



Report of the 9th British Islands and Mediterranean Region Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference

**4-6 October 2022
Gibraltar**



Introduction

1. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) is divided into nine geographic regions: Africa, Asia, Australia, British Islands and Mediterranean (BIM), Canada, the Caribbean, the Americas and Atlantic (CAA), India, the Pacific and South-East Asia. The BIM region is made up of branches from Alderney, Cyprus, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Jersey, Malta, Northern Ireland, St Helena, Scotland, Wales and the United Kingdom.
2. The 9th British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference took place in Gibraltar from 4-6 October 2022. The theme of the conference was '*Attracting and Retaining Effective Women Parliamentarians in the British Islands and Mediterranean Region*' and Sarah

Boyack MSP represented the Scotland Branch as the delegate. Karen Adams MSP was also due to attend the conference but had to cancel her trip due to Chamber business.

3. The objectives of CWP BIMR are to:
 - Maximise the role of women parliamentarians. Working with local organisations and campaigns to promote women's representation. Undertake Gender Sensitive Parliament Audits to identify the barriers to equal female representation in Parliament and closely monitor the implementation of recommendations.
 - Build the capacity of women Parliamentarians and proactively encourage a central role in gender mainstreaming at all levels of decision making. Run programmes in the region involving stakeholder groups, creating peer-to-peer learning opportunities to put issues that particularly impact women in the fore of Parliamentary debate and legislation. Reflect the CWP thematic priorities in our regional work: women in leadership, eliminating gender-based violence, economic empowerment and equal access to national resources.
 - Advocate for mentoring and knowledge sharing amongst women parliamentarians. Offer mentoring opportunities for new women parliamentarians in the region. Act as advocates for CWP and seek opportunities to promote its work.
 - To increase our influence. Identify key partner organisations at branch, regional and Commonwealth level. Work in partnerships with other like-minded organisations to amplify messages about women's representation, gender equality and women's empowerment.
4. The conference brought together women Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and speakers from across the region to address issues facing women parliamentarians today. The conference offered the opportunity for Members to benefit from networking, professional development, supportive learning and the sharing of best practice with colleagues from Commonwealth Parliaments together with the participation of leading international organisations.
5. A copy of the programme is attached at annex A and a report from the BIMR CWP secretariat at Annex B.

Recommendations

6. During the *Equality Reviews and Reforms in BIMR Parliaments* workshop it was agreed that the Scottish Parliament shares the findings from its Gender Audit with the BIMR CWP network once they have been published.
7. Following the conference, it was suggested to the BIMR CWP Steering Committee that the impact on gender of policy initiatives and budget decisions was to be one of the focuses of the network in 2023.

Programme

Tuesday 4 October

8. The conference began with the BIMR CWP Steering Committee meeting to discuss the agenda of the conference; feedback from the CWP Conference and Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference which took place in Canada in August 2022; and Gender Sensitive Parliaments updates from branches.
9. This was followed by a welcome reception, giving Members an opportunity to network before the conference sessions began the next day.

Wednesday 5 October

10. The conference was opened by a panel made up of Hon. Samantha Sacramento MP; Rhianon Passmore MS, Vice-Chair BIMR CWP Steering Committee; Hon. Zainab Gimba MP, Chair of CWP; Helen Haywood, CPA UK/Secretary to the BIMR CWP Steering Committee; and Jon Davies, CPA UK/BIMR Secretary.
11. Following this, sessions covered *Legislating on Online Safety*, highlighting the need for up-to-date legislation in response to advancing technology; *Parliamentary Management of Online Safety*, identifying the support provided for Members by Parliaments; and *Training on Managing Online Abuse*, providing Members with training on online safety and digital self-defence skills.
12. Sarah Boyack MSP chaired the final session *Findings from the Report on Effective and Inclusive Parliaments in the British Islands and Mediterranean Region* where Dr Jess Smith gave delegates an insight into the conclusions of the report.

Thursday 6 October

13. The second day of the conference consisted of three sessions: *Equality Reviews and Reforms in BIMR Parliaments*, covering gender audits and diversity reforms; *Workshop on Mechanism to support Parliamentarians with Caring Responsibilities*, highlighting challenges associated with parental leave, proxy voting, childcare and family-friendly policies; and *Elections in BIMR*, including reports on gender representation in regional parliaments and gender quotas.

14. Sarah Boyack MSP took part in all sessions including being a panellist on the session on *Equality Reviews and Reforms in BIMR Parliaments*. She spoke about the work of the Scottish Parliament, including the Gender Audit, the challenges and opportunities of the Covid pandemic and challenges faced by women standing for election.

It was agreed that the Scottish Parliament shares the findings from its Gender Audit with the BIMR CWP network once they have been published.



15. In the afternoon delegates took part in an outreach panel discussion and networking event with the local community. The aim of the event, led by Samantha Sacramento MP, was to encourage more Gibraltarian women to stand in the next parliamentary election. It provided attendees with an opportunity to ask questions to the panel consisting of Sarah Boyack MSP, Rhianon Passmore MS and Ann Corlett MHK, about their experiences during the electoral process and in office.

Feedback

16. *"The conference was an excellent chance to network with women colleagues across the BIMR and to learn from the different cultures in our legislatures in relation to the numbers of women elected and the work being done to analyse and produce research and recommendations on their experiences.*

The opportunity to meet in person was particularly important post COVID. While online meetings are now able to be used more frequently, given the distances and costs of coming together, it was definitely energising to make connections and to get to know each other going forward.

Highlights for me were:

The outreach event where I was a member of the panel which shared our experiences as elected women representatives and the importance of wider engagement, for example with womens' campaigning organisations, trade unions, business organisations and community groups, not just to see women coming

forward to stand for election, but critically to support them once they have been elected.

There was strong interest in our experiences and the work we are doing as a Parliament.

One reflection I have from the Conference was the thought that it would be beneficial if we also promoted discussions on the policy and decision making within our elected legislatures to ensure that we discuss policy initiatives and budget decisions with a view to the impact they have on women in our constituencies, the lessons that can be learned and to share best practice.”

- Sarah Boyack MSP

Following the conference, it was suggested to the BIMR CWP Steering Committee that the impact on gender of policy initiatives and budget decisions was to be one of the focuses of the network in 2023.

Conclusion

Sarah Boyack MSP represented the Scottish Parliament at the 9th British Islands and Mediterranean Region Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference. She chaired a session on the *Findings from the Report on Effective and Inclusive Parliaments in the British Islands and Mediterranean Region* and was a panellist on the workshop *Equality Reviews and Reforms in BIMR Parliaments*, as well as an outreach panel discussion and networking event with the local community. She found the outreach session particularly useful, as it allowed discussion around shared experiences of standing for election and advice on how they can support one another as women once elected.

The conference allowed for in depth discussion and shared learning across a range of parliaments, where best practices could be shared and relationships developed. It focused on gender equality, with a specific discussion around gender sensitive audits and it was agreed that the Scottish Parliament will share the findings from its Gender Audit with the BIMR CWP network once they have been published.

Following the conference, it was suggested to the BIMR CWP Steering Committee that the impact on gender of policy initiatives and budget decisions was to be one of the focuses of the network in 2023.

Secretariat for CPA Scotland Branch
February 2023

**British Islands and Mediterranean Region
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference; Gibraltar 4-7 October 2022**

*Attracting and Retaining Effective Women Parliamentarians
in the British Islands and Mediterranean Region*

Tuesday 4 October

Day 1 - Arrival Day

All Day	Delegates will be met on arrival at Gibraltar International Airport and will be transported to The Rock Hotel
1530-1700	<i>BIMR CWP Steering Committee Meeting (<u>Steering Committee Members only</u>) Meeting Room (in the Rock Hotel) tbc</i>
From 1730 - 1930	Welcome reception (Rock Hotel, Poolside)

Wednesday 5 October

Day 2 - Online Safety

0900-1000	Session 1: Welcome and Introductions <i>Introduction to CWP & Programme</i> Chair: Hon. Samantha Sacramento MP (Gibraltar) Speakers: Rhianon Passmore MS (Wales), Vice-Chair BIMR CWP Steering Committee Hon. Zainab Gimba MP (Nigeria), Chair of CWP Helen Haywood, CPA UK/Secretary to the BIMR CWP Steering Committee Jon Davies, CPA UK/BIMR Secretary
1015-1145	Session 2: Legislating on Online Safety Chair: Rt Hon. Karen Bradley MP (UK) Speakers: Professor Penney Lewis, Commissioner, UK Law Commission (Online) Dr Kim Barker, Senior Lecturer in law, Open University (Online) Kate Osamor MP, UK Parliament Emma Atkinson, Refuge (Online)
1145-1200	<i>Break</i>
1200-1245	Session 3: Parliamentary Management of Online Safety Chair: Rhianon Passmore MS (Wales) Speaker: Oliver Davis, Head of Security Information and Risk Analysis Service, Parliamentary Security Department, UK Parliament (Online)
1245-1400	<i>Lunch</i>

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1400-1530	<p>Session 4: Training on Managing Online Abuse In Person Facilitator: Amy Knox (CPA UK) Speaker: Gwen Taylor (Glitch) – (Online) Training Workshop on online safety, digital self-defence skills and digital self-care</p>
1530-1600	Break
1600-1730	<p>Session 5: Findings from the Report on Effective and Inclusive Parliaments in the British Islands and Mediterranean Region Chair: Sarah Boyack MSP Speaker: Dr Jess Smith, University of Southampton</p>
Evening	FREE

Thursday 6 October

Day 3- Gender Sensitive Parliaments

0930-1030	<p>Session 6: Equality Reviews and Reforms in BIMR Parliaments Chair: Deputy Sue Aldwell (Guernsey) Speakers: Heledd Fychan MS (Wales) – Senedd Reform Diversity Recommendations Sarah Boyack MSP (Scotland) – Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit update</p>
1030-1230	<p>Session 7: Workshop on Mechanisms to support Parliamentarians with Caring Responsibilities <i>Parental Leave, Cover and Proxy Voting plus infrastructural provisions including childcare & facilities, allowing babies in the Chamber, hybrid proceedings and family-friendly sitting hours.</i> Chair: Rt Hon. Dame Eleanor Laing MP (UK) Contributions from all branches present: Gibraltar, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Jersey, Malta, Scotland, Wales, UK ~ Coffee and tea served during session ~</p>
1230-1315	Lunch
1315-1415	<p>Session 8: Elections in BIMR <i>Reports on gender representation in regional parliaments after recent elections in the region.</i> Chair: Hon. Samantha Sacramento MP (Gibraltar) Speakers: Hon. Graziella Attard Previ (Malta) Deputy Lucy Stephenson (Jersey) Helen Haywood, Deputy Chief Executive, CPA UK on <i>Survey of newly elected parliamentarians in the region</i></p>

1430-1600	Rock Tour
1600-1800	Outreach Panel Discussion and networking with local community <i>Venue: The Convent (Governor's Residence)</i> <i>Panel Discussion – GAMPA Choir – Networking - Refreshments</i>
From 1900	Reception and Dinner Venue: Mons Calpe Suite, Top of the Rock

Friday 7 October

Day 4 - Delegates depart



9th British Islands & Mediterranean Region Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians' Conference

Gibraltar

4 - 6 October 2022



REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Members of Parliament from across the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region (UK, Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey, Gibraltar & Malta) participated in the 9th BIMR Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference, delivered jointly by CPA Gibraltar and the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region Secretariat, on 5 & 6 October 2022.

With the overall aim of “Attracting and Retaining Effective Women Parliamentarians”, and building on ongoing engagement, the Conference focused on various aspects of this in more detail.

Delegates explored how parliaments across the region are responding to the escalating problem of online harms. The programme included tailored practical training for women parliamentarians on digital self-defence, digital citizenship, assertive communication, and safety responses to online abuse. It also looked at the UK’s draft ‘Online Harms Bill’ and the lessons learned from the UK’s legislative pathway to protect against online harms.

The programme also included sessions focusing on Gender Sensitive Parliaments, asking if parliaments are doing enough to respond to the changing demographics of their elected representatives. Delegates considered the recommendations made by Dr Jess Smith (University of Southampton) in her report [Effective and Inclusive Parliaments](#).

CPA UK gathered both formal and informal feedback throughout the Conference. Highlights for delegates included hearing from experts on legislating against online harms, the opportunity to discuss measures to support parliamentarians with caring responsibilities and the outreach activity promoting political pathways to women in Gibraltar.



CWP Chairperson, Hon. Zainab Gimba, opens BIMR CWP Conference

DELEGATES

Gibraltar

Hon. Samantha Sacramento MP (Member, BIMR CWP Steering Committee)

Hon. Marlene Hassan-Nahon MP

Guernsey

Deputy Susan Aldwell

Emma Atkinson – Delegation Secretary

Isle of Man

Ann Corlett MHK

Jersey

Deputy Louise Doublet

Deputy Lucy Stephenson

Vanessa Page – Delegation Secretary

Malta

Hon. Davina Sammut Hili MP

Hon. Graziella Attard Previ, MP

Scotland

Sarah Boyack MSP (Member, BIMR CWP Steering Committee)

Charlotta Craig – Delegation Secretary

Wales

Heledd Fychan MS

Rhianon Passmore MS (Deputy Chair, BIMR CWP Steering Committee)

Buffy Williams MS

Enfys Roberts – Delegation Secretary

UK

Rt Hon. Dame Eleanor Laing MP

Rt Hon. Karen Bradley MP

Kate Osamor MP

Jon Davies – Secretary, CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region / CPA UK

Helen Haywood – Secretary to the BIMR CWP Steering Committee / CPA UK

Amy Knox – CPA UK

Official Guests:

Hon. Zainab Gimba MP (Nigeria) – Chair, Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians

Stephen Twigg – CPA Secretary-General

Bénite Dibateza – CPA Secretariat

Legislating on Online Safety

This session explored how parliamentarians can effectively legislate against online harms. It considered how parliamentarians can apply gender-sensitive scrutiny to ensure legislation effectively reflects and addresses the experiences of women online. The UK Government's Online Safety Bill was used as a case study.

[Professor Penney Lewis, Criminal Law Commissioner of the UK Law Commission](#) discussed the background to the Law Commission's reform of the Communications Project, commissioned by the Department for Culture, Digital Media and Sport. The project aimed to explore legislative pathways to address existing inadequacies within communications offences in the UK, namely their ineffectiveness in criminalising genuinely harmful behaviour with the advent of social media, while disproportionately interfering with freedom of expression in other areas.

Professor Lewis outlined the Commission's key recommendations for the UK Government's Online Safety Bill to replace existing offences, including: a general harms-based offence; knowingly sending false communications intending harm; sending threats of serious harm; intentionally encouraging or assisting serious self-harm; and cyber-flashing.

Professor Lewis outlined various key lessons for jurisdictions looking to reform their communications offences, namely the importance of creating an offence which reflects that harmful communications are varied, context specific and are difficult to categorise. In addition, it was recommended that parliamentarians consider the culpability of the defendant to be equally as important in setting the boundaries of criminal law, rather than just focusing on the harm to the victim. Finally, delegates were advised that the more general the range of communications in scope, the greater the need for a specific element in legislation addressing freedom of expression rights.

Further links and resources:

- ♦ [Reform of the Communications Offences Project](#)
- ♦ [Modernisation of the Communication Offences: A Final Report](#)

[Dr Kim Barker, Senior Lecturer in Law, Open University](#) outlined the key principles underpinning good practices in legislating against online harms, including the provisions legislation should include. A foundational principle was for legislation to be gender-sensitive in its approach, to reflect that women's and men's experiences of the online space differ, and that women are disproportionately impacted by gender-based violence online. Dr Barker recommended a holistic approach, encompassing criminal and civil legal frameworks, as well as prevention initiatives, to address the range of harms women face online effectively and comprehensively.

Dr Barker highlighted the need for legislation to:

- ♦ Be guided by a clear definition of online violence against women which recognises online harm as a form of gender-based violence
- ♦ Be formed in consultation with key stakeholders who are either affected by or will be responsible for the implementation of legislation

- ♦ Mandate platform accountability by compelling platforms to develop corporate policies, practices and tools that respect women’s rights and counter online practices that are harmful to women
- ♦ Empower regulators to provide swift solutions in cooperation with private sector platforms
- ♦ Be victim/survivor-orientated in its approach and therefore prioritising forms of swift redress, such as takedown protocols
- ♦ Build capacity of actors responsible for implementation of legislation by mandating sensitivity training around all forms of online violence against women, and how those experiences map onto legally recognised categories of wrongdoing, would help to prevent inaction and mitigate harm

Dr Barker described the UK’s Online Safety Bill as a useful starting point, with merit in its broad ambition and demonstrative of strength in uniting stakeholders to address the issue. However, Dr Barker expressed concern that the Bill falls short of its potential in protecting women from online harm, most notably due to the absence of women and girls as a priority, and its lack of recognition of online harm as a form of gender-based violence.

Further links and resources:

- ♦ [Online Harms White Paper Consultation Response](#)
- ♦ [Online Violence Against Women: addressing the responsibility gap?](#)
- ♦ [Written evidence submitted by Dr Kim Barker and Dr Olga Jurasz, Open University Law School](#)
- ♦ [CPA UK Report: Gender-Sensitive Responses to Online Harms](#)

Kate Osamor MP, UK Parliament provided an overview of the UK Government’s Online Safety Bill and its journey through parliament. The Online Safety Bill was introduced in April 2022 and has so far reached report stage in the House of Commons.

The Government has said the Bill delivers its “manifesto commitment to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online while defending free expression”. The Bill has five policy objectives:

- ♦ to increase user safety online.
- ♦ to preserve and enhance freedom of speech online.
- ♦ to improve law enforcement’s ability to tackle illegal content online.
- ♦ to improve users’ ability to keep themselves safe online.
- ♦ to improve society’s understanding of the harm landscape.

Early drafts of the bill were considered overly complex and gave too much freedom to tech companies to continue to write their own rules. Changes were made by the Government in response to parliamentary scrutiny of the draft Bill, but there remain claims by [stakeholders](#) that the Bill “remains too complex”.

Kate Osamor MP discussed the key parliamentary campaign which has emerged in opposition to the Bill, concerning the Bill’s perceived weaknesses around promoting platform accountability and its inability to effectively challenge the business models of large companies. The UK Labour Party has described the legislation as ‘watered down’ and argued that they would strengthen the

Bill by including criminal sanctions for senior tech executives who repeatedly fail to enforce the rules and provide greater teeth to regulators.

Kate Osamor MP also discussed criticisms of the Bill's gender-sensitivity in its current form. Opposition parties and other stakeholders have argued that the Bill presents a gender-neutral solution to a gendered problem. Refuge, Glitch and the End Violence Against Women Coalition have been advocating for women to be named on the Bill, as well as the incorporation of the range of harms women face online.

- ♦ [Analysis of the Online Safety Bill, House of Commons Library](#)
- ♦ [Online Safety Bill: Commons stages, House of Commons Library](#)
- ♦ [Joint Committee on the Draft Online Safety Bill, Report of Session 2021–22](#)
- ♦ [VAGW Principles for the Online Safety Bill, End Violence Against Women](#)

Emma Pickering, Senior Operations Manager, Tech and Economic Abuse, [Refuge](#) discussed Refuge's work around technology-facilitated violence against women, including the establishment of the UK's first dedicated [Tech Safety Service](#) supporting victim/survivors of complex tech abuse with a range of specialised services. The launch of this service resulted from Refuge experiencing a 97% increase in the number of complex tech abuse cases between April 2020 and May 2021. The service was created in partnership with survivors and offers each referral a dedicated Tech Advocate to provide support and empower survivors.

Emma Pickering shared that Complex tech abuse cases often involve perpetrators using multiple accounts and devices to abuse, control and monitor their partners. The technology harnessed can range from everyday devices and accounts, to sophisticated, malicious software. A recent report from one of Refuge's digital security partners Avast found a 93% increase in the use of malicious stalker-ware and spyware apps when compared to the same time last year.

- ♦ [Unsocial Spaces, Refuge](#)
- ♦ [Marked as Unsafe, Refuge](#)

Parliamentary Management of Online Safety

This session explored how parliaments can manage the online safety of members and protect women MPs from the potential harms they face online, using the UK Parliament's Social Media Monitoring Service as a case study.

In recent years, the incidents of criminal abuse and harassment suffered by MPs have risen sharply and both the House of Commons and the police services have increased security arrangements and taken more legal action as a result. Oliver Davis, Head of the UK Parliament's Security Information and Risk Analysis Service and Ezgi Payir from the Social Media Safety Team outlined the role of the Parliamentary Social Media Monitoring Service and how it operates. Members of the House of Commons and House of Lords can sign up voluntarily and consent to have their social media channels monitored for online abuse, using software in collaboration with social media companies. The social media monitoring service also involves forwarding threatening or abusive social media communications to the Police. There are currently 237

Members who have opted into the social media monitoring service.

Further links and resources:

- ♦ [Democracy, freedom of expression and freedom of association: Threats to MPs, Joint Committee on Human Rights](#)
- ♦ [Intimidation in Public Life, A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life](#)
- ♦ [UK Parliament Social Media Monitoring Service](#)

Workshop on Managing Online Abuse



CPA UK's Amy Knox facilitated a workshop delivered by UK Charity Glitch exploring the impact of online abuse on women parliamentarians, aiming to equip delegates with the skills and tools necessary to defend themselves online and build resilience against online harms.

Further links and resources:

- ♦ [Glitch Resources](#)
- ♦ [Think10 Safety Questionnaire, National Democratic Institute](#)
- ♦ [Guide on Managing Online and Offline Abuse, CPA UK](#)

Effective and Inclusive Parliaments



This session, led by Dr Jessica Smith, explored the findings from the Report on [Effective and Inclusive Parliaments](#) in the BIMR, focusing on hybridity and related parliamentary infrastructure promoting gender-sensitivity.

Dr Jessica Smith's findings revealed that most parliaments in the region are falling short of meeting gender-sensitive benchmarks including on diversity of MPs, women's leadership positions, childcare and child-friendly provisions and maternity and parental leave

Delegates discussed the recommendations made by Dr Smith concerning hybridity and parental leave. Delegates considered how they could be applied to different BIMR parliaments respectively, including virtual participation and proxy voting. Delegates also agreed that such provisions should extend not only to mothers but all care providers and other minority groups

who may be systematically excluded by the existing systems.

Delegates further agreed that the application of recommendations were context specific and practices which work well in some parliaments may be less applicable in others. For example, Wales was cited as an example where hybridity has remained in place following COVID-19 and is working well, while this was considered to be less feasible in the UK context due to the setup of the chamber. Upcoming research by Dr Smith will further discuss whether constituents are less likely to vote for members who attend parliament in a hybrid manner or who take parental leave.

Further links and resources:

- ♦ [Report on Effective and Inclusive Parliaments in the BIMR](#)
- ♦ [CPA Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines](#)

Equality Reviews in BIMR Parliaments

Sarah Boyack MSP outlined Scottish Parliament's Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit, which aimed to review the representation and participation of women in the Scottish Parliament. The Audit was supported by the establishment of an Audit group, consisting of all parties represented in Holyrood, as well as staffers, academics, and [Engender](#). The audit's remit included the number and position of women parliamentarians, participation and intervention levels in Chamber business and the impact of parliamentary procedures and policies. The Audit is scheduled to reach reporting stage by the end of 2022.

Sarah Boyack reported that engagement of civil society was key to establishing and implementing the audit. Engender, Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation, are an instrumental member of the Audit group, bringing a range of expertise and resources.

Further links and resources:

- ♦ [Sex & Power in Scotland in 2020, Engender](#)



Sarah Boyack MSP, Scottish Parliament

Heledd Fychan MS discussed the background to the Senedd reform programme, which aimed to promote changes to strengthen the role of the Senedd to better suit the needs of the people of Wales. The Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform was established in February 2017 to advise the Llywydd (Speaker) and Senedd Commission on a range of potential reforms, such as the number of Members the Senedd needs, the most suitable electoral system by which they should be elected, issues relating to Senedd electoral areas and the minimum voting age for Senedd elections. The reform work was split into two phases. Phase 1, led to [Senedd and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2020](#) and Phase 2 was intended 'to make the Senedd a more effective, accessible and diverse legislature'.

Heledd Fychan shared that due to parliamentary time constraints, in 2019 the Senedd Commission decided to establish a Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform as it would not be possible to legislate on Phase 2 during the current Senedd. The Committee found 'clear and compelling' evidence that the Senedd is currently undersized and that its membership lacks diversity. The Committee made 32 recommendations, including actions to achieve a gender equal Senedd with representatives from diverse backgrounds. Key recommendations included the implementation of a gender quota integrated within the electoral system, strengthening candidate-based selection processes to support a gender equal parliament and enabling candidates to stand for election on the basis of job-sharing arrangements.

Heledd Fychan reported that the Welsh Government is aiming to have the changes in place by 2023 and will therefore need to bring a Bill to parliament next year for this to be delivered.

Further links and resources:

- [Senedd reform: the next steps](#)
- [Reforming our Senedd: A stronger voice for the people of Wales](#)

Workshop on Mechanisms to Support Parliamentarians with Caring Responsibilities

This session focused on how parliaments have dealt with the issue of parental leave, cover and proxy voting. It considered how each parliament has implemented infrastructural support for parents and parliamentarians with other caring responsibilities such as childcare facilities, babies in the chamber, hybrid working and family-friendly hours.

- In the UK Parliament, proxy voting is available for MPs on baby leave and has been extended to MPs with long-term illnesses, however it is not available for MPs with other caring responsibilities. While childcare facilities are available onsite, babies in the chamber are subject to debate and has been considered by the Procedure Committee, who concluded babies should not be present during proceedings.
- In the Senedd, proxy voting is available to those on parental leave, of which men can also take advantage. Delegates reported an increasing demand for childcare facilities which were not provided in the new parliament building.

- In the Scottish Parliament, the Standards Committee is currently considering extending COVID-19 provisions for hybrid working and piloting a proxy voting scheme for those with childcare responsibilities and illness.
- In the States Assembly of Jersey, there are currently no provisions in place and a 'gold plated' reason for absence is required for proxy voting. The hybrid provisions from COVID-19 remain in place for positive cases and long-term illnesses, but do not extend to childcare. Delegates reported an increasing demand for formal provisions and family friendlier hours.
- Delegates from Guernsey, Isle of Man, Cyprus and Malta reported there are no provisions in place, however this has been requested by a growing number of younger women parliamentarians elected.

Session Chair Dame Eleanor Laing asked break-out groups to identify their top three reforms they would like to see implemented to make parliaments more attractive to a more diverse cohort of prospective candidates. These were:

Group 1:

1. Provision for wraparound care
2. Onsite creche
3. Hybrid participation options

Group 2:

1. Find a Champion in Parliamentary Leadership
2. Financial Support (i.e., extra staffing budget/accommodation/childcare)
3. Educate the public about the need for more women/GSPs (so less backlash on extra costs)

Group 3:

1. Provision for parliamentary visitors i.e., a creche, to ensure equal participation in democracy
2. Hybrid participation and remote voting
3. Predictability of the legislature/regular hours

Elections in the BIMR

The Session considered case-studies from two branches in the region which have had elections in 2022 – Jersey and Malta - to look at the outcomes in respect to gender representation. Key areas of interest were the introduction of a new gender quota mechanism in Malta, and the increase in women's representation in Jersey from 29% (2019) to 43% (2022).

Hon. Graziella Attard Previ MP outlined the context and process of constitutional reform which led to the introduction of gender quotas in Malta. The reform was driven by alarming statistic that in the previous parliament only 9 of Malta's 67 parliamentarians were women, the second lowest representation in Europe. The Maltese constitution was amended to allocate 12 additional parliamentary seats for women if they do not gain a 40 percent share in elections (and for 20 years afterwards). Hon. Graziella Attard Previ MP shared that the reforms had broad support from key stakeholders, including the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality.

Following the quota's implementation in January and the proceeding election in April, 22 MPs were elected now constituting 27.8% of parliamentarians. The quota was therefore successful in its purported aims of increasing women's representation; although has faced criticisms on account of its limitations in addressing the systemic structural and cultural barriers to the representation of women in parliament and their participation in political life, including pervasive gender stereotypes and a male-dominated political sphere.

[The Application of Gender Quotas in Malta, Equality Law EU](#)

Deputy Lucy Stephenson outlined the context of gender representation in Jersey, which has historically been low. Since 1948, 344 men have sat in the States Assembly, while only 45 women have done so. However, the 2022 election saw more women elected to Jersey's government than ever before, forming 43% of the States Assembly. More than 50% of the deputies elected were women.

The gains in elected women Deputies were achieved despite the absence of special measures to address the historical disparity in representation, as envisioned in Article 4 of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was extended to Jersey in 2021. To solidify and improve upon this unprecedented result CPA UK's Election Observation mission [recommended](#) measures to strengthen women's participation in elections could be considered, especially in elections for Connétables, in line with international good practice.

[Diversity Forum Legacy Report, States of Jersey](#)



Helen Haywood in her capacity of Secretary to the BIMR CWP Steering Committee, discussed BIMR's survey of women who had recently contested elections in the region's jurisdictions and shared the benefits of collecting and collating information of this type. The survey received 19 responses from 6 out of 13 branches.

Helen discussed the most common responses concerning how the women surveyed first became interested in politics and why they decided to stand, which included coming from a political background, discontent with the status quo and/or it being the right time in their lives. Family was overwhelmingly cited as having encouraged respondents to stand and as providing the greatest level of support both at home and through campaigning and canvassing. Just 30% of women standing declared they had adequate support, noting that both financial support for campaigning materials, and training about the political environment and election process would have been helpful.

Respondents who had previously stood for election highlighted more interpersonal contact during the campaign, having a higher profile, as well as availability of time to dedicate to the campaign, as key reasons for subsequent success. Finally, respondents highlighted social media abuse; missing out on family time; and finances as factors which put them off standing for election. These concerns were not resolved however respondents cited they were spurred on by the bigger picture of advocating for the changes they wanted to see in their communities.

Outreach session with local women



At an outreach session led by Samantha Sacramento MP Gibraltarian women with an interest in politics questioned women parliamentarians from the different branches in the region about their experiences. The panel, including Rhianon Passmore MS, Ann Corlett MHK, and Sarah Boyack MSP gave frank accounts of the positives and challenges they have faced during the electoral process and in office. The session was positioned to encourage women to stand for election and take a more active role in politics. Members of the panel highlighted that the growing number of women in politics had led to legislative change and made it easier for women to be parliamentarians. Barriers the parliamentarians faced included the power of incumbency, and the lack of care infrastructure in parliaments.

Opposition Spokesperson for Equality in Malta, Graziella Attard Previ MP, highlighted how the power of incumbency had affected her. "What kept me going in politics is my determination," she told attendees.

In the audience were women from a cross-section of the local community, from all political parties, or with no political affiliation. Also present were Gibraltar's male members of parliament, including the Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo and Leader of the Opposition Keith Azopardi.

After the session, Samantha Sacramento stressed the importance of having more women in the legislature. In recent times she has proposed parliamentary reform for parental leave to be legislated. No woman has ever been pregnant or had a child while serving as an MP in Gibraltar. "No one's actually thought what to do when that time comes," she said. "So my ambition was to have a framework and a structure in place for people should want to [have a child], then they know what's coming and they know how it would work."

Marlene Hassan Nahon MP said Gibraltar has "deep rooted social injustices" and the way forward for women in politics is to legislate. She called for paternity laws which will remove the childcare burden from women and create more equality in families. "There has to be more proactivity from leadership to put women in positions of power," she said. She echoed the message that men need to support women, but also called for women to come forward. "It's a vicious circle. As long as women don't come forward, they are not going to be taken seriously," she said.

Gibraltar's Commonwealth Youth Parliament delegate, Adriana Lopez, found it inspiring to see the number of local women interested in politics. "On a personal level this afternoon has been inspiring because I can see the conversations that we are used to having are finally more tangible," she said.[1]



CWP Chairperson, Hon. Zainab Gimba speaking to Gibraltar media

[Watch GBC News' coverage of the Conference](#)

[1] Words taken from an article by Gabriella Paralta in the Gibraltar Chronicle published on 10 October 2022



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