



COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

**PARLIAMENTARY
WORKPLACE EQUALITY &
DIVERSITY NETWORKS:**

*CASE STUDIES FROM THE
COMMONWEALTH*

About the CPA

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) connects, develops, promotes and supports parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and the implementation of the enduring values of the Commonwealth. The CPA collaborates with parliaments and other organisations, including the intergovernmental community, to achieve its statement of purpose. It brings parliamentarians and parliamentary staff together to exchange ideas among themselves and with experts in various fields, to identify benchmarks of good practices and new policy options they can adopt or adapt in the governance of their societies.

About the author

This document was produced by Acacia Wall, Programme Administrator, and Clive Barker, Programmes Manager, at the CPA Headquarters Secretariat.

Acknowledgements

The CPA Headquarters Secretariat extends its thanks to its member parliaments that have taken the time to respond to the Commonwealth Parliament Research Survey for Workplace Equality and Diversity Networks. Without these submissions, this Report would not have been possible.

Additional thanks are given to Irving Anderson who inspired the commissioning of this report.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2

WHAT ARE WORKPLACE EQUALITY & DIVERSITY NETWORKS? 3

WHY ARE WEDNS IMPORTANT FOR PARLIAMENTS? 5

WEDNS AND SMALL PARLIAMENTS 6

WHAT MAKES FOR EFFECTIVE WEDNS? 7

WEDNS AND THE CPA 8

STAFF VS PARLIAMENTARIAN NETWORKS CASE 9

CASE STUDIES 10

PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
PARLIAMENT OF CANADA
PARLIAMENT OF FIJI
STATES ASSEMBLY OF JERSEY
ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC (MOZAMBIQUE)
PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
NEW ZEALAND PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENT OF PAKISTAN
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA
UNITED KINGDOM PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA
SENEDD CYMRU/WELSH PARLIAMENT
WESTERN CAPE PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT

ENDNOTES 30

FURTHER READING 31

© Commonwealth Parliamentary Association 2022

All rights reserved. This publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photography, recording or otherwise provided it is used only for educational purposes and is not for resale, and provided full acknowledgement is given to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as the original publisher. Rights are not extended for the reproduction of any photography or design not owned by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as contained in this publication.

Views and opinions expressed in this publication are the responsibility of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Headquarters Secretariat and should not be attributed to any Parliament or Member of the Association.

Have you used this publication?

If you have, let us know as we are always keen to hear how our products are being used. Our details are on the back.

Foreword

This publication by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association will be an invaluable tool in providing Commonwealth Parliaments with case studies, which will, in turn, provide foundations for its member Parliaments to develop new, or improve existing, workplace equality and diversity networks. The report showcases the work that thirteen Parliaments throughout the Commonwealth are doing to facilitate their inclusion and equality agendas with internal networks.

Although the jurisdictions of these Parliaments differ in terms of culture, they face common challenges, where unique approaches can be determined through learning from others. It is the strength of the CPA to be able to bring diverse Parliaments together to strengthen and promote democratic practice.

Parliaments should be institutions that are not only representative of the public, but actively seek to improve the conditions for Parliamentarians and Parliamentary staff. It is important that Parliaments are environments that facilitate genuine equality, and ought to be exemplary institutions leading the way towards ever greater diversity and inclusivity. Without appropriate steps taken by Parliaments to resolve disparities in equity among Parliamentarians and Parliamentary staff, they cannot be considered truly representative. Equality and Diversity Networks provide a platform in which to address existing issues and create solutions. Striving to achieve new goals, introducing new procedures and policy, and continuing to build on existing equality and diversity work is paramount to achieving a truly democratic and prosperous society. Ensuring all citizens from all backgrounds have equal access to Parliamentary positions is a core function in Parliaments being both inclusive and trustworthy. However, we must also prioritise the continued development and maintenance of an environment where each Parliamentarian and Parliamentary staff member feels valued, heard and respected.



The Hon. Solomon Lechesa Tsenoli, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of South Africa

When changes occur within democratic institutions, this encourages more equal participation of minorities in wider society. A society that continually manages equality, diversity and inclusion is a society that is moving towards being free of prejudice and discrimination. The constitution of South Africa envisages a world where every citizen is equal. It is important not only in South Africa but throughout the Commonwealth, to hold Parliaments accountable to remain as inclusive institutions.

The recently established South African Parliamentary Institute will actively promote those values throughout the entire legislative sector in our country, including in all parliaments we collaborate with.

Executive Summary

Workplace Equality and Diversity Networks (WEDNs) provide a forum for employees of parliaments to discuss, consider and promote vital equality rights-related issues, ranging from disabilities, race, gender to sexuality and age. They seek to support the needs of employees with different social identities, such as women, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities, to have a positive, healthy and safe work environment. They also aim to strengthen the inclusion and equality agenda for parliaments. As parliaments are one of the principal institutions of any functioning democracy, there is a sustained need for diversity and inclusion to be a priority. Institutions, like parliaments that are representative of the wider society, have greater legitimacy and authority and are undoubtedly more democratic. Good governance means acting in the interests of all citizens, and ensuring the experience of all citizens will be considered.

Parliaments must aim to champion a plurality of voices and promote a sense of belonging among parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. Different experiences, approaches and attitudes foster variations in practices and policies. This type of environment, therefore, generates innovation and creativity, enhances problem-solving and promotes flexibility and adaptability.

Many Commonwealth parliaments have introduced policies surrounding inclusion and diversity. WEDNs allow for action to take place on the commitments parliaments have made with these policies. When marginalisation of minority groups exists, impacts can be seen within wider society where there is a disparity in access to healthcare, education and unemployment for those groups. Parliament has a key role in providing a trickle-down effect to wider society by putting issues of marginalised groups at the forefront of policy implementation. WEDNs provide a channel for these diverse groups to have the opportunity to be heard within parliamentary institutions.

As highlighted in SDG 16 – *“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”*¹ the CPA has the mandate to support our member Branches in strengthening their practices and approaches towards creating inclusive, diverse and representative institutions. This report has been commissioned to provide a current examination of WEDNs within a parliamentary context and to offer best practice examples of their application across the Commonwealth. Whereas WEDNs are a small part of the diversity and inclusion picture, they are an important and useful approach that can easily be adopted for parliaments, both large and small, which seek to pursue best practice.

Case studies provided within this report have been sourced directly from CPA legislatures, as well as additional desk-based research. We would like to express appreciation to all CPA Branch Secretaries and other parliamentary staff who have co-operated in providing material, as without their assistance this publication would not have been possible.



Akbar Khan (7th Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) (centre) attending the UK Parliament's meeting of the ParliREACH Workplace Equality Network to discuss issues of race, ethnicity and cultural heritage.



What are Workplace Equality & Diversity Networks?

Workplace Equality and Diversity Networks were originally established in the USA and were intended as groupings of employees who could work collectively to promote equality, diversity and inclusion of marginalised and underrepresented groups within a set industry, sector or organisation. Initially, this would be for women and ethnic minorities, and would later evolve to include persons with disabilities and members of the LGBT+ community. These initial WEDNs existed within private sector entities and academia, but in recent years have been replicated within the public sector, and of particular relevance to this report, parliaments.

Within a parliamentary context, WEDNs are characterised as informal support groups of primarily parliamentary staff and officials. WEDNs should not be confused with unofficial political caucuses, friendship groups or All-Party Groups, which are primarily comprised of parliamentarians and tend to focus on campaigning and awareness-raising. Nevertheless, in some instances, Members of Parliaments are included in WEDNs. For example, in the UK Parliament, most of their Workplace Equality Networks have parliamentarians as members. In fact, such an approach should be encouraged, as such senior stakeholders can be influential actors in aiding the WEDNs to achieve their organisational aims.

According to Dennissen, Benschop and van den Brink in their paper on *Diversity Networks: Networking for Equality?*² there are three areas in which WEDNs seek to be drivers of change. These are at the level of:

- Individual
- Group
- Organisational

Individual

WEDNs are most effective in supporting individuals within parliamentary workforces with career progression, mentoring, creating opportunities and networking. Women/gender-focused WEDNs are most successful in this field.

Group

This element of WEDNs focuses on building a group or collective between employees of the same gender, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. who can act as a support group and bring people together in a safe setting. It is a useful way for like-minded people to share experiences and approaches and find ways to work and succeed.



Organisational

WEDNs can act as lobbying agencies to pursue and push executives to increase equality and diversity on behalf of parliamentary workforces and even elected representatives. WEDNs might contribute to parliamentary organisational reforms or might even submit evidence to internal parliamentary committees which might be reviewing recruitment procedures, working hours or accessibility for persons with disabilities.

It is important to stress that WEDNs do not typically come about within an organisational vacuum. WEDNs evolve and develop from a bottom-up desire or a top-down need to progress equality and diversity in parliament. Nevertheless, a good approach is for parliament to set the agenda, or at least create an environment, or establish policies that enable such networks to flourish. Such support might come in the shape of meeting space, funding or staff time to enable the network in its undertakings.

One of the obvious requirements to enable the establishment of WEDNs is for the parliament to be responsible for its parliamentary service. This is not always the case, as in many instances across the Commonwealth the public or civil service, which may encompass parliamentary employees, will be responsible for staffing and recruitment. Either way, parliaments need to have some form of equality, inclusion and diversity policy/strategy, sometimes known as an equal opportunities strategy in place before encouraging the creation of a WEDNs or creating a viable environment for one to be initiated by staff or parliamentarians. This is in part because such policies will go into detail on recruitment, equal pay, flexible working, anti-harassment, etc. All of which should seek to form an organisational framework for WEDNs to exist and function. Equally important is the need for such frameworks to align with national, regional and international laws, regulations, standards and commitments on equality. For example, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) International Labour Standards on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment.³

ACTIVITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF WEDNs

From examples supplied by parliaments (see case studies), there are several activities and characteristics that apply to WEDNs across the Commonwealth. Some of these are:

- **Hosting social gatherings or events for members of the network to build connections.**
- **Campaigning and advocating on areas of importance for the network internally and externally of parliament.**
- **Build partnerships and connections with organisations or similar bodies nationally, regionally and internationally.**
- **Communicating and sharing key information with members of the network on topics relevant and of interest (laws, policies, training opportunities, briefings, etc.).**
- **Establishing mentoring or shadowing programmes and schemes to support network members.**
- **Set up awards/prizes or work with external award schemes to highlight and showcase champions or initiatives of the network.**
- **Develop organisational best practices and champion them with key senior stakeholders**
- **Initiate and publish research on topics relevant to the network and promote them to key stakeholders.**
- **Organise fundraisers to support the work of the network.**
- **Undertake visits and outreach to external organisations, businesses, CSO, etc. to learn different approaches.**



Why are WEDNs Important for Parliaments?

Regardless of how diverse and equal the parliament may consider itself in terms of diversity and inclusion, legislatures are representative institutions. At all times, it should showcase best practices when it comes to doing all it can to ensure parliament is reflective of the diversity of people who it governs and represents. As highlighted previously, WEDNs can be an effective mechanism to improve diversity and inclusion within parliamentary workforces.

Studies have demonstrated that WEDNs can achieve many positive outcomes for employees. Effective networking, in particular, is linked to positive career outcomes such as job opportunities, promotions, higher wages, influence and status.⁴ There are also clear benefits in providing safe spaces for members of the network, especially minority groups, to share experiences and mutual learning, which otherwise might not be available. As such, staff morale is increased and productivity also rises as a result. Equally important is that working in parliament can be a very specialised field, and it, therefore, is essential to retain skilled staff as much as possible. For example, women who feel there is an insurmountable glass ceiling may wish to work in other organisations where there is a greater opportunity for promotion.

Where WEDNs can support the parliament by increasing the diversity of the workforce, the parliament in turn gains from having a more diverse presence and voice in the performance of parliament. Having people with different backgrounds, views, expertise and perspectives can enrich the decision-making process. Groupthink, whereby a small group of people are involved in decision-making centred around misguided collective rationalisation, where members of the group don't second-guess their assumptions, can result in poor outcomes. There is clear evidence to suggest that having a diverse boardroom can significantly improve decision-making.⁵

WEDNs can also be a valuable outreach and engagement channel for parliaments that wish to work with civil society and non-governmental organisations which champion equality and diversity. As part of a recent report by the CPA, diversity and inclusion should be central to any parliaments outreach and engagement strategy.⁶ WEDNs can therefore provide valuable insight as to how best to conduct and implement such public engagement effectively.

Furthermore, WEDNs when established can be of considerable benefit to parliamentary governing bodies as forums and platforms to engage with staff on matters of equality and diversity. For example, when developing or updating staff handbooks, recruitment policies, WEDNs can provide valuable insight. Although, it is important to stress that they should not be used as a substitute for broad consultation and engagement with all staff and parliamentarians.



C, H, A, N, G, E,



WEDNs in Small Parliaments

It is worth highlighting that Workplace Equality and Diversity Networks can be challenging to establish when it comes to smaller legislatures. Some parliaments in the Commonwealth and beyond may only consist of three to four members of staff. Small numbers of staff can, of course, be reflective of small numbers of parliamentarians, the majority of whom may be in the government. This inevitably creates a disincentive for the establishment or need for WEDNs. Therefore, how do small legislatures establish mechanisms like WEDNs to increase diversity and inclusion? One approach highlighted by the Jersey States Assembly is that staff of the legislature can be part of wider public/civil service networks. In jurisdictions like Anguilla, for example, parliamentary staff who are employees of the government can be part of a Civil Service Association, which is a type of Trade Union.⁷

Trade Unions are useful entities that provide a larger mechanism to fulfil many of the objectives and approaches smaller WEDNs may wish to pursue, with the exception that WEDNs will typically have a narrower focus. Broader public service Trade Unions can in turn be members of international organisations, which can provide additional networking opportunities and resources. Public Services International, is such an organisation with represents approx. 30 million employees.⁸



The CPA Small Branches network is also a mechanism available to support smaller parliaments who wish to strengthen their approaches to diversity and inclusion. The network represents the smallest jurisdictions in all regions of the CPA to identify their particular needs and requirements in parliamentary strengthening.⁹

When it comes to informal networks for parliamentarians as opposed to staff networks, the Caribbean region has highlighted the benefits of working regionally to strengthen women's caucuses. Several informal meetings and workshops have been conducted to support women parliamentarians across the region on best-practice approaches, skills-building and mentoring. A particular focus has been on supporting a large number of women Speakers and Presiding Officers to support one another in overcoming misogyny which, at times, is prevalent in the legislatures of that region.





WHAT MAKES FOR EFFECTIVE WEDNS?¹⁰

Have a clear purpose - It is important to have a mandate/purpose/strategy for both high-level long-term goals and easy wins. Be realistic in what can be achieved and when. Knowing what you want to achieve within your network will help to have a shared vision, which can be essential if the network is made up of a vast collection of people with different views and perspectives, especially if they are politically different.

Be holistic in the approach - Remember, your parliament might have an equal opportunity or diversity policy, so it is best to work within and support that policy. Consider international, regional and domestic standards, commitments and laws that the network can champion, uphold or educate on.

Be an inclusive and broad collective - Although the network might focus on gender or disabilities, ensure that the membership of the network is broad and diverse. Be open to anyone interested in championing the cause. Male Champions of women's equality can help support such a network's objectives.

Be organised and coordinated - Hold meetings regularly, consult with network members or allies frequently or at regular intervals. Be open and transparent in your approach, and equally be consistent. Have an executive board to lead and manage the work of the network, and ensure such a board has a democratic mandate to carry out its work. The Chair of the board could be its champion and spokesperson with broader engagement. Have an effective approach to internal communication, such as a WhatsApp or Facebook group or a page/section of the parliaments' intranet site where one exists.

Engage internally and externally - Hold events, support external charities and CSOs. Think about campaigns and advocacy. Work with academia and other similar networks based in other organisations. For example, if there is a like-minded public service network or international counterpart, consider working with them. Look for partners and sponsors who can assist with your work.

Engagement and buy-in from senior stakeholders - It is important to have a senior individual representative to champion the importance of the network, and make them a central feature of your Diversity and Inclusion strategy. Make sure there is a strong engagement from the relevant Human Resources team.



WEDNs and the CPA



The CPA is dedicated to assisting Commonwealth parliaments in becoming inclusive and diverse institutions through a range of programmes, projects and activities. This includes work carried out by both the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)¹¹ and the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD)¹² networks.

The CWP is a network within the CPA of women parliamentarians with a mission *to promote the representation of women in CPA Branches and women's full and equal participation in all political and parliamentary leadership at all levels*. The CPwD on the other hand is a network within the CPA that champions and increases the representation of persons with disabilities in Commonwealth parliaments and works towards the mainstreaming of disability considerations in all CPA activities and programmes.

Several parliaments have used the existing CWP and CPwD networks as a workplace equality network, and the members of the networks have continued discussions outside of programmes and activities arranged by the CPA.

The CPA published [Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures](#), in which Benchmark 16.7 suggests that Parliaments should 'ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.' Parliaments that encourage a variety of staff members to actively participate within WEDNs are facilitating the commitment to adhere to this benchmark.¹³

In line with previous work to bridge gaps of inequality within parliaments, the CPA has supported the production of a [blog post](#) on how Commonwealth parliaments can become more diverse workplaces for their staff, alongside how WEDNs help to create an inclusive work environment.¹⁴



STAFF VS PARLIAMENTARIAN NETWORKS

Friendship Groups, like those in Australia and Canada, or All-Party Parliamentary Groups like those in Malaysia or the United Kingdom, are types of informal networks for parliamentarians. Whereas most might have an inter-parliamentary focus, some parliaments will have networks focused on domestic diversity and inclusion matters. Such networks do not include parliamentary staff. The most potent example of such networks will be Womens Caucuses. Some of the characteristics of these networks are:

Informality: Whereas with staff WEDNs which might come under the remit of parliamentary administrations, parliamentary networks like APPGs are typically independent of parliament. In fact, most parliamentary administrations seek to have little to no involvement in domestic parliamentary networks. It is unlikely that parliamentary standing orders/rules of procedures will make any reference to such networks. However, independent standards, ethics commissioners or registrars of interest may have some involvement where public money or externally provided funding is utilised. Networks that are provided with funding, resources or staffing can be an area of contention, especially where lobbying and lapses of transparency and reporting are concerned.

Cross-Party/Bipartisanship: Typically, such parliamentary networks are and should be cross-party, and encourage a broad membership. Where the parliament is bicameral (two chambers), members from both could be included. There are, of course, instances where some parties or independents may be excluded, but this is not considered good practice. In addition, there are often diversity and inclusion-focus networks within individual political parties or political coalitions, in such instances, cross-party engagement might be more light touch.

Function and Objectives: One of the challenges of Member-based diversity and inclusion networks is in identifying what to focus on and how to best manage the busy schedules of members when compared to parliamentary workloads. Often, these networks will focus heavily on campaigning and advocating for changes outside of parliament, such as a change in the law or seeking a more diverse number of parliamentary candidates for election. At times this can cause difficulties in challenging political party partisan policies, so compromises and agreements need to be struck to ensure in-fighting doesn't occur. What is also important, is that the work of these networks does not interfere or overlap with the work of formal parliamentary committees.



CASE STUDIES:



Parliament of Australia

The Parliament of Australia has several parliamentary friendship groups. To be recognised as such, the group must formally apply at the commencement of each Parliament. The group must also adhere to the following:

- be open to all senators and members;
- be apolitical;
- be clearly defined;
- have no sponsorship from external organisations;
- have a Chairperson and Deputy Chair; and
- have a membership of at least 10 current sitting senators and members.

Parliamentary friendship groups have access to venue hire free of charge.

Below are some examples of parliamentary groups that have been established by parliamentarians within the Parliament of Australia:

- Parliamentary friendship group for LGBTIQ Australians
- Parliamentary friends of disability
- Australian parliamentary group on population and development
- Parliamentarians against child abuse and neglect
- Parliamentarians for action to reduce violence against women and children
- Parliamentary friends of affordable housing and reducing homelessness
- Parliamentary friends of ageing and aged care
- Parliamentary friends of climate action
- Parliamentary friends of democracy
- Parliamentary friends of mental health

Further information about these groups is available on the Australian Parliament House website [here](#).

There are also two networks for officials who work in the parliamentary departments, including:

- **Parliamentary Service Indigenous Employee Network** (information is available [here](#))
- **LGBTQI Network** (information is not publicly available).



Parliament of Canada

Senate of Canada

The Senate of Canada's Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration has a subcommittee on Diversity. The subcommittee was recently reconstituted following the 2021 Canadian federal election with the mandate to examine and report on issues of diversity in the Senate workforce. In 2018, the Committee released the report *Diversity in the Senate: From Aspiration to Action* regarding the status of diversity in the staffing of the Senate's administration. The report examines progress in the enabling the hiring of people from four designated 'employment equity groups' including:

- Women
- Aboriginal peoples
- Persons with disabilities
- members of visible minorities

The report can be accessed via the following link:

https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/421/CIBA/reports/CIBA_DVSC_Web_E.pdf

Library of Parliament

The Library of Parliament is currently leading an initiative to put in place diversity and inclusion networking groups for employees.



Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

As the Parliament of Fiji is a relatively small parliament of only 51 Members, there is not the capacity to have a full array of WEDNs. However, two key networks that work locally and regionally in the interest of marginalised groups have been established.

The Fijian Parliament had established a **Gender Group (CWP Fiji Group)** and **Disability Champion (CPwD)** to promote issues of interest on gender and disabilities. Both networks provide an opportunity for interested parliamentarians and groups of people to discuss and consider issues relevant to their situation or of interest to them.

These networks support the Parliament's vision of a workplace that is accessible, inclusive and innovative, enabling Parliament to support democracy by being representative, fair and relevant.



States Assembly of Jersey

The States Assembly of Jersey has no workplace equality network, however the States Greffe (the administration of the Assembly) is part of the Government-wide **iWill** network which is about women in leadership. This group aims to encourage women to take up leadership roles within government. The group provides mentor and shadowing opportunities, as well as support in facilitating career progression. Further information can be found throughout this [report](#).



Assembly of the Republic, Mozambique

In the Parliament of Mozambique, there are two workplace equality and diversity networks, these are as follows:

1. Parliamentary Women Caucus

The Women Caucus deals with gender-related issues, and it comprises 107 members, 91 of whom are from the ruling party (Frelimo) and six from the main opposition party (Renamo).

The Women Parliamentary Caucus has carried out monitoring activities to find out whether the laws approved by Parliament are being implemented, especially those that aim to protect women and children, namely:

- Family Law - Law 29/9
- Success Act - Law 23/19
- Combat Early Marriage Act - Law 19/19 and
- Combat Early Marriage Act - Law 6/08

Tasks of the Parliamentary Women Caucus:

- Create a space for debate on specific women's issues
- Promote seminars to strengthen participation in leadership and decision-making positions at different levels



- To stimulate and encourage the effective and responsible performance of women in the fight for equality and gender equity to assume decision-making positions at various levels of political, economic and cultural life.

2. Parliamentary Youth Caucus

To be eligible to become a member of the Parliamentary Youth Office, the parliamentarian must be no older than 35 years old at the beginning of the parliamentary term.

17 young Members of Parliament make up the Parliamentary Youth Caucus. 11 of which are women, and six are men. 16 are from Frelimo Party, and one Member is from Renamo Party. All constituencies are represented except for Manica and Inhambane Provinces, which corresponds to 6.8% of the 250 MPs.

Tasks of the Parliamentary Youth Caucus:

- Interact with public and/or private entities dedicated to youth actions
- Promote the rights of young people
- Promote debates for the reinforcement of citizenship and the participation of young people in leadership and decision-making;
- Ensure collaboration and articulation with the various national and international organisations that bring together young people in the political, economic and socio-cultural spheres;
- Establish cooperation with similar organisations at the regional and international levels.



Parliament of New South Wales

The Parliament of New South Wales, Australia has an established **Diversity and Inclusion network** committed to the following focus groups:

- Gender equity
- People with disability
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders
- Culturally and linguistically diverse Australians, including refugees
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender &/or Intersex people (LGBTIQ+)
- Mature-age persons.

Each focus group is championed by an Executive Sponsor to promote and develop their specific community group in the workplace.

Events and initiatives are held throughout the year to fairly and equitably represent and promote these focus areas, as well as build support, collaboration and community.



New Zealand Parliament

The New Zealand Parliament have the following workplace equality networks:

Ko Tāua Tāua/Diversity and Inclusion: this committee is open to all Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives (the Office) and parliamentary service staff. The committee was originally developed by the Office over two years ago, and the Parliamentary Service was invited to join in 2020.

The committee launched its Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2023 in 2020, which confirms the Clerk's and Chief Executive's commitment to foster a workplace environment that promotes diversity and inclusion, and sets out eight focus areas for the Diversity and Inclusion Committee to address:

- Creating a business case for diversity and inclusion at NZ Parliament
- Expanding its diversity data and improving metrics
- Strengthening its grassroots teams in the D&I area
- Creating and implementing the Diversity and Inclusion strategy
- Increasing visibility of the committee and its work
- Strengthening Parliament's attractions and recruitment to embedding D&I best practices into our recruitment and onboarding processes.
- Establishing targeted D&I policies
- Upskilling its current and future leaders

The group is also committed to upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi and recognises the continuing partnership it established and to do our part to deliver on the commitments to Māori under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The New Zealand Parliament's Diversity and Inclusion Committee meets every six weeks, primarily virtually through Microsoft Teams. These meetings are accessible by anyone via the internal intranet server for parliamentary staff. At the beginning of each meeting, a set agenda is presented by the co-chairs. This agenda sets out the points of discussion for the meeting and aligns with in-flight activity to progress the strategy, as well as forum-based discussions with the membership. A member of the Office's Senior Leadership Team, as well as operational managers across both agencies, attend committee meetings. A member of the Senior Leadership and Operational Management teams attends the D&I committee once a quarter and the committee are invited to brief leadership every six months. The committee targets membership from underrepresented sectors of the agencies and seeks input from others who may not be permanently represented.



The current co-chairs of the committee are Adelyn Wischnowsky (Head of Human Resources, Parliamentary Service) and Katherine Farmer (Senior Business Analyst, Office of the Clerk). The committee does not have its dedicated budget, however, some events and initiatives are funded from the centralised human resources budget and operational budgets from both agencies.

Authentic self

The Authentic Self network aims to help create a culture in which all employees can bring their whole selves to work, including those who identify as LGBT+. The group will advocate LGBT+ equality; promote the importance of an inclusive workplace, and act as a support network for those in the community. The aim is for the Authentic Self to foster a safe and supportive workplace.

Māori networks

Tangata Whenua Roopu. Ministerial Services, including employees within ministerial offices, are welcome to join Tangata Whenua Rōpū. The rōpū and its activities provide common ground and a proactive interface for Māori staff working within the diverse nature of each of the Department's business groups.

Taha Moana

Taha Moana increases Pacific cultural capability and understanding and connects and supports Pacific staff to be successful in the following ways:

- Provide a support network for our Pacific people.
- Promote Pacific culture and language.
- Provide DIA managers and staff with access to Pacific cultural expertise and resources.
- Advocate for Pacific staff in recruitment and career development.
- Support the development of resources to raise Pacific cultural awareness.
- Support the DIA National Pacific Staff Fono.
- Promote Leo o te Pasifika, DIA's Pacific Language Weeks programme.
- Support the implementation of Te Ara Vaka.

Woman's Network

The DIA Women's Network (DIAWN) is a DIA-people led to support and development network. The DIA Women's Network is a co-creation where like-minded people are ready to work together to generate events, performances, exhibitions and debates.



Parliament of Pakistan

The Parliament of Pakistan under the leadership of the Hon. Speaker National Assembly (NA) has established a special committee on persons with disabilities. This committee has taken the following steps:

- Translated the whole Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in braille for persons with visual impairments.
- Made the National Assembly's official website accessible for persons with visual impairments.

The Parliament of Pakistan has also undergone a disability audit and the entire building is being renovated with the perspective of giving equal opportunity and access to persons with disabilities. The following works are planned:

- Installation of new ramps where required
- Construction of disability-friendly washrooms
- Reservation of parking slots of persons with disabilities
- Provision of electronic wheelchairs
- Reservation of special gallery for persons with disabilities

The Parliament has also passed the CT Rights of Persons with Disability Act 2020. The Act is a remarkable achievement and is the first of its kind in Islamabad Capital Territory that is developed in line with United Nations Conventions on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD).

A Special mobile Application named *Equal Access* has also been developed for the integration of data for persons with disabilities.



Scottish Parliament

The Scottish Parliament has six employee diversity network groups that provide support to people from diverse groups. Staff networks form an important role in improving the way they work. The networks provide a good source of information about the challenges in the workplace and help build a better picture of the needs and expectations of diverse groups who want to work, visit or engage with the Parliament.

The diversity staff networks were first established as a key activity in delivering on the outcomes of our [2017-21 Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#). Each of the networks has a Senior Champion from its Leadership Group, who provide advice and support to the network. The Network Chairs group have two places on our Diversity Board that was established at the same time as the networks. The Diversity Board is chaired by a member of the Leadership Group.

Further information about each of the networks is available on their website:

<https://www.parliament.scot/about/work-for-the-parliament/diversity-and-inclusion/our-people>



Diversity & Inclusion Innovation through diversity

Scottish Parliament's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021
Ro-innleachd Ionadachd is In-ghabhail Phàrlamaid na h-Alba 2017-2021



Parliament of the Republic of South Africa

The Parliament of South Africa has established two workplace equality/diversity networks/forums that serve as a platform for employees to discuss issues of interest to them:

1. Parliamentary Women and Gender Rights Forum (PWGRF)

The purpose of this forum is for women, transgender, and gender non-conforming employees of Parliament of the Republic of South Africa to promote fair treatment of all persons, regardless of gender identity, and achieve substantive equality. The main objective of the PWGRF is to promote a rights-based approach in all areas of the workplace, inclusive of the following focus areas:

- transformation;
- economic empowerment;
- leadership;
- safe working environment; and
- sustainability.

Membership of the WGRF is open to all women, transgender, and gender non-conforming employees of Parliament who identify with the principles and objectives of the WGRF.

2. Employment Equity and Skills Development Forum

The Parliament of South Africa recognises the importance of diversity in the workplace and is committed to shaping an organisational environment that supports inclusivity.

This forum has been established to represent employees in matters related to employment equity and skills development to drive the transformation agenda and is responsible for:

- Providing input and assisting in the implementation of transformation interventions related to diversity, employees with disabilities, skills development, and employment equity.



United Kingdom Parliament

Workplace equality networks (WENs) were established in UK Parliament under the House Equality Scheme 2009-2011. UK public sector organisations were required by UK law at that time to eliminate discrimination and to promote equality in terms of race, gender and disability. An Equality Scheme was a strategy for setting out in a timetabled action plan how an organisation will build equality into its activities, and how it will monitor and evaluate its performance. The first WEN was established in 2010, and most, but not all, of the WENs have at their core the interests of one of what subsequently became to be known as the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. The other WENs take forward interests of other groups not mentioned as a characteristic in the Act, but which nevertheless are important, such as carers and economic exclusion.

The protected characteristics are under the Equality Act 2010 are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. The WENs are open to all pass holders, that is to say, anyone who works for UK Parliament, whether they be Members, Members' staff, Peers, Peers' staff, staff of both Houses, and contractors. The bulk of the membership is formed by the staff of both Houses. WEN committee members run the WENs on a voluntary basis, in addition to their main roles.

The WENs also have two board champions, one from each chamber, who are responsible for representing the network during management board meetings. The chairs meet with the board champions on a quarterly basis.

The UK Parliament have a total of six WENs:

- **ParliAble** - supports disabled people in Parliament.
- **ParliCARE** - raises awareness of and support for all those in Parliament with caring challenges.
- **ParliGENDER** - the WEN for gender equality in Parliament.
- **ParliOUT** - a support network relevant to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, (LGBT+) people.
- **ParliREACH** - a network in support of increasing awareness and appreciation of race, ethnicity and cultural heritage.
- **ParliON** - the Parliamentary Opportunity network, a WEN to promote inclusion and equality of opportunity across Parliament, and to raise awareness of socio-economic inclusion.

Both Houses provide the WENs with modest financial support, and expenditure follows strict guidelines.

Diversity and Inclusion teams

The Diversity and Inclusion team in the Commons was established in its own right in 2010 but existed before that as part of the Learning and Development team. The establishment of the



Inclusion and Diversity team in the Lords followed in 2015. The first WEN to be established was ParliOUT in 2010, with the other WENs being established in subsequent years. The D&I and I&D teams form part of the Administration of their respective Houses and report ultimately to the Clerk in the Commons and the Clerk of the Parliament in the Lords. Both teams often work together as much of their remit is bicameral.

The teams also manage WENs by means of facilitation. They provide the budget, adhoc advice and guidance, attend committee meetings and bring a balanced perspective to the WEN to guarantee they remain politically neutral. Funds must be spent on activities that directly support the objectives of the WEN, such as educational events or awareness-raising.

The D&I/I&D teams have overall governance of the WENs. This includes leading on any reviews which may take place from time to time.

ParliAble

ParliAble was established in 2011. All members of the committee are responsible for managing the shared mailbox on a rostered basis. All must also become a member of PurpleSpace and attend at least one event annually. PurpleSpace is a learning, networking and professional development group specific to disability network leaders. The wider membership of ParliAble consists of over 100 members. Members are welcome to attend any of the committee meetings, which take place once per month. Members are also emailed any newsletters and about any upcoming events, the group is hosting. At present, the committee consists of 2 co-chairs, a secretary, an inclusion analysis officer, two communications officers and a finance officer.



An action plan is created every year to specify the goals and targets the network aims to achieve. The main goal of the network is to make Parliament more accessible. Financial support for the WENs is provided by both Houses annually for activities and events. The network takes part in equality impact assessments (known as inclusion analyses in UK Parliament), and this is a way in which they can influence policies to make them more inclusive. From this engagement, the WEN was able to provide feedback to the diversity and inclusion team, so further action could therefore be taken to help these barriers of inclusion be overcome. The network also sits on a steering group that discusses accessibility in buildings. The network has also run mental health awareness campaigns and events for specific types of disabilities such as dyslexia, blindness, autism, etc. During COVID-19 lockdowns, the network hosted water cooler events in which members had the opportunity to socialise and check in with each other. The aim of this event was to facilitate positive mental health.

ParliGENDER

The network meets roughly once a month. The number of leadership members changes often, but currently, there are roughly 16 committee members. Though membership is open to staff of either the Commons or the Lords, members are primarily from the Commons. There are not currently any staff from MPs offices in the WEN. For positions on the Committee, candidates are expected to submit a statement stating their interest and experience.



Representation in parliament is not the primary aim of the WEN, as its aims focus on other areas of work, such as work on improving domestic violence training, menopause and period awareness. ParliGENDER is also currently looking at pregnancy loss, IVF, abortion, adoption and surrogacy in the workplace. Hybrid working is another area that ParliGENDER is looking at with how women on the UK parliamentary estate are managing going back and forth between the workplace and home, as well as working remotely.



The goals of the network must be in line with the strategies of the House of Commons' Diversity and Inclusion team and House of Lords' Inclusion and Diversity team, who sign off the WEN's strategies.

How often events happen depends on COVID-19, as it was usually every other month before the pandemic started. In November 2021, ParliGENDER had an event on COVID-19 and violence against women and girls. ParliGENDER also has a film club, which is open to other employees on the estate. These would be screenings of films relevant to ParliGENDER's cause.

ParliOUT

ParliOUT is the longest standing WEN and has existed since 2010. When the network was initially established, there was only one chair. However, there was recognition that as the workload increased it was necessary for there to be two chairs. Having two chairs also allowed for more representation and diversity by ensuring there was a chair of different genders. This was especially important for ParliOUT in demonstrating the voices of men, who make up the majority of parliament, did not overshadow other genders.



There are over 500 members in total. Members can also join from external entities. For example, members can be from other parliaments, prior speakers or partners from past events, members of APPG groups, or contacts from previous outreach events. The wider membership is specific to those who are registered on the mailing list to receive updates on events and newsletters.



ParliREACH

ParliREACH was founded in 2014. It has a formal meeting once per month, with chairs meeting fortnightly. There are a total of 21 members in the leadership team, and several hundred make up the wider membership. The WEN aims to teach other colleagues about race, ethnicity, culture and heritage as well as advocate for Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff members. They host a number of events to mark days of significance such as Ramadan, Black History Month, Diwali, etc. They use the existing Diversity and Inclusion strategy as a framework for their annual goals.



Similarly to ParliGENDER, ParliREACH investigated the effects of hybrid working on BAME populations and seeks to receive further engagement on the issue as a result of hybrid working during COVID-19. ParliREACH hopes to address the issues with virtual engagement. In 2017/2018 ParliREACH led focus group surveys with BAME staff members on their experience in parliament. The report, titled *Stand in my shoes: race and culture in Parliament*, can be accessed via this link: <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/foi/201041pr.pdf>

ParliREACH also offers a reciprocal mentoring programme in which senior staff 'buddy-up' with other staff members who identify as BAME to provide insight into discrimination and barriers those from an ethnic background face. They run a film club which screens short films about race relations issues. All film screenings offer a question and answers section with producers, directors and actors in attendance.

ParliON

There are two co-chairs on the committee for this network. There are a total of 400 members in the WEN. There is a committee meeting each month, which all members are welcome to attend. The co-chairs meet weekly and meet with the communications officers biweekly. A newsletter is sent out to members every six weeks.



ParliON releases a strategy with goals in mind annually. ParliON focuses on the below targets:

- Signposting – identify available services within parliament and make them more accessible to parliamentarians and parliamentary staff.
- Events – host speakers from both within the House of Commons and House of Lords, and well as utilise experts from outside organisations to educate staff and spread awareness. Events have moved to a hybrid way of access because of COVID, where both virtual and in-person access is facilitated.
- Policy – English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses provided for staff members working in cleaning and catering. ParliON has worked collaboratively to try and improve IT access to those colleagues who work on the estate and have front-facing roles.

ParliCARE

This WEN seeks to promote inclusion and equality of opportunity across Parliament, with the

aim of raising awareness of and support for all staff and members of both Houses of Parliament with caring challenges.

ParliCare is part of the UK Carers Network and Employers for Carers, meaning Members and staff of both houses can access additional support and guidance. This platform provides a range of online practical resources, tools and e-Learning to help support carers in Parliament.

Its objectives are:

- To raise awareness of issues related to caring in Parliament
- To create a supportive and inclusive environment
- To promote equality of opportunity for carers.

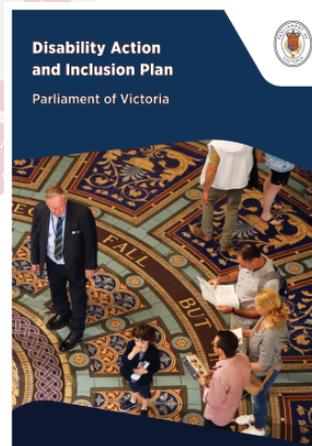


Parliament of Victoria

The Parliament of Victoria in Australia started by establishing a working group, which consisted of 11 staff from around Parliament, along with representatives from external peak disability resource organisations. This working group has begun implementing a number of the plan's initiatives, including activities such as undertaking disability awareness training and becoming a gold member of the Australian Network on Disability.

The Parliament of Victoria also has a gender equality working/steering group made up of staff of the Parliament which assists the organisation to meet certain new statutory obligations.

The Parliament of Victoria has been working on implementing its **Disability Action and Inclusion Plan (DAIP)** over the last 18 months. This plan began as a project for the Parliament's 2018–19 Emerging Leaders program. Eight parliamentary officers from all areas of Parliament undertook this project as part of their leadership training with the stated aims of meeting “obligations under existing legislation, be practical and achievable, and promote Parliament of Victoria as a disability-friendly and inclusive organisation.”



Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament

The Welsh Parliament has the following 6 [Workplace Equality Networks](#):



PLWS
Our LGBTQ+ Workplace
Equality Network



REACH
Our Race, Ethnicity and
Cultural Heritage Network



EMBRACE
Our Disability Workplace
Equality Network



TEULU
Our Working Parent
and Carer Network



INSPIRE
Our Women's Workplace
Equality Network



MINDFUL
Our Mental Health
Support Network

These networks help to promote equality, foster good relations and remove discrimination in a number of ways, including offering advice on diversity, inclusion and equality issues and impact assessing policies to ensure they are fair and inclusive.



Western Cape Provincial Parliament

The Western Cape Provincial Parliament in South Africa has a newly established **Employment Equity Consultative committee**. This committee is mandated to consult over equality and diversity issues. However, due to this committee being established very recently, the Terms of Reference are yet to be finalised.

The Western Cape Provincial Parliament has taken strides in being progressive in being gender neutral amongst Members. This can be seen in the amendment to the leave policy for Members which is the first non-gendered policy for a legislature in South Africa. It takes steps to ensure rights for parliamentarian parents for maternity, paternity, adoption and surrogacy leave.



Endnotes

1. UN DESA, Information for integrated Decision-Making and Participation on SDG 16. Accessible from: <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/information-integrated-decision-making-and-participation>
2. Dennissen, Benschop, Brink, Diversity Networks: Networking for Equality, British Journal of Management, Vol. 30, 966-980. Accessible from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1467-8551.12321>
3. International Labour Organisation, International Labour Standards on Equality of opportunity and treatment. Accessible from: <https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/equality-of-opportunity-and-treatment/lang-en/index.html>
4. Dennissen, Benschop, Brink, Diversity Networks: Networking for Equality, British Journal of Management, Vol. 30, 966-980, citing Borgatti, S. P. and P. C. Foster (2003). 'The network paradigm in organizational research: a review and typology', Journal of Management, 29, pp. 991-1013. Accessible from: <http://www.analytictech.com/borgatti/papers/networkparadigm.pdf>
5. A. Johansson, Why Workplace Diversity Diminishes Groupthink And How Millennials Are Helping (2017), Forbes Online. Accessible from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/annajohansson/2017/07/20/how-workplace-diversity-diminishes-groupthink-and-how-millennials-are-helping/?sh=4867c29f4b74>
6. Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Engagement, Education & Outreach Handbook for Commonwealth Parliaments - Creating Open, Accountable and Transparent Institutions (2021). Accessible from: https://www.cpahq.org/media/sbif14kt/engagement_education_outreach_handbook_final.pdf
7. Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Governance, Organisational and Administrative Review - Anguilla House Of Assembly (2021). Accessible from: <https://www.cpahq.org/media/oy1ajkxh/report-governance-organisational-and-administrative-review-of-the-anguilla-house-of-assembly-september-2021.pdf>
8. Public Services International. Accessible from: <https://publicservices.international/?lang=en>
9. CPA Small Branches network. Accessible from: <https://www.cpahq.org/our-networks/cpa-small-branches/>
10. T. Beebee, A. I. Gallego & K. Recina, The importance of employee networks, CBI online. Accessible from: <https://www.cbi.org.uk/articles/the-importance-of-employee-networks/>
11. Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians network. Accessible from: <https://www.cpahq.org/our-networks/commonwealth-women-parliamentarians/>
12. Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities network. Accessible from: <https://www.cpahq.org/our-networks/commonwealth-parliamentarians-with-disabilities/>
13. Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures*, 2018. Accessible from: <https://www.cpahq.org/media/10jjk2nh/recommended-benchmarks-for-democratic-legislatures-updated-2018-final-online-version-single.pdf>
14. Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, *How can Commonwealth Parliaments become more diverse workplaces for their staff?* Accessible from: <https://www.cpahq.org/knowledge-centre/cpa-blogs/blog-post-how-can-parliaments-become-more-diverse-workplaces-for-their-staff/>



Further Reading & Resources

DiversityQ. Accessible from: <https://diversityq.com>

Government of Jersey, Departmental Operational Business Plans [Online]

Accessible from: <https://www.gov.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/Government%20and%20administration/Draft%20Business%20Plans%20for%202020%2020191024%20CB.pdf>

International Labour Organisation, International Labour Standards on Equality of opportunity and treatment [Online]

Accessible from: <https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/equality-of-opportunity-and-treatment/lang-en/index.html>

Parliament of Australia, Parliamentary Friendship Groups [Online]

Accessible from: https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Friendship

Parliament of Australia, Reconciliation Action Plan 2019-2022 [Online]

Accessible from: https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Publications/Reconciliation_Action_Plan

Parliament of the United Kingdom, Workplace Equality Networks [Online]

Accessible from: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/working/workplace-equality-networks/>

Parliament of the Wales, Workplace Equality Networks [Online]

Accessible from: <https://senedd.wales/commission/work-for-the-senedd-commission/diversity-and-inclusion-at-the-commission/workplace-equality-networks/>

Stonewall - Diversity Champions Programme [Online]

Accessible from: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/diversity-champions-programme>



Image credits: CPA Secretariat and CPA Branches, Shutterstock file images and freepik.com

Published by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).
Registered Charity Number 263147.

CPA Headquarters Secretariat
Richmond House, Houses of Parliament
London SW1A 0AA
United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7799 1460
Email: hq.sec@cpahq.org
Website: www.cpahq.org