similarly, state administration has a key role in promoting gender equality by integrating policies and programmes aimed at preventing discrimination and creating opportunities for equal participation of all. Such policies and programmes can include incentives to increase the representation of women in leadership positions, measures to address the pay gap and support women in the workforce. Specific ways in which state administration already promotes gender equality include equal access to education, promoting equal pay, and providing equal employment opportunities. Additionally, state administration can lead by example by including policies that strengthen diversity and the inclusion of different groups in recruitment and promotion processes. Other measures include providing support for working parents (maternity and paternity leave), addressing violence against women (e.g., funding for safe houses and support services, training in legal aid, and adopting laws and policies that protect victims), and promoting women's political participation (e.g., quota systems, incentives, and support for women running for office).

Women's Rights Organisations

Global Level

Women's rights organisations are indispensable in the ongoing quest to promote gender equality and ensure women's voices are heard and respected globally. These dynamic organisations operate at various levels, from grassroots local initiatives to influential global platforms. Central to their missions is advocating for legal and policy reforms aimed at securing and enforcing laws that safeguard women's rights. This includes lobbying for legislation against gender-based violence, advocating for equal pay for equal work, protecting reproductive rights, and promoting women's participation in political decision-making processes.

Moreover, these organisations actively promote gender equality by advocating for equitable opportunities and treatment for women in

various domains such as education, employment, healthcare, and leadership roles. They strive to dismantle barriers that perpetuate gender disparities and hinder women's full participation and advancement in society.

At the local level, women's rights organisations often focus on community-based projects that address immediate needs. These initiatives can include improving access to healthcare, providing education and vocational training, supporting victims of domestic violence, and promoting women's participation in local governance. By working closely with communities, these organisations can tailor their efforts to specific cultural and social contexts, making their interventions more effective and sustainable.

On a national scale, these organisations frequently engage in advocacy and policy work, striving to influence legislation and public policy in favour of gender equality. They may work to ensure the implementation and enforcement of laws that protect women's rights, such as those concerning reproductive health, equal pay, and protection against gender-based violence. By lobbying government officials, conducting research, and raising public awareness, they play a critical role in shaping a legal and social environment that supports women's rights and gender equality.

Women's rights organisations collaborate globally with international bodies such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and various international non-governmental organisations. They participate in global forums, contribute to international treaties and conventions, and share best practices across borders. These organisations address broad issues such as women's health rights, including access to reproductive health services; education, ensuring that girls and women have equal opportunities to learn and succeed; labour force participation, advocating for fair wages, safe working conditions, and non-discriminatory practices; political involvement, pushing for greater representation of women in decision-making positions; and justice, fighting against gender-based violence and discrimination.

By covering such a broad spectrum of issues, women's rights organisations recognise the intersectional nature of gender inequality. For instance, improving women's access to education can profoundly impact their economic opportunities, influencing their ability to participate in political processes and advocate for their rights. Similarly, addressing health rights, including reproductive health, is crucial not only for

women's physical well-being but also for their ability to engage fully in social, economic, and political life.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, commonly known as UN Women, is one of the most pivotal global organisations dedicated to advancing gender equality and women empowerment. Established in 2010, UN Women operates with the primary objective of expediting gender equality and fostering the empowerment of women on a global scale. The organisation's extensive reach spans over 90 countries, wherein it actively collaborates with governmental bodies, civil society organisations, and the private sector to formulate and implement policies and programs that promote women's rights and gender equality (UN Women, 2020).

UN Women's initiatives are comprehensive and multifaceted, addressing many issues that impact women's lives. One of the critical areas of focus for UN Women (2020) is the eradication of violence against women. The organisation conducts and supports numerous campaigns aimed at raising awareness about gender-based violence, advocating for legal reforms, and providing resources and support to survivors. These campaigns are instrumental in changing societal attitudes towards violence against women and in fostering environments where women can live free from fear and harm.

In addition to combating violence, UN Women significantly emphasises women's economic empowerment. The organisation develops and supports programs designed to enhance women's access to economic resources, including education, vocational training, and financial services. These programs are tailored to address women's unique challenges in different regions and sectors, helping them gain economic independence and improve their livelihoods. By empowering women economically, UN Women contributes to the broader goal of achieving gender equality and reducing poverty.

Furthermore, UN Women is a staunch advocate for women's participation in decision-making processes at all levels. The organisation works to increase the representation of women in political and public life, supporting initiatives that encourage women's leadership and participation in governance. This advocacy includes promoting gender quotas in political institutions, providing training and support for women candidates, and fostering networks of women leaders. By ensuring that women's voices are included in decision-making processes, UN Women helps to create more inclusive and equitable societies.

Overall, UN Women's efforts are characterised by a holistic approach to gender equality, recognising that progress in one area often supports and enhances progress in others. The organisation's work is grounded in the understanding that true gender equality requires systemic change across all sectors of society, and it strives to create an integrated framework for advancing women's rights worldwide. Through its extensive network and collaborative efforts, UN Women continues to drive the global movement towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

In addition to UN Women, the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP),¹ established in 1985, assumes a crucial role in overseeing the enforcement of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). IWRAP serves as an intermediary entity between domestic and international stakeholders, advocating for heightened global consciousness regarding the imperative for transformations in women's rights. The organisation undertakes many educational initiatives to enhance local institutions' capabilities, fostering improved integration of CEDAW at the national level. These endeavours encompass training programs, workshops, and collaborative ventures aimed at fortifying the mechanisms through which CEDAW is actualised within diverse socio-political contexts. By bolstering capacities and disseminating knowledge, IWRAP plays an instrumental role in advancing the principles enshrined in CEDAW and striving towards gender parity globally.

The Women & Politics Institute (WPI)² under the American University in Washington DC is a prominent entity committed to enhancing the empowerment of women within political arenas. Established with the primary goal of advancing the representation of women in political leadership roles across the globe, WPI undertakes multifaceted initiatives to foster inclusivity and equity in political processes. Central to its mission, WPI provides comprehensive educational programs, specialised training modules, and mentorship opportunities tailored for women aspiring to enter or excel in political spheres. These initiatives are strategically designed to equip women with the necessary skills, knowledge, and support networks to navigate and succeed in political landscapes. Moreover, WPI collaborates closely with governmental

¹ <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/iwraw/about.htm>

² <https://www.american.edu/spa/wpi>

bodies, international organisations, and non-governmental entities to advocate for policies that promote gender parity and facilitate women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Through these partnerships, WPI contributes to shaping legislative frameworks and institutional practices that foster an enabling environment for women in politics.

In addition to its educational and advocacy efforts, WPI conducts rigorous research and analysis to identify systemic challenges and barriers hindering women's political advancement. These studies illuminate women leaders' disparities and obstacles and propose evidence-based solutions and policy recommendations to overcome gender-based inequities. By disseminating research findings and best practices, WPI plays a pivotal role in informing public discourse and policy discourse on gender equality and women's political empowerment. WPI catalyses transformative change by actively empowering women to participate and lead in political arenas worldwide. Through its holistic approach encompassing education, advocacy, mentorship, and research, WPI contributes significantly to advancing the status of women in politics and advancing the broader goals of gender equality and inclusive governance.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)³ and the National Organization for Women (NOW)⁴ are two distinguished women's rights organisations that have made significant contributions to advancing gender equality and promoting women's rights globally and within the United States, respectively.

Founded in 1915 during World War I, WILPF is one of the oldest and most influential international women's peace organisations. Its founding members, including notable activists Jane Addams and Emily Greene Balch, sought to unite women worldwide to advocate for peace and social justice. WILPF operates nationally and internationally, with sections in over 30 countries. The organisation focuses on issues such as human rights, economic justice, and political participation. WILPF engages in advocacy efforts at the United Nations and other international forums to promote peacebuilding initiatives that prioritise gender perspectives and the inclusion of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction processes. Through

³ <https://www.wilpf.org>

⁴ <https://now.org>

its grassroots activism, research, and policy analysis, WILPF continues to play a crucial role in promoting a feminist approach to peace and security.

Established in 1966, NOW is the largest and oldest grassroots feminist organisation in the United States. Founded by Betty Friedan, among others, NOW aims to bring equality for all women in all aspects of society. The organisation advocates for reproductive rights, equal pay, ending gender-based violence, LGBTQ+ rights, racial justice, and other issues affecting women's lives. NOW engages in legal advocacy, lobbying efforts, public education campaigns, and grassroots organising to influence local, state, and national policy and legislative changes. The organisation has been instrumental in shaping landmark legislation such as Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in education, and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which enhances legal protections for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. NOW's network of chapters across the United States mobilises activists and supporters to work towards achieving gender equality and social justice.

WILPF and NOW exemplify women's rights organisations' diverse strategies and approaches to advance feminist agendas, protect women's rights, and promote inclusive societies. Their work underscores the importance of grassroots activism, coalition-building, policy advocacy, and international solidarity in addressing systemic inequalities and advancing the rights and well-being of women globally and within specific national contexts.

These organisations continue to be at the forefront of efforts to challenge patriarchal structures, promote women's leadership, and foster a world where all individuals, regardless of their gender, can live free from discrimination and violence. Through their ongoing efforts, WILPF and NOW contribute significantly to shaping public discourse, influencing policy decisions, and advancing the feminist agenda for equality and justice.

National Level

Women's rights organisations in Slovenia are crucial in advocating for gender equality and supporting women's political participation, as well as advocating for women's rights at the national level. These organisations undertake numerous activities, including advocacy, education, research, and provision of support services, aiming to improve the posi-

tion of women in Slovenian society. Their efforts have been instrumental in creating an environment that encourages and supports women's political engagement.

One of Slovenia's most prominent women's rights organisations is the Women's Lobby of Slovenia, established in 1996.⁵ ŽLS advocates for gender equality, women's and girls' rights, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination. It operates as a network of various non-governmental organisations and individuals engaged in women's rights issues. ŽLS is known for its advocacy work, which includes developing and implementing public awareness campaigns and exerting pressure on policymakers to enact legislation that supports gender equality. The organisation is actively involved in researching women's status in Slovenia and collaborates with international organisations on gender equality issues.

The Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture – City of Women⁶ focuses on increasing the visibility and influence of women in the cultural and public spheres. The organisation engages in various artistic projects, educational programs, and public discussions that highlight women's contributions to society and culture and advocate for gender equality.

In addition to these organisations, numerous other non-governmental organisations play a significant role in improving women's rights in Slovenia. For example, non-governmental organisations such as Amnesty International Slovenia conduct campaigns to prevent gender-based violence and improve women's access to legal remedies.⁷ Amnesty International Slovenia plays a crucial role in advocating for women's rights, particularly in human rights and legislative reform. The organisation focuses on campaigns that demand improvements in the legal framework for protecting women's rights and eliminating gender-based discrimination.

The Institute 8th of March⁸ is an organisation that advocates for the rights of women and girls and social justice. The organisation conducts campaigns, research, and education to improve women's position in Slovenia. The Institute is known for its successful campaigns for wom-

⁵ <https://www.zenskilobi.si>

⁶ <https://mestozensk.org/sl>

⁷ <https://www.amnesty.si>

⁸ <https://www.8marec.si>

en's rights related to reproduction and against discrimination, as well as gender-based violence.

Similarly, webpage spol.si⁹ presents an independent and non-partisan media outlet focused on gender-related issues. In an analytical manner, it responds to gender inequalities, the phenomenon of sexism, and the reproduction of stereotypes in various social fields (politics, media, art, culture, science, etc.). In doing so, it covers a range of subject areas, e.g., the division of labour in the household, political representation and segregation in the labour market, violence in the private sphere, sexism in the media, etc. The portal is published by Vita Activa, the Association for the Promotion of Equality and Pluralism.

These organisations form a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality and ensuring that women's voices are heard and considered in all aspects of social and political life in Slovenia. Their efforts are crucial for further progress in gender equality in Slovenia.

Strategies and Campaigns

EU Level

At the international level, the EU has aligned its efforts towards gender equality with global initiatives such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which is part of the United Nations. CEDAW is a legally binding international women's bill of rights instrument that commits countries to promote gender equality. The central part of the convention consists of the commitment that state parties shall take measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life and to ensure that women are treated equally to men in these domains:

- The right to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be elected to all publicly elected bodies.
- Participation in the formulation and implementation of government policy and the exercise of public functions at all levels of government.
- Participation in non-governmental organisations and associations.

⁹ <https://spol.si>

Such initiatives provide a platform and legal guidelines for the EU to collaborate with other countries and organisations to achieve gender equality. One of the essential European institutions that supports these efforts is the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE),¹⁰ which was established in 2006 with the aim of promoting and strengthening gender equality.

Generally, the EU combats gender inequality through legislation, gender mainstreaming, and specific measures for women's empowerment. An example of such legislation is the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 (European Commission, 2020), which sets among its main goals challenging gender stereotypes, closing the gender care gap, addressing gender pay and pension gaps, as well as achieving gender balance in decision-making and politics. Among its significant milestones, the agenda highlights the new EU-wide work-life balance rights for parents and carers that started applying in 2022 and the #EndGender-Stereotypes campaign. The latter tackled gender stereotypes affecting men and women in various social spheres, such as career choices, sharing care responsibilities, and decision-making.

Considering action plans, Gender Action Plan III (European Commission, 2024) tackles the period from 2021 to 2025 and sets as its key priorities empowering women and girls and ensuring their equal participation in society. The document points out that currently, no country in the world is on track to achieve gender equality by 2030 and that the COVID-19 crisis disproportionately affected women and girls; thus, the need to strengthen the efforts is crucial. The document provides the EU with a policy framework emphasising five pillars of action:

- By introducing rules for applying and monitoring gender mainstreaming across sectors, the goal is that 85% of all new actions throughout external relations will contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment by 2025.
- Close cooperation with member states and partners at multilateral, regional, and country levels is needed to develop a common approach and select strategic issues.
- Focus on the key thematic areas to achieve accelerating progress. This includes social and political empowerment of women and girls and the promotion of equal participation and leadership, as

¹⁰ <https://eige.europa.eu>

well as bringing the gender perspective to new policy areas (i.e. green transition and digital transformation).

- Leading by example; the EU should establish gender-responsive and gender-balanced leadership at top political and management levels.
- Adopting a new monitoring and evaluation system approach to increase public accountability and ensure transparency and access to information on its assistance to gender equality worldwide.

In addition, the European Commission (EC) established dedicated boards such as the High-level group on gender mainstreaming and the Advisory committee on equal opportunities for women and men (Commission decision of 16 June 2008 relating to the setting up of an Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2008/590/EC), 2008). Since 2003, both groups have been helping the EC prepare the report on equality between women and men and helped the EC to prepare and implement activities aimed at promoting equal opportunities for women and men.

Lastly, various initiatives, projects, and activities have been funded through EC programs. Two important programs are the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme and Horizon Europe. These programs aim to promote and protect specific rights that derive from EU law, including the promotion of gender equality and supporting initiatives to improve equality between women and men.

Apart from legislative measures and project activities, there are also measures proposed to strengthen participation and representation in the form of, for example, a quota system. The quotas determine the numerical sex ratio on the list of candidates either for political decision-making bodies or on the lists of candidates for national representative bodies. Quotas can be defined in different ways depending on their purpose, timing, legal force, the definition of the proportion, and who determines them. In Europe, quotas are in force in eleven EU Member States: Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain (and in eight other European countries). These laws usually require at least 30% of candidates to be a national MP (in France and Belgium the quota is 50%). As Galligan (2021) notes, in countries with legal quotas, the proportion of women in parliamentary seats has increased from 18% in 2004 to 34% today. In addition, the EC assumes that countries with implemented quota

systems will reach gender balance much sooner than countries without additional measurements. The latter can anticipate reaching gender balance in decision-making positions by 2039 (European Commission, 2024).

Other measures proposed include awareness-raising activities for young people, especially young men, mainstreaming gender equality in education, balanced media coverage of all candidates regardless of their sex or gender, workshops for journalists on conscious and unconscious bias that reproduces gender stereotypes, and similar (O'Connell, 2013, p. 24). The latter is also part of the document 'Improving Parliament: Creating a Better and More Representative House,' where the demand for increased attention to sexism in media and analysis of women's media representation is emphasised (Kelly & White, 2016, p. 34).

In addition, Lovenduski & Norris (1993) emphasises three different strategies that political parties can adopt to raise the number of women in politics:

- *Rhetorical strategies.* Women's demands should be part of political campaigns supported by clear messages from relevant political actors that women in politics matter. When political parties attempt to increase the number of women in politics and tackle gender imbalance, women can anticipate effective measures and start to consider themselves as adequate for political participation.
- *Strategies of positive and affirmative action.* Political parties develop training, workshops, financial support, and similar mechanisms for women's political participation in collaboration with civic women's organisations.
- *Strategies of positive discrimination.* Several seats are set for political bodies or electoral lists for women. However, the more important political positions are at stake, the less fond political parties are to implement strategies of positive discrimination during the candidate selection process.

Rhetorical strategies usually significantly contribute to the self-confidence of women candidates, especially in public speaking and argumentation, which positively affects voters. Positive and affirmative strategies contribute to confident and determined efforts to win. In contrast, positive discrimination strategies artificially create the need

for female candidates, consequently affecting the pool of competent candidates (Kelly & White, 2016).

We shall conclude this part with several strategies that could increase the participation of women in politics presented by the United Nations Development Programme (2012) that are still relevant 12 years later. Among them are, for example:

- Training for newly elected representatives that support the development of necessary skills that are particularly important in the field of gender equality (sensibilisation of political members is also part of this measurement).
- Supporting and developing reforms that are friendly to women and contribute to a more inclusive political culture.
- Supporting women's associations and parliament's boards.

National Context

In Slovenia, the Equal Opportunities Division at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities¹¹ has been most involved in addressing gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality, as these concepts are most intertwined with its activities. The foundation for state activities related to gender equality was laid with the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act established in 2002. The act determined common ground for improving women's social position and developing equal opportunities for men and women in political, economic, social, educational and other areas of social life. In Article 31, the Act demands from political parties that are part of the official register to develop action plans related to gender equality and gender balance. Another significant contribution of this act was its demand that all ministries establish coordinators for equal opportunities for women and men (for municipalities to appoint such coordinators is only recommended). Until 2020, these recommendations were followed in 20% of local communities in Slovenia, while 5% developed action plans. In these, local authorities developed gender equality action plans based on national resolutions and guidelines. These documents include measures to achieve the set objectives in the areas of eliminating gender-

¹¹ <https://www.gov.si/en/state-authorities/ministries/ministry-of-labour-family-social-affairs-and-equal-opportunities/about-the-ministry-of-labour-family-social-affairs-and-equal-opportunities/equal-opportunities-division>

based inequalities in employment, balancing work and private or family life, reducing inequalities in education, culture and the media, equality in social inclusion, protecting and promoting women's and men's health, and ensuring a balanced representation of women and men in decision-making positions. Turning back to the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act, the document established a legal framework to ensure gender equality, providing a basis for enacting policies that promote equal rights and opportunities.

Another vital document in this regard is the Resolution for the national programme for equal opportunities for women and men (*Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2015–2020*, 2015). The document was the first to comprehensively define gender equality policies in six priority areas: gender mainstreaming, work, knowledge society, social well-being, gender relations, and decision-making processes. The first national programme tackled the period from 2005 to 2013. Its evaluation pointed out increased visibility and sensitivity to gender equality issues in society (e.g., increased monitoring of gender discrimination in employment by the Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia and development of tools to monitor the incidence of sexual and other harassment in the workplace), the introduction of new training, activities, and programmes (e.g. Women's Career Promotion Programme, Active Dad and Active All media campaign on gender roles and household responsibilities), and legislative changes (the Parental Care and Family Benefits Act has been more targeted in terms of the equal use of parental leave). In addition, a pilot project to mentor young women to enter politics was launched. Participants contributed the proposals for the It Pays Off conference organised by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the international conference Women 20 years after Beijing (*Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2023–2030*, 2023).

The second Resolution for the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men addressed the period from 2015 to 2020. The final version was developed following the recommendations from the Expert Council for Gender Equality, established in 2015 and has been chaired by the Minister of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities since then. The programme focused on eight areas: equal economic independence, reconciliation of work and private or family life, knowledge society without gender stereotypes, so-

cial inclusion, health, balanced representation, violence against women, and gender equality in foreign policy and international development cooperation. The document included activities to promote women's entrepreneurship, strategies to eliminate gender stereotypes in career choices, social protection programmes with the active involvement of Roma and migrant women, programmes to empower disadvantaged groups of women, and activities to promote active fatherhood and eliminate stereotypes about women's and men's roles in society. Moreover, measures were taken to update the curricula from a gender perspective, promote equal opportunities for women and men in sports, and promote gender-sensitive language practices (Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2015–2020, 2015).

The third Resolution for the national programme for equal opportunities for women and men covers the period from 2023 to 2030 (Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2023–2030, 2023). It tackles six key areas: the gender gap in employment and financial independence of women and men, health, education, gender-based violence, decision-making and external affairs. One of the main goals of this new national programme is to improve the national gender equality index by more than 10% and to reach index 78 in 2030. The basis for the programme's latest version was evaluation of the previous programme conducted in 2021. The evaluation demonstrated that activities combating gender stereotypes in youth's career choices were developed while highlighting research activities on gender equality and curriculum changes about gender equality. Moreover, additional funds were allocated to projects promoting work-life balance, active fatherhood, and initiatives combating online violence and harassment of girls and women (Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2023–2030, 2023). The latter is especially important since women (especially in politics) are increasingly exposed to online violence; the study from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018) showed that 85,2% of female respondents experienced psychological violence, while almost 50% received death or rape threats directed towards them, their children or other family members. These threats were expressed using social media accounts or emails.¹²

This new strategy also set specific goals, measures and indicators

¹² <https://www.gov.si teme/enakost-zensk-in-moskih>

for each of the six areas to tackle various challenges that stand in the way of gender equality, e.g., the pay gap, a disproportionate amount of care work, and aggravated risk of poverty and social exclusion for women. For example, under the goal ‘balanced representation of women and men on all levels of decision-making in politics,’ the measurement proposes changes in election legislation and supporting programmes and projects encouraging young women to participate in politics (Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2023–2030, 2023).

EU Projects

The development of various interventions, workshops, and training presents an institutionalised attempt to combat low levels of women in decision-making positions. The common goal of all these activities is the political empowerment of girls and young women, raising awareness of the importance of women’s inclusion in politics, creating a space for gaining experience and developing materials which can help civil society in the political socialisation of individuals. Many activities have been carried out to understand and tackle barriers preventing women from participating equally in decision-making processes. For example, awareness-raising campaigns on the benefits and advantages of gender balance for different target groups were carried out, contributing to raising the political culture and creating a political climate more favourable to gender equality policies. Moreover, research on possible measures to ensure a more balanced gender representation in political decision-making and analyses of elections from the perspective of gender balance, aimed at examining the impact of quotas on gender balance on candidate lists and women’s electability and representation, have also shown where significant progress has been made and where challenges remain. This progress would not have been possible without civil society’s continued pressure on the party leadership to allow women to stand in electable constituencies and electable slots on lists.

At the EU level, the European Women’s Lobby addresses the empowerment of young women for political engagement. It organises online seminars on raising awareness of women’s rights, advocacy, equal representation in politics, women’s political participation, and the like. Among their key projects, the EXCHANGE practice stands out; it is a multi-day event aimed at exchanging ideas for increasing the participa-

tion of women in politics on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean (European Women's Lobby, 2016).

In 2020, the Council of Europe released a toolkit for local authorities and civil society organisations that focuses on the participation of girls and young women from vulnerable groups in political and public decision-making processes at the local level. The tool presents the characteristics of the target group, the methodology of development and use of the training manual, examples of practical exercises for group and individual work, and examples of good practices at the local level (Golub et al., 2020). Among the presented projects, the Grow Up – Girls' Leadership Academy aimed to develop leadership skills among young women and girls. This project improved participants' knowledge of electoral and legislative processes.

National Projects

Among activities in Slovenia, the Women Can Do It project from 2002 presents a series of workshops for training women for political action, spilling over into Women Can Do It II. Both projects aimed to strengthen women's political power and influence in parliamentary parties. The participants were part of the seminars on women's representation, issues of gender inequality, and gender equality policies (Robnik, 2016). The project also designed criteria that determine to what extent certain political parties are friendly to women. Among these criteria are, for example, that gender equality is one of the main programme values of the political party, implementation of special measures for gender equality, unlimited opportunity to discuss matters related to gender equality within the party and public debates, and collaboration with non-governmental and civic organisations that support women's actions (Neubauer, 2002). Another related project was Roma Women Can Do It; the project encouraged Roma women to become more involved in public and political life. At the seminars, the participants were encouraged to build solidarity with women within the Roma community and connect with local and state politicians (Robnik, 2016).

In 2011, a mentoring programme was launched to enable young women to meet and learn from women's politicians. Women students from three Slovenian public universities (Ljubljana, Maribor, and Primorska) who expressed political interest were given the opportunity to participate in the mentoring day. On International Women's Day, 30 es-

tablished women politicians and women students spent a day together (Robnik, 2016).

Regarding integrating the principle of gender equality in policymaking (i.e., gender mainstreaming) in Slovenia, activities have been carried out within the framework of individual projects and with the support of EU funds. For example, in 2007, the project Gender Equality in Local Development took place; the civil servants in local communities in Slovenia, Luxemburg and Denmark prepared guidelines on gender mainstreaming in local development and participated in a series of workshops aimed at identifying issues related to gender equality (Robnik, 2016). A year later, a follow-up project informed on the importance of integrating the principle of gender equality in the state administration. The project included an analysis of tools for ensuring gender equality in the state administration, workshops for representatives of the state administration, and training for coordinators of equal opportunities between women and men in the ministries. From 2010 to 2012, the EU project Integration of Gender Mainstreaming Principle – Strategically was implemented. The project included a series of research, training, and workshops that contributed to the development of an online tool for solving gender equality issues and the preparation of guidelines for the integration of the principle of gender equality in development policies (Robnik, 2016).

During the project Meta dekleta, supported by EU funds, free workshops were organised in various Slovenian cities on effective communication with the media and the modern design of advocacy campaigns. The consortium created a handbook that contains the presentations of vital political bodies in Slovenia and a special chapter dedicated to local self-government (*Ženske za politiko, politika za vse*, n.d.). Another similar project was the project Winning Political Equality with New Names, where academic and research institutions, Slovenian municipalities and the Women's Lobby of Slovenia collaborated with the support of Norway Grants. The project identified obstacles that prevent women from participating in local and national politics. Based on their findings, the consortium developed support strategies and awareness-raising activities for women, men, professionals, gatekeepers and the general public. During the project, women candidates willing to participate in politics were identified and empowered with the necessary knowledge and support.

Political parties within their youth groups carry out similar projects.

In 2016, the Youth Forum of Social Democrats organised an international seminar for young women in politics entitled 'Empowerment for Participation.' The seminar aimed to empower young members with skills in communication, networking, public speaking, and campaign planning (Mladi forum SD, 2016). Part of the Social Democrats is also the Women's Forum,¹³ which presents one of the most active women's forums within Slovenian political parties. It was established in 1993 as an autonomous political association that ensures opportunities for the party to develop gender equality politics, strengthens the political power of women members, and enables civic groups with similar goals to have a direct impact on the party and parliament. In their action plan, they emphasise the importance of regular press conferences with special attention given to gender equality in public life, organisation of training for women, designing the list of perspectives and successful women that could be politically engaged, creating conditions for a smooth transition of young women from the Youth Forum to the highest party positions, and ensuring support for young women who aims for a local political career. Right-wing political parties, the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)¹⁴ and the New Slovenia (NSI)¹⁵ also have Women's Board or Women's Association; on their websites, they highlight support for gender balance in public life, equal opportunities in professional and personal development, support for women's associations in EU and third countries, etc.

Regarding projects specifically focused on young people, #jezikza-volitve (eng. language for elections)¹⁶ was implemented by the Youth Cultural Centre Maribor in 2018 and 2019. With mentors and lecturers, more than 500 young people formulated proposals based on their expectations regarding youth over four years. The project's long-term goal was to increase young people's motivation to participate in elections and equip young people with the skills to search for relevant information – both represent essential elements of electoral culture. The first workshop strengthened the skills of critical thinking and argumentation, the second informed about the electoral process and the political system at the local, national, and European levels, and the third fo-

¹³ <https://socialnidemokrati.si/tag/zenski-forum-sd>

¹⁴ <https://www.sds.si/o-stranki/organiziranost/interesne-organizacije/zo/o-zenskem-odboru>

¹⁵ <https://nsi.si/org-oblike/zenska-zveza>

¹⁶ <https://mkc.si/jezik-za-volitve>

cused on becoming acquainted with the election programmes. By the end of this project, young people formulated proposals and later discussed them with the mayoral candidates in the city of Maribor. Following these interventions and young people's opinions, measures that would draw more young women into politics are mentoring system, organised training on politics for younger women, raising awareness among younger women about the existence of women's groups within politics, and the family-friendly reorganisation of the political field (e.g., organised childcare, shorter timetables).

Intentions for the political activation of women are also part of the project that started in 2022 under The Women's Lobby of Slovenia.¹⁷ In cooperation with the American Embassy, the organisation started the Voting Literacy for Gender Equality project. Project activities included workshops with prominent Slovenian women who were holders of elected positions at the municipal and state levels. The roundtables and workshops were recorded and are available online. The conversations with the youth took place in different Slovenian cities, while topics extended from active citizenship, civil society and politics to electoral systems and women in politics.

Conclusion

Women's rights organisations are pivotal in the global drive for gender equality, playing a crucial role in combating discrimination and violence against women while advocating for equal opportunities in all societal domains. These organisations operate at various levels, from grassroots initiatives to international networks, addressing a broad spectrum of issues that profoundly impact women's lives. By striving to eliminate discriminatory practices and promoting gender parity across society, these organisations contribute significantly to fostering a more just and inclusive world for women and girls worldwide.

The efforts of women's rights organisations are multi-faceted, focusing on a range of issues that include but are not limited to gender-based violence, economic inequality, political representation, and access to education and healthcare. These organisations employ various strategies to achieve their goals, including advocacy, public awareness campaigns, legal aid, and support services. Grassroots initiatives often work directly with communities to challenge local norms and practices

¹⁷ <https://www.zenskilobi.si>

that perpetuate gender inequality, while international networks lobby for global standards and conventions that promote women's rights.

Governments and public agencies are also responsible for advancing gender equality through policy formulation and implementation. By enacting non-discriminatory policies and programs, governments can enhance opportunities for women's leadership, address disparities such as the gender pay gap, and support women's integration into the workforce through initiatives like parental leave and anti-violence measures. Furthermore, governmental actions exemplify diversity and inclusivity, shaping societal norms and practices on a broader scale.

Effective policy measures include legislative reforms that mandate equal pay for equal work, protect women from harassment and violence, and ensure equal access to education and employment opportunities. Governments can also implement gender-sensitive budgeting to ensure that public spending addresses the specific needs of women and girls. Governments can promote a more balanced and inclusive decision-making process by setting quotas for women's representation in political bodies and leadership positions.

The European Union (EU) strategically aligns its gender equality efforts with global frameworks like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and initiatives under the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). These frameworks underscore the EU's commitment to promoting women's participation in political and public life, safeguarding their electoral rights, and facilitating their engagement in governmental policymaking at all levels.

Central to these efforts are EU institutions such as the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), supported by legislative frameworks like the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025. This strategy aims to challenge gender stereotypes, reduce gender gaps in caregiving and pay, and achieve gender balance in decision-making roles. The strategy also emphasises the importance of integrating a gender perspective into all EU policies and activities, ensuring that gender equality is considered in areas ranging from economic policy to health and education.

Additionally, the Gender Action Plan III (2021–2025) outlines priorities to empower women and integrate gender perspectives into emerging policy areas such as green transition and digital transformation. This plan enhances global accountability through improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, ensuring that progress towards gen-

der equality is tracked and reported. The plan also supports initiatives that address the specific needs of women in crises, such as those affected by conflict or natural disasters, recognising the disproportionate impact these events can have on women and girls.

Initiatives like the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (REC) and Horizon 2020 & Horizon Europe further bolster the EU's commitment to gender equality by funding projects that promote women's empowerment across Europe. These programs provide financial support for initiatives that aim to improve women's participation in the labour market, support women entrepreneurs, and foster gender equality in research and innovation. By investing in these areas, the EU not only promotes gender equality but also contributes to broader economic and social development goals.

These comprehensive strategies at both organisational and governmental levels aim to foster an inclusive and equitable political landscape where women's participation and representation are significantly enhanced. The combined efforts of women's rights organisations and governmental bodies are essential in creating an environment where women can thrive and contribute fully to society. By working together, these entities can ensure that gender equality is not just a goal but a reality for women and girls worldwide. This collaborative approach underscores the importance of continued advocacy, policy innovation, and resource allocation to address the persistent barriers to gender equality and create a more inclusive and just society for all.

References

- Commission decision of 16 June 2008 relating to the setting up of an Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2008/590/EC). (2008). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 190, 17–21.
- Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW). (1979). <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>
- European Commission. (2020). *A union of equality: Gender equality strategy 2020–2025* (COM(2020) 152 final). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152>
- European Commission. (2024, 25 November). *Gender action plan – putting women and girls' rights at the heart of the global recovery for a gender-equal world*. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2184

- European Women's Lobby. (2016, 23 November). *EXCHANGE – transatlantic cooperation to smash the glass ceiling*. <https://womenlobby.org/ExCHANGE?lang=en>
- Galligan, Y. (2021). Gender equality politics. In D. M. Farrell & N. Hardiman (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Irish Politics* (pp. 57–70). Oxford University Press.
- Golub, O., Volodko, V., & Korniienko, H. (2020). *Participation of young women and girls from disadvantaged groups in political and public decision-making processes at local level: Toolkit for local authorities and civil society organisations*. Council of Europe Publishing.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2018). *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe* (Issue Briefs). <https://www.ipu.org/file/5472/download>
- Kelly, R., & White, I. (2016). *All-women shortlists* (Briefing Paper No. 5057). House of Commons. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05057/SN05057.pdf>
- Lovenduski, J., & Norris, P. (1993). Introduction: The dynamics of gender and party. In J. Lovenduski & P. Norris (Eds.), *Gender and party politics* (pp. 1–15). Sage Publications.
- Mladi forum SD. (2016, 9 May). *Mednarodni seminar Mladega foruma za večjo participacijo mladih žensk v politiki*. <https://socialnidemokrati.si/mednarodni-seminar-mladega-foruma-za-vecjo-participacijo-mladih-zensk-v-politiki/>
- Neubauer, V. (Ed.). (2002). *Ženske to zmoremo II*. Vlada Republike Slovenije, Urad za enake možnosti.
- O'Connell, H. (2013). *Implementing the European Union gender action plan 2010–2015: Challenges and opportunities*. European Development Cooperation Strengthening Programme (EDCSP). <https://media.odi.org/documents/8305.pdf>
- Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2015–2020 (RENPEMŽM15-20). (2015). *Uradni list Republike Slovenije* (84). <https://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?sop=2015-01-3307>
- Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2023–2030 (RENPEMŽM23-30). (2023). *Uradni list Republike Slovenije* (105). <https://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?sop=2023-01-2971>
- Robnik, S. (Ed.). (2016). *Gender equality – the (still) unfinished story: Review of developments in the field of gender equality in Slovenia 1991–2016*. Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MDDSZ/Dokumenti/Enakost-spolov/Publikacije/beda27c4bc/NFMPublikacijaZgodovinskiPregledAN.pdf>

UN Women. (2020). *The world for women and girls: Annual report 2019–2020*.

United Nations Development Programme. (2012). *Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Good Practices Guide to Promote Women's Political Participation*.

Zakon o enakih možnostih žensk in moških (ZEMŽM). (2002). *Uradni list Republike Slovenije* (59). <https://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?sop=2002-01-2837>

Ženske za politiko, politika za vse: politika za začetnice. (N.d.). <https://metinalista.si/wp-content/uploads/MetaDekleta-politikazazacetnice2.pdf>