



## **Political Parties and Recruitment of Young Women**

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Today the development of any political agenda that does not include the views and experiences of those who will be affected is no longer credible. Yet in both electoral and decision-making processes, women, and especially young women, often find themselves as spectators rather than active participants. The reasons for this are many and varied, ranging from supposed apathy and disinterest in the voting process, to lack of opportunities for systematic inclusion in decision-making processes. An important way in which young women can affect policy making is to run for positions of elected leadership. As elected representatives, women can influence the formulation of gender sensitive policies and monitor implementation. Yet specific strategies and policies need to be considered and adopted to facilitate young women's political participation.

I will argue that we need to examine the role of political parties as a means of increasing young women's access to decision-making structures, and other direct policy measures such as quotas which can effectively increase the participation of under-represented groups. When talking about political parties and quotas, it is necessary to consider the type of electoral system used in a particular country. It is now conventional wisdom that in proportional representation systems, or electoral systems with a strong party bias rather than a strong candidate bias, women tend to be elected in higher numbers than majoritarian systems. In the 45 participating states of the Council of Europe, 28 countries use list PR systems, 13 use a combination of PR lists with constituency elections, 2 use STV and 2 use majoritarian or constituency systems. Therefore given that 91 per cent of the member states use some form of PR lists of candidates for election, I will focus on political party nomination processes although the principles are applicable in other systems.

As gatekeepers to elective office, political party candidate recruitment processes offer an important way to increase young women's access to decision-making at the sub-national and national level. Political parties determine the composition of lists for election, and the rank ordering of candidates. If a party so desires, it is relatively easy to ensure a diverse and representative list of candidates, including young people, women and minority groups. However, in practice party lists are often not representative of the people they supposedly represent. It is in

this process of candidate recruitment that a key opportunity to ensure young women's presence exists, yet how can this be achieved?

1. Political parties need to recognise the important **contribution** that young women can make to politics, and recognise that that young people and young women particularly are often excluded from, or are invisible in, party structures.
2. Women's wings and youth wings are valuable vehicles for young women's **mobilisation** into politics, and they should seek to actively recruit and attract young women's participation in the party, by for example, working with unions or universities to recruit young women. By promoting a **youth targeted policy**, particularly young women's health, education, welfare and the environment, young women may be lured into what is often viewed as 'uninteresting and irrelevant' conventional party politics.
3. Young women need to be **mentored** as possible candidates. Young women must realize that it is their right to run for office, and promoting efforts to build the confidence of women to speak out and seek election are important. Programmes could be developed that include information on participation within the party, negotiation processes, campaigning for candidates and different types of campaigns at different levels (national and sub-national levels), fundraising and advocacy and lobbying.
4. Political parties need to recognise that young women face both **financial** and institutional barriers accessing the party. Money and economic security are crucial if young women are to actively participate in politics at every level and to resource campaigns and gain name recognition within the party. Funding mechanisms such as Emily's List may be considered as a means of facilitating young women's participation.
5. The important process of **candidate recruitment** ahead of an election needs to be considered from a gender point of view. As young women are oftentimes unrecognised in the party means that it will be hard for young women to be afforded 'electable' positions on party lists for election. Nomination committees that are responsible for candidate recruitment need to be mindful of the obstacles that young women face. In some countries, representatives of women's wings are included in nomination committees of parties that decide the rules on candidate nomination, and such practices could be expanded to include youth wings.
6. **Political party quotas** for women have been implemented by over 130 political parties in more than 60 countries. Political parties should recognise the success that has been achieved in different countries through **affirmative action** mechanisms especially by recruiting a certain target of women on political party lists. In a handful of countries, quota laws stipulate that young people should be included as party candidates, including the Philippines and Malaysia. By developing a pool of young women candidates within a party, quotas within party lists can include the nomination of a certain percentage of young women to ensure inclusive participation.

Underpinning all efforts to increase young women's participation at the national and local level is partnership-building among various NGOs, groups working for women's political participation and individual women in politics, to develop candidate support and to build constituencies for women's issues. Networking and the development of solidarity among women is key to women's participation in politics, and women should strive toward this end at both the national and regional levels.