

Factsheet

Gender Equality in Political and Public Affairs

Summary of previous cycles

Cambodia accepted all 44 recommendations from the 3rd cycle that either directly mentioned women or addressed an issue that disproportionately affected women in Cambodia. However, none of the recommendations specifically addressed women in leadership position in government and political representatives. The closest recommendations “related to overall mechanisms for gender parity and women’s empowerment” in the 3rd cycle and the recommendation by Cuba in the 1st cycle to “Continue the implementation of the necessary affirmative measures to achieve gender parity.”

National Context

Since the last UPR review, Cambodia has gone through election cycles resulting in slightly increasing at commune level and decrease in representation at National Assembly by women. Only 12.8 percent of parliamentary seats were allocated to women based on the political parties’ candidate lists and the 2023 national election results. Representation had been closer to 20% over previous election cycles. 22 percent of those elected as commune councilor were women in the 2022 local elections.

In 2019, women accounted for 42 percent of the total of civil servants in Cambodia which is significantly progressive yet a much lower percentage were at the decision-making level at both national and sub-national levels. Only 10% of ministers are women – the same as in the last cycle. Only 15 percent, equal to 108 women are serving in ministries as secretary of state, and 15.9 percent (108) women as under-secretary of state as of 2023.

Challenge 1 – No legal requirements for gender parity

Cambodia has no written policies and laws to require larger numbers of women to be included in leadership roles and candidates. There is no specific written gender equality policy within political parties in place, which should be enacted as a temporary special measure under Article 4 of CEDAW. The election laws are not gender-responsive, failing to support and provide opportunities for both women and men to equally participate in decision-making role and in the politics.

Recommendations

- > Amend the election laws at the local and national levels by 2026 to require the sandwich system, alternating women and men candidates on all party lists, with women at the top of half of the lists and women representing 50% of all candidates.
- > Amend the relevant laws and policies by 2025 to require quotas of 50% women in all top ministry positions, including ministers and deputy ministers, in every ministry.

Challenge 2 – Lack of high-level commitment to inclusion of women

Lack of political will of the political parties, especially the parties with highest potential and lack of the high commitment of the leaders in promoting gender equality in politics and decision-making level and financing issue is one of the biggest barriers for women to enter politics. Cultural and social norms that have a negative mind-set, perpetuating the myth that women cannot be leaders, are the root cause. These stereotypes create barriers to all women’s participation in political life.

Recommendations

- > Continue engaging with relevant stakeholders, including women’s rights organizations, to ensure the effectiveness in changing the negative cultural norms toward women leaders.

> Require state investment of both technical and financial resources to develop a concrete plan to build capacity and feminist support system for women.

Recommendations

> By 2026, change relevant laws and policies to ensure the inclusion and protection of women and LBT to be free from discrimination and violence, especially in political engagement.

Challenge 3 – Violence against women engaging in politics

Women political party activists and women politicians continue to face all forms of discrimination and violence, hindering their participation in political activities as well as access to gender justice and the benefits of taking part in politics. COMFREL conducted a survey in 2020 on “Women Political Activist’s Participation in Politics in Cambodia” documenting discrimination and violence against women in their political participation and interests. 71% of the survey respondents daily experienced violence against women; 82% faced threats; 70.9% experienced psychological violence; 34.5% suffered from physical abuse; and 9.1% experienced sexual harassment.

Advanced Questions

> When will the new Royal Government of Cambodia adopt regulations requiring gender parity in ministry leadership positions?

> When will the elections laws including the Law on Election of Members of National Assembly (LEMNA) and the Law on Election of Members of Commune Council (LEMCC) be changed to require affirmative measures to ensure women are equally represented in elected office?

> When will the winning parties of elections and the leaders of the Royal Government of Cambodia commit to set up the sandwich system, with women at the top of half of the party lists and women representing 50% of all candidates and women in leadership positions?

Questions and inquiries may be made to:

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Recommendations made by:

