

## ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT THE INTRODUCTION OF GENDER QUOTAS IN THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL PARLIAMENTS IN **LEBANON**



Lebanese women live under a patriarchal and sectarian system. The national culture, customs and traditions dictate gender roles that marginalize women, restrict their potential and confine them to the private sphere, excluding them from public life. There are numerous discriminatory laws against women that the Lebanese Parliament has not amended despite long advocacy efforts from the Lebanese feminist movement.<sup>1</sup>

Women representation in the parliament has been improving but it remains very low. The 2022-parliamentary elections recorded the highest-ever number of women elected.<sup>2</sup> Eight women out of 128 MPs (6.25 percent). Similarly, there has been no change in the low representation of women at the local level. For the last Municipal elections held in 2016, women won only 5.4 percent of the total number of the Municipal seats.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, for the last local (*Mukhtar*) elections held in 2016, women won only 1,9 percent of the total number of Mukhtar seats.<sup>4</sup>

1 UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). (2019). Gender Justice and Law in the Arab States Region. <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/publications/gender-justice-and-law-study> and <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/publications/gender-justice-and-law>

2 Lebanese Parliamentary Elections: Milestones and Lessons Learned, UNDP (2022). <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/publications/2022-parliamentary-elections-milestones-and-lessons-learned>

3 <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/publications/women-municipal-elections-2016>

4 <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/publications/women-municipal-elections-2016>

The 1926 Lebanese constitution does not include specific reference to sex or gender equality or even non-discrimination against women. It states, however, that all Lebanese are equal before the law and equally enjoy civil and political rights (Article 7). Article 12 of the constitution also guarantees equal opportunities to hold all public positions.

Electoral Law No. 44/17 of June 2017 provides for the election of 128 members of parliament for a four-year term through a system of proportional representation with open lists. The electoral system is based on a confessional distribution of seats, half of the seats being reserved for Muslims and the other half for Christians. While voters can vote for any candidate in their district, candidates can only run for a seat corresponding to their confession.

The law does not consider the equitable distribution of seats in its establishment of major electoral constituencies, and it does not give citizens' votes equal weight or value due to the great variation in the number of voters from one constituency to another. The preferential vote adopted in the electoral law led to intense competition within the same list and to men securing the majority, with parties distributing preferential votes to men based on the prevailing patriarchal mentality and the unfavourable views towards women's potential and opportunities for political leadership. The electoral law does not include any quota dictating the number of seats reserved for women or as a requirement in the formation of lists.

## UNDP's role in the adoption of TSMs

UNDP's engagement begins with the first phase of the UNDP Electoral Support Programme, which was set up in 2012 in preparation for the planned 2013 parliamentary elections. This programme comprised several elements: an advocacy campaign for the introduction of TSMs in the electoral law to bolster women's representation in parliament; capacity-building for women candidates; and campaigns to raise awareness about women's political rights.

As elections did not happen in 2013, the Electoral Support Programme reviewed its strategic programming. In partnership with national CSOs and the National Commission of Lebanese Women (NCLW), large-scale campaigns were designed to boost knowledge about the concepts of gender equality and TSMs. These campaigns targeted the general public and political parties, who both considered TSMs as a special favour for women which violated the principle of equality before the law between men and women. Various other activities were designed and implemented to challenge the traditional stereotypes of women being incapable of governing. Women political party members and the few women members of parliament (4 women MPs from 2009 to 2018) were trained on diverse issues dealing with the national and international frameworks on women's rights. They received specific training to reinforce their leadership skills and expand their networks notably with civil society. From 2012 to 2017, CSOs continued to make demands for women's quotas not only at the parliamentary level, but also at the municipal level. However, since there was no date scheduled for the parliamentary elections which, had been delayed twice, their demand remained irrelevant.

In 2017, prior to the 2018 planned parliamentary elections, the UNDP Electoral Support Programme, in collaboration with *Women in Front* (Nissa' a Ra' idat),<sup>5</sup> an NGO, conducted an awareness campaign

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5 [www.womeninfront.org](http://www.womeninfront.org)



on the gender imbalances and inequality in Lebanese politics, and emphasized the importance of institutionalizing a women's quota. The project created two animated video clips that highlighted some of the controversies surrounding women's quotas and presented arguments in favour of the quota as a "temporary measure to get us back on track."<sup>6</sup> That same year, UNDP established, through its parliamentary support project<sup>7</sup> and in cooperation with the Women in Parliament coalition, the "National Coalition to Promote Women's Political Representation." The coalition developed a set of demands for a women's quota that was later reviewed and approved by the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW). These recommendations were presented as a draft law proposal to include in the new electoral law and were submitted to the Office of the Minister of State for Women Affairs (OMSWA) for adoption. Unfortunately, these proposals were not included among the draft law proposals to include in the new electoral law. The new electoral law adopted in 2017 for the parliamentary election to take place in 2018, did not include any gender quota, however it adopted for the first time proportional representation.

After the 2018 parliamentary elections, the UNDP Electoral Assistance Project continued working with CSOs to raise public awareness of the importance of women in leadership, politics and the electoral process. Gender-based violence in politics was also among the main subjects addressed by the partner CSOs.

## UNDP's support to the policy campaign efforts

In the year preceding the 2022 parliamentary elections in Lebanon, the UNDP Electoral Assistance Project, with the financial support of the European Union, the United States, Germany and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, launched a policy advocacy campaign for the adoption of a gender quota in the electoral law with the aim to increase women's representation in the parliament.

The policy advocacy campaign was designed and implemented in partnership with *Fiftyfifty* (<https://fiftyfiftylb.com/>), a Lebanese NGO comprising women and men aimed at promoting gender equality in private and public sectors and focused mainly on political decision-making positions. *Fiftyfifty* understood that for change to happen, both the electoral law needs to be amended to include a women's quota and a change in the political party leaders' practices needs to occur.

The primary aim of the advocacy campaign was to integrate a TSM into the electoral law. The objectives included formulating a TSM proposal that aligns with the sectarian quota to ensure its acceptance, empowering women to participate in legislative contests, and shifting the perspectives of men political party leaders to support the inclusion of a gender quota in the electoral law.

The campaign was initiated by conducting research to identify the best possible scenarios to implement a gender quota or any other alternative TSM in Lebanon and accordingly preparing a draft to amend the Election Law No. 44/2017. The research and the draft legal provisions were devised by Lebanese experts selected by *Fiftyfifty* among prominent university teachers and civil society activists who are not seen as supporting any political parties or sectarian group. The draft legal provisions proposed:

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6 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-women-are-almost-invisible-lebanons-parliament>

7 [UNDP Technical Support to the Lebanese Parliament project](#)

- ◆ The introduction of a gender quota which takes into account the sectarian distribution;
- ◆ 26 reserved seats for women divided equally between Muslims and Christians (around 20 percent of parliament seats);
- ◆ 40 percent gender quota on the candidate lists which allows women to run as part of the quota or outside of it, which they would indicate on their candidacy application; and
- ◆ The introduction of a provision for private media outlets to refrain from disparaging and gender biased reporting on women candidates.<sup>8</sup>

To build support for the draft legal provisions, *FiftyFifty* and the national experts conducted several consultative meetings with relevant CSOs such as the electoral consortium of domestic election observation NGOs (LADE – LTA – LUPD – Maharat), women CSOs and the National Council for Lebanese Women (NCLW).

Next, UNDP backed the creation of a “Civil Coalition,” consisting of over 50 civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, and experts. Led by Fiftyfifty, the coalition’s primary mission was to advocate for the gender quota. The “Civil Coalition for Quota” discussed the draft legal provisions and confirmed feasibility in the Lebanese political environment. It also discussed and agreed on the advocacy strategy, tactics and tools to be produced and used.

The project produced advocacy tools such as four animated videos and two TV spots on the quota proposal,<sup>9</sup> misconceptions around the quota,<sup>10</sup> the discrimination Lebanese women are facing in political life and women’s poor representation in politics.<sup>11</sup> All the advocacy tools called for the adoption of a gender quota.

Men and women journalists as well as men champion activists, experts and politicians were identified and called upon by the “Civil Coalition for Quota” to join and support the policy advocacy campaign. As a result, the videos were promoted on three main Lebanese TV stations: MTV, LBCI, and ALJADEED.

The coalition agreed with all the women NGOs who were non-formally part of the “Civil Coalition” to adopt a unified message on their social media calling for the adoption of the gender quota in the electoral law and for the endorsement of a code of ethics by political parties to declare both that they support the inclusion of women on their electoral lists and the proposed new law.

The draft legal provisions to amend the Election Law No. 44/2017 were initially presented in a press conference with the participation of emerging and traditional political groupings as well as candidates from the 2018 elections. All attendees agreed on the feasibility of the proposed gender quota and

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8 “Article 74: The obligations of private media outlets to refrain from publishing or promoting anything that undermines the dignity and status of women or limits their participation in political life.”

9 26 reserved seats + 40 percent candidate on the lists is the best formula for the women's quota: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-\\_qFpXS4g6M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_qFpXS4g6M)

10 The women's quota is not a discrimination against men, it is a temporary positive measure to correct the imbalance in the political representation: <https://www.facebook.com/fiftyfiftylb/videos/876349996493581/>

11 The percentage of women's representation in Parliament is only 6 out of 128 seats. The solution?: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImtNcYdBFOU> ; Women are present every day and everywhere and they fulfill all their duties, why don't they enjoy all their rights?: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrbWUdhBmYk>; We need 100 years to reach equality if we don't take any measures. We will not wait 100 years : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziwsZKgECjU&t=5s>; We are tired of discrimination and masculinity, we want to participate in decision-making: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuoJekx2bNA>

several women NGOs not formally part of the “Civil Coalition” expressed their strong support to the proposal and advocacy efforts.

The lobbying for the endorsement of the proposed gender quota started with seven political parties represented within the parliament who the “Civil Coalition” knew they would either vote for the gender quota, or, in case there is no vote in the parliament, would adopt internally some kind of gender quota. The first meetings were held with political parties’ women’s wings and in some cases with some political parties’ executive commission members. The “Civil Coalition” quickly realized that they needed to do more to influence political party decision-making process and decided to also engage political party leaders directly.

A delegation composed of representatives from *Fiftyfifty*, the “Civil Coalition”, the experts who prepared the draft legal provisions on the gender quota, a famous man journalist, champions among men MPs and a representative from the NCLW organized face-to-face meetings with the leaders of the seven main political parties. The delegation was gender balanced to convey the message to the political party leaders that women representation in parliament is a salient issue in public discussions and even more it is requested by the society.

In parallel to these face-to-face meetings with the political leaders, men and women journalists who partnered with *Fiftyfifty* and the civil coalition in this advocacy campaign, organized various TV shows with multiple political party leaders. During the show, the latter were publicly asked to answer questions related to their opinion on women’s political participation, the gender quota, as well as their commitments in terms of women’s nomination on party lists and party programme to address women’s low status in the society. These TV shows served to put pressure on the political party leaders who had to unveil their stance on women’s political rights and status within the party.

The draft legal provisions on the gender quota were submitted to the parliament by a joint parliamentary committee through women MP Inaya Ezzedine, an Amal Movement representative. However, the proposed law was not adopted. It was not even discussed as the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, who was chairing the committee, said: “We’re running short on time, we cannot discuss these new details.”

This defeat did not refrain the Civil Coalition from continuing the advocacy campaign for the adoption of a gender quota by political parties. The NCLW in coordination with the Civil Coalition started a second round of visits to political party leaders to challenge them on their pro-women stances on the media.

In partnership with UN Women, several aspirant candidates (political party members and independent) from all the constituencies and all the religious groups undertook training on electoral media campaigns. UNDP and UN Women supported them to intensify their appearance in the media. Journalists who partnered with the Civil Coalition played a crucial role in giving women aspirant candidates visibility and spaces to discuss their views on how to address the political, social and economic issues the country is facing. This was done mainly through a socio-political TV Programme on LBCI which enabled 15 potential women candidates to show their expertise and determination to improve the country’s conditions. This tactic was meant to influence indirectly political party leaders who continued to claim that women do not want to run for office.

In parallel, and before the end of the candidate nomination, the Civil Coalition prepared and through social media, with the consent of women, disseminated a leaflet representing 220 aspirant women





candidates (Political Parties' affiliated and independent). This tactic embarrassed political parties in general and particularly those who were planning to nominate few to no women candidates. It created a competition among political parties in terms of women candidates' nomination.

The advocacy strategy was successful as several political parties adopted a gender quota on their electoral lists. The Progressive Socialist Party adopted a gender quota for candidacy of 30 percent and a gender quota in the executive committees of 30 percent as part of its internal regulations. The Kataeb Party increased its gender quota for candidacy from 20 percent to 25 percent. The "Lana" party adopted a gender quota for candidacy of 50 percent as part of its internal regulations. Other political parties such as the Progressive Socialist Party, who had never nominated women on their lists, did so for the first time. Although, they did not put them in winnable position, this could be considered progress.

The number of women on the electoral lists increased significantly. Out of 103 lists there were 65 lists with 20 to 30 percent of candidates being women. A total of 118 women were on electoral lists running for the parliamentary elections. This happened for the first time in the history of Lebanon.

After the 2022 elections, the proposed gender quota draft provisions were resubmitted to the new elected Parliament. *FiftyFifty* held a National Quota Conference at the Lebanese Parliament Library. The conference was organized under the patronage of the speaker of the parliament and aimed at discussing and advocating for the gender quota draft provisions with the new elected MPs. More than 17 MPs and representatives of political parties attended the conference. Unfortunately, deputies again postponed the gender quota discussion to the 2026 elections. However, the Free Patriotic Movement made a proposal to reserve 16 seats for women. The Azm movement – founded and led by Prime Minister of Lebanon Najib Miqati, agreed on a 30 percent quota for women.

UNDP with the Civil Coalition headed by *Fiftyfifty* are currently implementing a policy advocacy campaign for the institutionalization of parity in the municipal councils in the municipal council election law. The message crafted for the advocacy campaign is "no majority, no minority, we want parity in the municipalities." The Civil Coalition's analysis of the political landscape identified that the sociocultural barriers preventing women from entering parliament don't apply as strongly at the local level, due to the following factors:

- I. Municipalities are seen by the public primarily as service providers, leading to less polarized municipal elections. This enhances the chances of women being nominated as both party-affiliated and independent candidates.
- II. At the local level, family influence often outweighs that of political parties.
- III. Influential local families have the capability to secure seats for women.

The policy advocacy campaign conducted for the parliamentary elections impacted political party leaders' behaviour. For the municipal elections to take place in 2023, a number of political parties did not reject the idea of institutionalizing parity in the municipal councils: the Azm movement and the Kataeb Party). With the support of UNDP, the Civil Coalition designed an advocacy strategy that combines a direct approach to policymakers to ask them to amend the municipal council election law, and an indirect approach to policymakers consisting of influencing through the media and through the preparation of a pool of competent and credible women aspirant candidates.

Women MPs and men champions played an important role in the direct approach. The eight Women MPs personally lobbied their respective political parties to determine the percentage of seats they'd



be willing to reserve for women. Additionally, these Women MPs identified men who could advocates within their parties and who could sway party leaders. Together, Women MPs and these men champions aim to aid the civil coalition in persuading party leaders to adopt gender parity provisions in the local election law and support the nomination of women candidates.

UNDP in partnership with UN Women are encouraging women, particularly those who did not win seats in the parliamentary elections, to run as candidates in the upcoming municipal elections. They will join efforts to further reinforce their political capacities as well as their capacities in local policy-making processes. A targeted media strategy will promote their community programmes to support their nomination as candidates.



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