

Engender submission to the Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry on Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 election: November 2016

1. INTRODUCTION

Engender welcomes the opportunity to respond to this inquiry on women's representation in the House of Commons. Women have unequal access to power, decision-making and participation across all areas of public life in the UK. This is the case in the House of Commons, where men's over-representation still stands at 70%, and throughout the political pipelines that lead to elected office nationally. This means that women are not able to participate fully in society and to exercise equal citizenship in the UK.

Global evidence shows that increased representation for women in politics has a positive impact on both gender equality and social policy more broadly.¹ Gender balance around decision-making tables influences both the focus and outcomes of discussion. The House of Commons provides critical oversight of challenges to gender inequality and discrimination, including development of laws, structures, policies, and programmes. Given that women and men experience life differently as a result of gender inequality and cultural gender roles, women have particular perspectives that must be heard in our representative bodies.

Women are the majority of unpaid carers, lone parents, recipients of social security, low-paid workers, and survivors of gendered violence. The drivers of this systemic gender inequality, and women's experiences of the public systems that are currently failing them must inform policymaking, or else public policy will continue to entrench systemic inequality between women and men. Representative political bodies also challenge normative gender roles, stereotypes and perceptions around public authority. Where women are seen to succeed, more women engage and participate in public life.² In order to achieve gender balance in politics, we advocate for legislated candidate quotas. This consultation response sets out arguments and

¹ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2005) *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*; UN Division for the Advancement of Women (2005) *Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership*; OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2011) *Gender equality in elected office: A six-step action plan*

² Electoral Commission (2004) *Gender and political participation*

evidence in support of such an approach, as well as the need to ensure that diverse groups of women are enabled to participate in politics.

2. QUOTAS

Qu. What should government, political parties, the House of Commons and the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority be doing now to ensure better female representation in the House of Commons in 2020 and beyond?

Lack of equal and diverse representation in our parliament and public bodies is a democratic deficit that demands targeted action to overcome it. We recommend that the House of Commons introduces parliamentary gender quotas to ensure that women's representation in the House of Commons is increased in 2020 and beyond.

Parliamentary quotas are employed worldwide to redress women's historical exclusion from public life with a high degree of success. They are designed to help overcome the vast range of economic, cultural and political realities that prevent women from taking part in politics on an equal basis to men. Not least amongst these are attitudes towards women and the role of women within political parties, where male-dominated cultures prevail and informal systems of privilege sustain men's over-representation across all levels of politics. The issue here is not that women are underqualified or do not want to put themselves forward, but that political parties serve as gatekeepers to political office.³ Positive, regulatory action to address this has proven to be vital, as demonstrated by the huge increase in the use of quotas throughout all regions of the world.

2.1 QUOTAS ARE EFFECTIVE

By 2015, 86 countries had introduced electoral gender quotas into constitutional or electoral law, as a guaranteed measure to make their democratic institutions more closely represent the populations they serve.⁴ Across the highest achieving 23 countries, eleven use legally enforceable quota systems, seven have adopted other forms of gender quotas, one is a one party state, and two are extremely small legislatures that are not directly comparable to the majority of democratic states in terms of this debate. Finland and Denmark, which have long and celebrated history of policymaking that promotes women's participation in public life, are the only other two states to feature at the top of the global league table.

*Table 1: Global league table on women's parliamentary representation*⁵

³ Dahlerup, D. (2006) *Political parties as gatekeepers to equal representation*, session paper for the Political Parties and Democratization, International Political Science World Congress, 2006

⁴ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2014) *Atlas of electoral gender quotas*

⁵ IPU (2015) *Women in Parliament: 20 years in review*

Rank	Country	Women's % representation	Election year	Quota system
1	Rwanda	63.8	2013	Legislated candidate quotas
2	Bolivia	53.1	2014	Legislated candidate quotas
3	Andorra	50.0	2011	No quotas
4	Cuba	48.9	2013	N/A
5	Seychelles	43.8	2011	No quotas
6	Sweden	43.6	2014	Political party quotas
7	Senegal	42.7	2012	Legislated candidate quotas
8	Mexico	42.4	2015*	Legislated candidate quotas
9	Ecuador	41.6	2013	Legislated candidate quotas
10	Finland	41.5	2015*	No quotas
10	South Africa	40.8	2014	Political party quotas
11	Iceland	41.3	2013	Political party quotas
11	Namibia	41.3	2014	Political party quotas
12	Mozambique	39.6	2014	Political party quotas
12	Norway	39.6	2013	Political party quotas
13	Spain	39.4	2015*	Legislated candidate quotas
14	Belgium	39.3	2014	Legislated candidate quotas
15	Nicaragua	39.1	2011	Legislated candidate quotas
16	Timor-Leste	38.5	2013	Legislated candidate quotas
17	Denmark	37.4	2015*	No quotas
18	Netherlands	37.3	2012`	Political party quotas
19	Angola	36.8	2012	Legislated candidate quotas
20	Slovenia	36.7	2014	Legislated candidate quotas
=48	United Kingdom	29.6%		Political party quotas

**updated to reflect most recent elections*

However, progress towards gender equal representation in states and regions where quotas are not legally binding has stalled or regressed in recent years, having appeared to reach a level of saturation at around 35%.⁶ The UK has not even reached this benchmark and is tied with Nepal at 48th place globally.⁷

Over time, once women are established in politics on an equal basis to men, barriers to women's participation have been eroded and it has become business-as-usual for parties to

⁶ Professor Drude Dahlerup, Women5050 conference, Edinburgh, November 2015

⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> (accessed 9/11/16)

stand equal numbers of women and men as candidates, there will no longer be a need for measures to enable progress. In the meantime, quotas are used to great effect to facilitate change in political culture, within and outside of political parties. Internally, this includes a challenge to dominant cultures around candidate selection, though more democratic and transparent recruitment rules and enacting the practice of equality.

The UK is inching forward on deeply entrenched gender inequality issues. Whether with regard to women's political representation, the gender pay gap or cultural attitudes, the pace of change over recent decades has been incredibly slow. This means that millions of women and girls across the UK will have worse experiences, opportunities and outcomes throughout their lives than if we could introduce a panacea for gender equality tomorrow. Quotas are not a panacea, but they are an evidence-based tool to fast-track change and compensate for the persistent barriers that women face when seeking public office. In turn, gender balance in political bodies has a positive impact on the pace of change across other policy areas that are vital to women's equality.

2.2 QUOTA MECHANISMS

Gender quotas have featured in recent elections in 128 countries, whether through legislation or voluntary measures adopted by political parties.⁸ This enormous uptake of gender-balancing mechanisms in politics has been implemented through three main models worldwide.

2.2.1. LEGAL CANDIDATE QUOTAS

Legislated candidate quotas legally require political parties to field proportional numbers of women and men as candidates for election to parliament or local government. Quotas can be set at 50% for either sex, or in terms of a minimum or maximum share of all candidates. These apply to all parties and are most effectively coupled with sanctions for non-compliance.

Bolivia

Bolivia introduced its bold Electoral Law in 2010, when women's representation was sitting at 25%. The law requires that all candidate lists must include equal numbers of women and men, in alternation. Where a list has an odd number of candidates, women must form the majority. In single-member constituencies, at least 50% of the candidates nominated must be women. Non-compliance of these rules results in rejection of a party's entire list by the regulatory body. In 2014, this system returned 53% of seats in

⁸ IPU website: <http://www.quotaproject.org/country.cfm> (accessed 29/1/16)

Bolivia's lower chamber of representatives and 47% of seats in its upper house to women.⁹

2.2.2 RESERVED SEAT QUOTAS

Reserved seat quotas regulate the number of women in public office, setting a minimum share of seats for women. In practice, this is achieved in a number of ways, including all-women contests for specified regional seats or additional floating seats, direct appointments and the 'best loser' system for women who have narrowly lost out through direct election. These quotas are applied through constitutional amendment or legislation.

Uganda

Since 1986, Uganda has played a leading role in developing and improving its system of reserved seat quotas, at both national and local level. At the national level, the Constitution states that each of Uganda's 112 districts must have one woman representative, directly elected by voters on an additional ballot. There must also be at least two women included in the seats reserved for the Uganda People's Defence Forces, and one woman represented within each of the five seats reserved respectively for disabled people, young people and workers. This system has led to a current representation rate of 35% for women, rising from a previous high of 3% before quotas were introduced. A constitutional amendment in 1995 also reserves one third of local government membership to women.¹⁰

2.2.3 VOLUNTARY PARTY QUOTAS

Lastly, voluntary party quotas are implemented during candidate selection processes by political parties, through constitutional amendments or nomination guidelines. Practically, these can be implemented in a range of ways, in line with electoral systems and parliamentary structures.

South Africa

The African National Congress (ANC) adopted a political party gender quota of 30% in South Africa in 1994. This was not a legislative measure but was written into the party guidelines for nominations. As a result, the representation of women in the South African National Assembly rose from 4% to 25%. The ANC has sustained and extended this commitment, adopting 50% gender quotas in local and national elections from 2006

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid

onwards.¹¹ Currently, women make up 41% of the Assembly, making South Africa one of only fourteen countries worldwide to have passed the critical minority benchmark of 40% representation for women. This shows that a strong political party can make a real commitment to equal representation by establishing policies that ensure results.

Various forms of voluntary quotas have been (sporadically) adopted by political parties in the UK. However, the slow rate of progress in increasing women's representation demonstrates that alone this does not guarantee results.

2.3 MAXIMISING IMPACT

There are a number of features of quotas systems that are critical to the level of impact achieved. Firstly, a range of approaches are in operation to ensure that women not only stand as candidates, but also have a strong or guaranteed chance of being elected. These include the use of all-women shortlists and placement rules, such as standing equal numbers of women and men in 'winnable' or priority seats, and alternating by sex on multi-member constituency lists, which is known as 'zipping'. Proposals for dual member constituencies, represented by one woman and one man, have also been developed in national and subnational contexts throughout the world.

Secondly, in legal quota systems, sanctions for non-compliance are crucial. Political parties are often extremely resistant to change, not least because they remain dominated by men, some of whom stand to lose out as individuals from regulatory change. Many existing sanctions regimes are based on financial penalties or incentives, with varying degrees of success. For instance, the need for robust sanctions is illustrated by the example set in France. Despite being the first country in the world to introduce 50% gender quotas, men still hold 73% of seats in the National Assembly and 75% of seats in the senate.¹² The financial disincentive of cuts to public funding is clearly not adequately strong.

Most effectively, some legislation bars political parties from competing in a given election should they fail to submit the legal proportion of women and men as candidates. A party's list is rejected by the electoral commission and they are given a fixed time to respond in line with the law. This provision is in place in Spain, where voters returned 39% of seats to women in the 2015 general elections and in Costa Rica, where strengthened regulation and enforcement led to an increase in women's representation from 19% in the first election involving quotas in 1996, to 33% in 2014.¹³

¹¹ IPU website: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> (accessed 29/1/16)

¹² *ibid*

¹³ *ibid*

2.4 GENDER NEUTRAL QUOTAS

A driving principle of gender quotas is that they help to level the playing field for women and men entering into politics. Part of this involves breaking down the barriers that women experience, including macho political cultures and structures that are incompatible with caring commitments and other aspects of women's lives. Equally, however, levelling the playing field must entail challenging the privilege enjoyed by white men within political culture. One aspect of this is tackling underlying assumptions and stereotypes regarding men's 'natural' superiority in positions of authority and power.

Women are under-represented in politics, therefore men are over-represented. All too often the quotas debate is focussed exclusively on women, with both proponents and detractors focussing on the capacities of individual women, rather than the limited capacities of a political system that is dominated by men. Framing the need for gender parity in terms of men's over-representation is one way to highlight this bigger picture and to challenge the idea that women's equality is an injustice to men.

In practical terms, there are two forms of gender neutral quota systems in operation. The first is the legal or voluntary requirement for gender parity across candidate lists, which sees quotas set at 50%. This is the case, for example, in Bolivia, Belgium and France, and in political parties throughout the world. The second sets figures that apply to either sex, as in the case of Spain and several of Sweden's political parties, where neither men nor women are allowed to represent more than 60% or less than 40% of candidates, or in Ireland, where the initial minimum quota of at least 30% for both women and men is set to rise when the rule has been in force for seven years.

Maximum quotas for men, rather than minimum quotas for women, would take this a step further and send a powerful message regarding the undemocratic nature of over-representation by any group. This approach would also be inclusive of people with non-binary gender identities.

2.5 THE REALITY OF QUOTAS

A number of misconceptions are regularly presented in opposition to gender quotas, whether in politics or the public sector. Our rebuttals to these arguments are presented here. We also make the underlying point that measures which actively tackle power imbalance will always be contested. By no means do all women support quotas or all men oppose them. However, as demonstrated by the pace of progress against entrenched gender inequality, privileged groups with vested interests do not readily yield positions of power and influence.

2.5.1 QUOTAS SUPPORT REAL MERITOCRACY

Detractors of quotas claim that they undermine meritocracy. However, this is a superficial defence of the unequal status quo, where women do not have the same opportunities to access politics and public life as men do. The idea that women may end up in office at the expense of more qualified candidates assumes that all of our elected representatives and public board members are subjected to standardised selection processes. This is not the case.

Meanwhile, evidence shows that there is no significant qualifications gap between women and men in public office, irrespective of whether gender-balancing mechanisms are in place.¹⁴ On the contrary, in Sweden, candidate quotas have led to women with diverse backgrounds standing for election, and consequently to more qualified political candidates overall.¹⁵

This argument against quotas also supposes that merit is an objective, uniform concept, which it manifestly is not. Rather, the idea of meritocracy demands questions about who defines merit in the male-dominated public sphere, and to what end. The proposition that outcomes may suffer as a result of greater gender balance across leadership falls down when we ask ‘*outcomes for whom?*’ Where women have greater involvement in setting the agenda, evidence shows that other women, and people from other disadvantaged groups, stand to benefit.¹⁶ A narrow conception of the route into politics and the boardroom, and of the skills needed to arrive there, also undermines the broad consensus that diverse perspectives and approaches are desirable in decision-making.

2.5.2 Quotas compensate for discrimination against women

Quotas compensate for structural barriers that exclude many women from taking part in public life, including direct and indirect discrimination. It becomes clear that quotas do not discriminate against men when this bigger picture is taken into account. The conversation around quotas can overly focus on women, placing unfair onus and attention at the individual level. However, quotas are fundamentally about addressing the systemic discrimination that women routinely experience in accessing resources, opportunities and security.

The argument that quotas discriminate against men highlights the dangers of exclusively framing lack of diversity in terms of women’s under-representation. Such an approach fuels the notion that women are individually responsible for overcoming barriers to their own participation, or that their performance as public representatives warrants additional scrutiny. It also deflects attention from both the performance and disproportionately high number of their male counterparts. Reframing quotas as men’s unfair overrepresentation in the public

¹⁴ Allen et al (2015) *Measuring the quality of politicians elected by gender quotas*, Political Studies

¹⁵ Research Institute of Industrial Economics (2012) *Gender quotas and the crisis of the mediocre man: Theory and evidence from Sweden*

¹⁶ World Bank (2012) *World Development Report 2012 Background Paper: Gender quotas and female leadership*

sphere helps to challenge the pervasive notion that women are intruding on men's natural space.¹⁷

Women categorically do not benefit from unfair advantage through the use of quotas. There is an inherent gender bias to accessing politics and decision-making, but it clearly and overwhelmingly favours men. It is not discriminatory against men to redress this.

2.5.3 QUOTAS ARE DEMOCRATIC

There is also a misconception that quotas are undemocratic because they interfere with democratic processes and restrict the electorate's choice of candidate. This overlooks the fact that political parties control the nomination process, regardless of gender or any other characteristic. It is not primarily the voters who decide who stands for election.

Evidence does show, however, that increased numbers of women standing for election is correlated with stronger female participation in politics and higher voter turnout by women.¹⁸ This supports the argument *in favour* of quotas on the basis that unequal representation is undemocratic.

2.5.4 VOLUNTARY QUOTAS ARE INADEQUATE

Voluntary measures are insufficient to deliver significant change, especially with regard to deep and sustained structural inequality. Many political parties have successfully raised the number of women standing for election through use of voluntary quotas, including in the UK. However, this does not guarantee sustained commitment to or delivery of women's equality in selection processes and leads to incremental change in terms of outcomes, as not all parties participate. Furthermore, evidence from Scandinavia, where voluntary quotas have been in operation for decades, shows that progress tends to stall after men's over-representation has been reduced to around 65%.

In terms of board membership, the inadequacy of voluntary measures is demonstrated by numerous non-mandated schemes across related fields, globally and in the UK. This includes the UK government's *Think, Act, Report* initiative which has comprehensively failed to deliver meaningful change in the composition of corporate boards.

This is because increased access to decision-making and influence for women and other under-represented groups means a lesser share of power for those who currently wield it. Theory of change analysis and historical precedent within the women's movement confirm what logic dictates: mandatory regulations are significantly more effective than voluntary measures.

¹⁷ Murray, R. (2014) *Quotas for men: reframing gender quotas as a means of improving representation for all*

¹⁸ Electoral Commission (2012) *Gender participation in politics*

Predicating change on voluntary action also attaches a lesser degree of importance to the issue at hand, in the eyes of those charged with implementation, as well as the wider public.

3. DIVERSITY

Qu: Is there a need to reach out to certain groups of women and how can this be done most effectively?

Other groups protected by the Equality Act 2010 are also significantly under-represented within the UK political sphere and public sector. For all groups that are marginalised in decision-making, the same imperatives around democracy, inclusion and the need for diverse perspectives apply.

It is extremely important that the full diversity of women in the UK be represented in public office. Strategies to enable women from minority ethnic, minority faith and refugee communities, women from different class backgrounds, younger and older women, and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women to take up positions in politics and public life would bring significant benefits to society and to their respective communities.

Systemic barriers to representation for those facing multiple inequalities must be tackled, or else the scope for gender balance to deliver more diverse perspectives will be limited. Without a strong intersectional approach, which directly involves different groups of women, it is likely that quotas will mainly lead to opportunities for women who already exercise a degree of power and privilege. However, strategies to achieve more effective and representative politics for minority groups are likely to vary across protected characteristics. Engender supports the calls of our colleagues in the equalities sector as such measures are developed in Scotland and the UK more broadly. In parallel, gender quotas should be implemented by the UK Government and political parties, without delay, along with plans to enable diverse groups of women to participate more in politics and public life.

3.1 DISABLED WOMEN

Non-disabled people are significantly over-represented in politics and public life. In the UK, one in five people have a disability, yet only two members of the House of Commons identify as disabled,¹⁹ amounting to a representation gap of 19.7%. This would mean at least another 63 disabled MPs in the UK. However, the House does not even collect and publish data on under-represented groups,²⁰ an unimplemented recommendation made by the Speakers Conference on Representation back in 2009. Evidently, there is a great deal of work to be done to erode the

¹⁹ Disability News Service: <http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/new-parliament-sees-number-of-disabled-mps-plunge/> (accessed 9/11/16)

²⁰ EHRC (2015) *Smoothing the pathway to politics for disabled people*

“physical, informational and attitudinal barriers”²¹ which sustain this inequality. To this end, Engender supports the current One in Five campaign, which works to encourage, empower and increase political participation amongst disabled people in Scotland.²²

Systemic barriers to politics and public life are amplified for disabled women, due to the multiple inequalities they experience across society. Participation is affected by access to social and economic resources. In addition to the exclusion experienced by all disabled people, many disabled women also struggle to access childcare, are subjected to gender-based abuse and violence, and experience discrimination and stereotyping in the labour market on account of their gender. These issues restrict disabled women’s access to training opportunities, quality employment and career progression, and are reflected in an average pay gap of 22% for disabled women compared with non-disabled men, (as opposed to 11% for disabled men).²³

Although information on disabled women’s experiences is limited, these systemic obstacles and attitudes will ultimately prevent many disabled women from standing as candidates for political office or public board membership. Data disaggregated by gender and disability is also lacking with regard to public authority boards, which should fully comply with the public sector equality duty and implement diversity strategies to improve representation for all women and men.

3.2 MINORITY ETHNIC WOMEN

Minority ethnic (ME) women are also less likely to participate in and be represented at all levels of politics and public life. In terms of grassroots activism, which is the primary route to political candidacy, the participation rate for women from ME communities is significantly lower than that of both minority ethnic men and women from white ethnic groups.²⁴

Only 3% of MPs in the House of Commons are ME women, compared with 13% of the population.²⁵ Once more, this is linked to systemic barriers that prevent or discourage full participation in the economy as well as in public life. For instance, unemployment and underemployment are major issues for women from some minority ethnic communities, who are less likely to be in employment than the white population.²⁶ Discrimination and racism, which remain prevalent problems across the UK’s labour market and public institutions, and occupational segregation which sees ME women clustered in low-paid jobs are key factors

²¹ Inclusion Scotland (2014) *A vision for an inclusive Scotland*

²² One in Five campaign website: <http://www.oneinfive.scot/> (accessed 12/2/16)

²³ EHRC (2010) *How fair is Britain? The first triennial review*

²⁴ Electoral Commission (2004) *Gender and political participation*

²⁵ House of Commons Library (2016) *Ethnic minorities in politics and government*

²⁶ Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (2008) *State of the Nation: Race and Racism in Scotland*

which drive this.²⁷ The ‘motherhood penalty’ and unpaid care work for disabled and older relatives, which women from some ME communities provide to an even greater extent than white women,²⁸ intensify this lack of access to the skills development, training and resources on which selection to public office depends.

Neither racial equality nor gender equality can be achieved until this lack of diversity in the UK’s politics and public life has been addressed. All political parties should examine internal culture and processes, and proactively engage with their membership in order to work towards more ethnically diverse platforms in future elections. Public sector bodies should improve collection of data disaggregated by gender and ethnicity, and use this to support development of intersectional equality and diversity strategies.

3.3 GENDER IDENTITY

Full democratic representation in the UK also means greatly improved opportunities and rights for transgender people, intersex people and people with non-binary gender identities. At present, there are just over twenty elected officials worldwide who publicly identify as transgender.²⁹ This reflects the horrifying degree of discrimination, bullying and prejudice experienced by trans people, across society and our public institutions, which often leads to low levels of health and wellbeing, and poorer outcomes in life. The cultural significance of transgender women and men holding public office in the UK would be extremely powerful. To this end, the UK Government and political parties should do all that they can to strengthen transgender rights, improve access to healthcare services, tackle hate crime and transphobia and build knowledge around barriers that exclude trans people from participating in public life.

Gender quotas are targeted at reducing men’s over-representation and increasing women’s under-representation in public life. As such, they are generally framed within a binary understanding of gender. However, intersectional campaigns that push parties and public bodies to strengthen their diversity strategies should also acknowledge issues for people of all gender identities, and Engender supports the development of inclusive quota mechanisms in the UK. In the meantime, we also support parallel campaigns to strengthen the rights of sexual and gender minorities, including in politics and public life.

3.4 QUOTAS FOR MINORITY GROUPS

²⁷ Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee (2016) *Removing barriers: Race, ethnicity and employment*

²⁸ Carers UK (2012) *Half a million voices: Improving support for BAME carers*

²⁹ University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2015) *Standing Out: Transgender and gender variant candidate and elected officials around the world*

Legal and customary quotas have also been adopted for minority groups in many countries.³⁰ These have tended to focus on regional, ethnic, linguistic or religious inequalities, but quotas for disabled people are also in operation. In Uganda, there is a precedent for intersectional quotas, in the form of reserved seats for disabled, young and ‘worker’ women.³¹

At present, Engender has no position on quotas for minority groups in the UK. This may well be a necessary and strategic approach to increase diversity in due course and, contrary to the assertions of some opponents, there is nothing to suggest that this would weaken the case for gender quotas. We will take a lead on this from peer equalities organisations in due course. We will also continue to call for maximum efforts by the UK Government, local authorities, public bodies and political parties to create an inclusive and supportive environment for all women to access opportunities within their organisations, and will support these efforts wherever possible.

4. CONCLUSION

Globally, 86 states have adopted legal gender quotas over the last twenty five years, to redress the huge imbalance between women and men across politics and public life.³² Amongst these are sixteen European countries, including our nearest neighbours in Ireland and France.³³ Political parties in around thirty more states have made use of quota systems on a voluntary basis, including certain parties at certain times in the UK. The reasons for this are straightforward. Men still hold 78% of parliamentary seats worldwide, without targeted action the rate of change is unacceptably slow, quotas are extremely effective, and equality and diversity in decision-making are widely accepted as desirable goals.

Whilst measures to erode the structural barriers that prevent women from entering into public office and to support women as candidates are also vital, these are simply not enough. If gender parity in our democratic institutions and gender equality more broadly are genuine political goals in the UK, then we must start moving towards a system of legal quotas to reduce men’s over-representation across public life.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

³⁰ Hughes (2011) *Intersectionality quotas, and minority women’s representation worldwide*, American political science review

³¹ IPU website: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> (accessed 3/2/16)

³² International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2014) *Atlas of electoral gender quotas*

³³ IPU website: http://www.quotaproject.org/country_by_region.cfm#region50 (accessed 24/2/16). These are Albania, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia and Spain.

Contact: Jill Wood, Policy Manager, Engender

Email: jill.wood@engender.org.uk

Mobile: 07889 805 787

ABOUT ENGENDER

Engender has a vision for a Scotland in which women and men have equal opportunities in life, equal access to resources and power, and are equally safe and secure from harm. We are a feminist organisation that has worked in Scotland for 20 years to advance equality between women and men.