



Fast Facts:

Gender equality in the Commonwealth

Overview

The Commonwealth is made up of 56 **independent** countries working together to pursue common goals, which promote **development, democracy and peace**. Our combined population is 2.6 billion, of which more than **60 per cent** is aged 29 or under.

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

To assess and accelerate progress, the Commonwealth Secretariat supports the progress towards the achievement of the Commonwealth's priorities on gender equality: women in leadership, women's economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls, and gender and climate change.¹

Women in leadership

- In the parliaments of **19 Commonwealth countries**, **30 per cent** or more of members are **women**.
- **Rwanda and New Zealand** are among the six countries worldwide to have achieved **gender parity** in parliament.
- Only **one in four** 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.
- **Eighteen** Commonwealth countries have achieved the target of **30 per cent or more women ministers**.

Women's economic empowerment

- In the Commonwealth, girls are as likely to attend primary school as boys.
- The pan-Commonwealth average for

female labour force participation is **53.89 per cent**.

- **The Solomon Islands** has the highest percentage of women's participation in the labour force at **83 per cent**, followed closely by **Rwanda** at **82.5 per cent**.
- Only seven out of every ten girls in the Commonwealth attend secondary school.
- **Thirty-eight** member countries have legislation on sexual harassment in employment, while 36 have criminal penalties or civil remedies for it.
- **Twenty-one** countries mandate equal pay for work of equal value.

Ending gender-based violence

- Of our 56 Commonwealth member countries, **50** have laws against domestic violence.
- In the Commonwealth, **38** countries have legislation against sexual harassment.

Gender and climate change

- According to the United Nations, **4 in 5** people displaced by climate change globally are women.
- Women and children are **14 times more likely** than men to die during disasters.
- Women are more likely than men to hold jobs which are vulnerable to climate change.

Our work

- Our partnership with the **Global Strategy for Equality in Law for Women and Girls** by 2030 aims to eliminate discriminatory laws and provide full legal protection for 50 million women and girls in 100 countries from 2019 to 2023.
- Our work alongside the Government of Seychelles has revealed that violence against women and girls costs the

country USD 65 million annually.

- In Lesotho, violence against women and girls incurs a cost of about USD 113 million annually. This means that each citizen loses at least USD 50 every year due to such violence.
- We have helped over 25 Commonwealth countries develop **gender-responsive budgeting**, which is vital for both gender justice and fiscal justice.
- Our **‘Commonwealth Says NO MORE’** campaign raises awareness and promotes action to reduce cases of domestic and sexual violence, which affects one in three women in their lifetime.
- Our efforts to develop **campaigning skills among women candidates** ahead of the 2019 elections in Malawi helped to increase the number of parliamentary seats held by women

from 16 to 23 per cent.

- We evaluate how **gender is integrated into the Nationally Determined Contributions** (NDCs) of Commonwealth member countries. Our 2021 review shows a 79 per cent increase in the integration of gender in the second round of new or updated national plans.
- Our **guide on gender integration in Nationally Determined Contributions** helps Commonwealth member countries mainstream gender equality in climate action.
- Through our partnership with the International Trade Centre (ITC), we deliver **digital bootcamps** to enhance the skills of women-owned micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. Hundreds of women business owners are expected to benefit from this programme.

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

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