



# Fast Facts:

## Gender equality in the Commonwealth

### Overview

The Commonwealth is made up of 54 **independent** countries working together to pursue common goals, which promote **development, democracy and peace**. Our combined population is 2.4 billion, of which more than **60 per cent** is aged 29 or under.

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

In order to assess and accelerate progress, the Commonwealth is now working hard to measure their collective progress in four areas: women in leadership, women's economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls and gender and climate change.<sup>1</sup>

### Women in leadership

Commonwealth member countries collectively have a goal of ensuring that women hold at least 30 per cent of elected political offices.

- In the parliaments of **14 Commonwealth countries**, **30 per cent** or more of members are **women**.
- **Rwanda** is one of only three countries in the world to have achieved **gender parity**, with more than **67 per cent** of seats occupied by women in both its houses of **parliament**.
- Only **one in five** Commonwealth **parliamentarians** is a **woman**.
- The parliaments of the **Caribbean and Americas** region are on average almost 25 per cent female, relatively high compared to other Commonwealth regions.
- Ten Commonwealth countries have achieved the target of 30 per cent or more women ministers.

### Women's economic empowerment

- In the Commonwealth, a girl is as likely to attend primary school as a boy.
- The pan-Commonwealth average for female labour force participation is 56.30 per cent.

- Rwanda, at 86 per cent, has the highest percentage of women's participation in the labour force.
- The highest female enrolment in secondary schools is in Canada with 100 per cent.
- Of every 10 girls in the Commonwealth, only seven attend secondary school.
- Thirty-four member countries have legislation on sexual harassment in employment.
- Thirty-one member countries have criminal penalties or civil remedies for sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Twenty-two countries do not mandate equal pay for work of equal value

### Ending gender-based violence

- Of our 54 Commonwealth member countries, 48 have laws against domestic violence.
- In the Commonwealth, 41 countries have legislation against sexual harassment.

### Gender and climate change

- According to the UN, 4 in 5 people displaced by climate change globally are women.
- Women are more likely than men to hold jobs vulnerable to climate change.

### Our work

- Our strategy, with UN Women, to eliminate discriminatory laws will fast-track full legal protection for 50 million women and girls in 100 countries from 2019 to 2023.
- Our work alongside the Government of Seychelles has helped determine that the national cost of violence against women and girls amounts to USD 65 million each year.
- Our work has helped more than 25 Commonwealth countries to develop gender-responsive budgeting, which is essential for both gender justice and fiscal justice.
- Our work on the 'Commonwealth Says No More' campaign is reducing cases of domestic violence, which affects one in three women globally at some point in their lives.
- Our work to build campaigning skills among women candidates ahead of the 2019 elections in Malawi helped towards increasing the number parliamentary seats held by women from 16 to 23 per cent.

<sup>1</sup> Data against some parameters is missing in a few countries. Findings come from the 2019 Commonwealth annual report on gender equality.