

Parliamentary delegations keep gender on the agenda



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Delegation for Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

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Both houses of the French parliament – the National Assembly and the Senate – have had a ‘Delegation for Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men’ since 1999, aiming at complementing each other. Their function is to mainstream gender throughout the legislative process. They are cross-party bodies, and each has 36 members, among them both women and men. The Delegations can scrutinise proposed legislation and monitor implementation. They also conduct consultation and research to produce proactive reports aiming to influence future legislation.

The delegation in the Assembly has drafted at least six reports on different aspects of the French electoral system and has been instrumental in introducing certain new measures – for example the use of ‘twinning’ in the recent regional elections.

Both Delegations have played a crucial role in safeguarding and extending gender parity in politics.

Two delegations on women's rights

The women's delegations in the two houses of the French parliament (the General Assembly and the Senate) were established in 1999 during course of introducing gender parity legislation. Their function is to mainstream gender equality throughout the legislative process, to ensure the successful implementation of the gender parity legislation, to ensure good outcomes for women in all aspects of decision-making, and to raise awareness of policy areas particularly concerning women in France and abroad and to get them onto the political agenda.

Members also sit on standing committees and those members often use their committee roles to enhance the work of the delegations. They can also use Private Members' Bills to initiate legislation proposed by the delegations.

Both delegations were intended to introduce an element of gender mainstreaming into the French parliament. They are composed of members of the respective chambers of parliament from across the parties and include both sexes, even though the great majority are women (26/36 members in the Senate and 30/36 members in the National Assembly).

Making a difference

The delegations can scrutinise proposed legislation and monitor its implementation. Delegations can seize themselves of bills in order to issue recommendations before they are adopted. Their purpose is to revise legislation where the gendered repercussions had been overlooked, through sponsoring amendments, as well as to prepare and support legislation that has a directly gendered remit. They also conduct consultation and research on their own initiative, and produce reports to influence future legislation by getting issues onto the government agenda or taken up as a Private Members' Bill. In recent years, the balance between new legislative input and monitoring existing measures has shifted towards the latter, largely because the delegations have now built up a range of measures that require monitoring. The delegations have extensive powers to call expert witnesses, obtain documents, and question ministers.

Since their establishment the delegations were focussing among others on such domains as:

- parity in politics

- gender pay and professional equality
- women and pensions
- violence against women

The working methods included: preparation of the reports commenting on legislative proposals or draft legislation (e.g. on immigrant women, women in precarious situations, part-time employment and professional equality) elaboration of information and evaluation reports, initiating or active participation in hearings, public debates, international events, etc.

Throughout the years the delegations developed and intensified their activities. For example, if in the period 2002-2007 the Delegation of the National Assembly was preparing 2-3 reports per year, in the period 2012-2014 it was on average annually publishing 6 reports. This demonstrates that since their establishment the role of the delegations became more prominent. Numerous proposals made by the delegations were taken into account by the government. For example, recently in the context of the draft law for equality between women and men, an amendment initiated by the members of the delegation and presented by its president was taken on board regarding the topic of creating the possibility for introducing specific measures for supporting women entrepreneurs by the Public Investment Bank (BPI). The same applies to the draft law on the adaptation of society to population ageing. In this case among others the recommendations of the delegation on raising awareness of violence against older persons in particularly older women and on developing gendered data collection and better informing the Parliament were adopted.

The two delegations aim to complement each other to maximise their effectiveness, and often publish reports on the same subjects – which is inevitable as bills passed back and forth between the two houses during debate. Regarding monitoring and proactive research on issues that are not (yet) on the legislative agenda, they are also complementary, often examining different aspects of a given issue.

The delegations have helped to introduce certain issues to the agenda, to stop others (such as gender parity) from falling off the agenda before they were resolved, to monitor the implementation of policies and highlight where outcomes have been negative for women, and to provide a formal arena within parliament devoted to promoting women's rights.

Both delegations have played a crucial role in safeguarding and extending gender parity in politics, and the reports they have published – together with the speaking time in the chamber that delegation members are entitled to when they present them – are key. The delegation in the Assembly has drafted at least six reports on different aspects of the French electoral system and has been instrumental in introducing certain new measures – for example the use of ‘twinning’ in the recent regional elections – and has been very vocal in its opposition to previous measures that would have undermined gender parity.

Influence through networking

The delegations reinforce the influence of a gender equality perspective inside the state administration. They also work closely with other gender parity mechanisms - particularly when they issue evaluations and recommendations of public policies and pending legislation. The presidents of the women's delegations in the National Assembly, the Senate and the Economic, Social and Environmental Council all have automatic membership of the Haut Conseil à l'Egalité entre les Femmes et les Hommes (HCEfh), which was set up to stimulate public debate on gender equality. The HCEfh has a more neutral research function and the delegations have a more political function focused on revising and introducing legislation.

The cooperation between the Haut Conseil and the delegation in the Assembly is particularly close and was a vital component in the early days. The fact that many people transfer between these two bodies is indicative of this link. Since the HCEfh is attached to the executive, and the delegation is rooted in the legislature, they have on several occasions carried out a ‘pincer’ movement. This is part of quite effective networking.

One of the strengths of the delegations therefore lies in their ability to network with powerful actors and to empower their members in their parliamentary work.

Contacts/Further Information

Contacts

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Further information

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[Senat:Délégation aux droits des femmes et à l'égalité des chances entre les hommes et les femmes](#)



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