

COMMONWEALTH  
PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

# **UPDATED BENCHMARKS FOR DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATURES**

## **USER MANUAL**

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*Minimum and Additional Standards for  
Parliamentary Effectiveness*

## 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.

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## Acknowledgements

The CPA Headquarters Secretariat extends a special thanks to all the CPA Branches across the Commonwealth who took the time to engage in the process and feed into these updated standards.

These thanks extend to all those CPA Branches who provided feedback on their experiences with the previous edition of the Benchmarks, as well as those resource persons who assisted in the delivery of all Benchmarks Self-Assessments.

For an abridged version of this document, without the explanatory notes, please access the version available [here](#).

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# Foreword

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The Updated Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures mark a critical step in supporting parliaments in their journey towards excellence, transparency, and integrity.

At the heart of the CPA's mission is our dedication to the Commonwealth values of democracy, the rule of law, and good governance. These values are the foundation of any healthy democracy and the CPA has long recognised that a robust parliamentary system is fundamental to the preservation and growth of democracy.

By setting out comprehensive Benchmarks—both foundational and aspirational—this publication serves as a practical tool for legislatures to assess their effectiveness, make necessary reforms, and ultimately better carry out their legislative, scrutiny and representative functions.

Whether through promoting greater transparency in legislative processes, ensuring ethical conduct among members, or creating mechanisms for public engagement, each and every Benchmark embodies the CPA's vision of a legislative environment that is responsive to the people it serves and supports the people who work within its walls.

However, the Benchmarks outlined in this document serve not merely as a checklist, but as a blueprint for institutional resilience. By evaluating themselves against these standards, parliaments can identify strengths and areas for improvement, ensuring that they remain robust but responsive in the face of change. By approaching this publication as a roadmap, parliamentarians and senior parliamentary staff can work towards more effective, capacity-rich and inclusive institutions. Fundamentally, this is a tool to guide internal reviews, inform strategic planning, and inspire positive reform where necessary and appropriate.

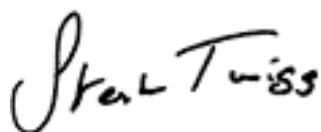
One of the strengths of the Commonwealth is its diversity and the CPA's member-parliaments vary considerably in size, resources, and constitutional frameworks. This diversity includes a range of legislative traditions and approaches, all of which enrich our work, collaborations and interactions. Nevertheless, this diversity also means there is no standard model for the “perfect” parliament.

The Benchmarks in this publication account for such differences by distinguishing between “Minimum Benchmarks”, which establish essential standards for any effective parliament, and “Additional Benchmarks”, which offer aspirational goals that parliaments may strive towards based on their capacities and priorities. This approach, further explained later in the publication, allows for a practical and realistic pathway toward institutional strengthening, tailored to the unique context of each of our members.

The CPA has a longstanding tradition of fostering cooperation and knowledge exchange among Commonwealth parliaments. This publication was not only compiled following consultations and insights from many of our member-parliaments, it also reinforces our belief in this peer-to-peer support and knowledge sharing. We want these Benchmarks to not only guide individual parliaments but also foster collaboration and shared learning across the Commonwealth. Whenever parliaments embark on a benchmarking journey, we welcome opportunities to share insights, exchange best practices, and build a stronger, more interconnected Association.

The CPA invites all parliaments to utilise this document as a practical and informative resource. Parliaments are encouraged to approach benchmarking as an ongoing process, one that grows and evolves as the world changes. This publication is not just about meeting standards—it is about building resilient institutions that can uphold democratic values for generations to come and meet future challenges with accountability, openness, and resilience.

We commend each parliament and its staff for their commitment to continuous improvement and to the democratic values that unite us all. By embracing these Benchmarks, parliaments can inspire confidence in their citizens and strengthen their role as pillars of democracy in an increasingly challenging world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Twigg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephen Twigg, Secretary General,  
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association



# Introduction

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## A Short History of the CPA Benchmarks

Building on the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles on the Separation of Powers, the CPA Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures provide a framework for excellence in Commonwealth parliamentary and legislative practice. The Benchmarks has been an important part of the CPA since 2006. A considerable amount of work has been undertaken around the Benchmarks from their initial inception to the present day.

The original 2006 Benchmarks were the outcome of a Study Group hosted by the Parliament of Bermuda on behalf of the CPA and the World Bank Institute with support from the United Nations Development Programme, the European Parliament and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. The initial 87 indicators were drafted by CPA parliamentarians representing different Commonwealth regions.

The CPA Benchmarks were fundamental to the wider values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter, adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government on 14 December 2012, which expresses the commitment of member states to the development of free and democratic societies.

In 2018, the CPA formed part of the Commonwealth Partnership for Democracy (CP4D) project which was funded by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office and implemented by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD). CP4D aimed to build trust in democratic institutions and, as part of this project, the CPA Benchmarks were revised and updated in June 2018 by a second Study Group of parliamentarians and officials, which met at Wilton Park, West Sussex, United Kingdom. The updated 132 indicators sought to include new international developments such as the implementation of the 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2023, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office agreed to provide funding to the CPA for Benchmarking work in the form of the Commonwealth Good Governance Project (GGP). Between 2018 and May 2025 over 40 Commonwealth jurisdictions have undertaken self-assessments against the Benchmarks.



Members of the joint study group established by the CPA and WFD to update the Benchmarks. The workshop was convened in June 2018, at Wilton Park, UK. Parliamentary representatives came from Asia, Australia; British Islands and Mediterranean; Canada; India; Pacific, and included leading experts in the field of parliamentary strengthening.



## Definition of Benchmark Categories

This document classifies Benchmarks as either a “Minimum Benchmark” or as an “Additional Benchmark”.

This categorisation allows this publication to establish and provide both a foundational standard for parliamentary practice whilst simultaneously encouraging aspirational targets that promote continuous reflection and improvement within legislatures.

### “Minimum Benchmarks”

Baseline standards essential to the functioning of an effective, democratic, and inclusive parliament. They establish core principles and practices that all legislatures, whether Commonwealth or otherwise, should strive to meet as an initial measure of democratic integrity, accountability, and governance.

Adherence to these Benchmarks is considered necessary to fulfil fundamental expectations of parliamentary democracy.

### “Additional Benchmarks”

Aspirational standards for parliamentary practices, beyond the essential requirements outlined in the Minimum Benchmarks. These standards, while not universally required and which may not always be applicable, represent advanced practices in democratic governance.

These Additional Benchmarks encourage legislatures to aim for higher aspirational standards that reflect emerging best practices, provide a roadmap for their continuous improvement and provide support to parliaments in responding to 21st Century challenges and opportunities.

## A Guide to the Explanatory Notes

This publication seeks to provide additional information to those CPA Branches, and any other parliament or legislature, interested in assessing themselves against these updated standards. More specifically this manual seeks to provide supplementary information and context for why these updated standards are important and how legislatures, regardless of their size and resource constraints, can seek to meet the highest possible standards of a 21st Century parliament. The explanatory notes have been provided against each “section” of the Updated Benchmarks and follow, as close as possible, the same format which is outlined below:

**Purpose and Scope:** This section seeks to provide a short introduction to the importance of the Benchmarks.

**Relevant SDGs and Other International Standards:** This section looks to provide a short summary of which Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are most relevant together with other international principles and standards that might be referenced on the same theme.

**Why These Benchmarks “Matter”:** This section provides the rationale for why these Benchmarks have been included in the document and, more pertinently, why legislatures should aspire to meet those same standards.

**Examples of Measures to Strengthen Electoral Conduct:** This section outlines a number of means and methods through which parliaments may better meet the minimum and/or additional Benchmarks.

**Practical Considerations:** This section acknowledges the range of different contexts within which parliaments operate and the challenges that may be faced by institutions in aspiring to meet these standards.





Chart



Line Chart



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# Updated Benchmarks

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## PART 1

### ELECTIONS, POLITICAL PARTIES AND APPOINTMENTS

#### 1. Elections Conduct and Rules

##### Minimum Benchmarks

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1.1 Members of the popularly elected House, or Houses, shall be elected by direct universal and equal suffrage in a free and fair secret ballot.

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1.2 Legislative elections shall meet international standards for genuine and transparent elections and be verified as such by a relevant International Observation authority.

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1.3 Term lengths for Members of any popularly elected House shall reflect the need for accountability through regular and periodic legislative elections.

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1.4 There shall be legislation to ensure appropriate campaign finance laws are in place to regulate the manner and extent to which political parties and candidates may receive monetary contributions from individuals and corporations.

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1.5 An independent Electoral Commission or similar authority shall be established for the management of the conduct of elections and its tasks shall include monitoring the election expenses of parliamentary candidates and political parties.

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##### Additional Benchmarks

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1.6 Legislatures should, where possible, ensure that any electoral reform laws being enacted are passed at least a year before the next election occurs (excluding the consolidation of existing laws).

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1.7 At the commencement of the election campaign period, legislatures should ensure rules are in place which prevent incumbents having unfair access to resources which may disadvantage other candidates.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Elections are the cornerstone of democratic legitimacy. They confer authority on those who govern and ensure accountability to the electorate. Section 1 covers core principles such as universal suffrage, internationally recognised electoral standards, clear regulation of campaign finance, and the establishment of an independent Electoral Commission. Taken together, these Benchmarks ensure that elections are credible, fair, and accessible, thereby upholding the fundamental right of citizens to choose their representatives freely.

### Relevant SDGs and Other International Standards

- **SDG 16.5:** Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms;
- **SDG 16.7:** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels;
- **ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), Article 25:** Stipulates universal suffrage in genuine elections, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;
- **UNCAC (United Nations Convention Against Corruption):** Emphasises transparent and accountable processes in governance, including campaign finance.

These commitments underscore that credible electoral processes—anchored in universal and equal suffrage, free and secret balloting, and stringent transparency measures—are indispensable for any modern democracy.

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Legitimacy Through Genuine Elections:** Elections that meet international standards (Benchmark 1.2) underpin the legitimacy of legislatures. If elections are viewed as credible by citizens, national stakeholders and international observers alike, parliaments are better positioned to enact laws and conduct oversight with trust from the public.
- **Preservation of Free Choice:** Benchmarks around universal suffrage (1.1) and periodic elections (1.3) affirm that citizens can meaningfully exercise their right to vote and that power is not held indefinitely and arbitrarily by a single group.
- **Transparency and Fairness:** Transparent campaign finance laws (1.4) and the oversight of an independent electoral authority (1.5) mitigate undue influences and corruption in the election process. They protect against illicit funding, ensuring voters can make informed choices based on policies rather than hidden financial backers.
- **Consistency and Stability:** Additional Benchmarks 1.6 and 1.7 reinforce the principle that last-minute changes or misuse of parliamentary resources should not skew electoral competition. Such rules give parties and candidates time to prepare fairly and should maintain a level playing field. Equally, electoral institutions must have adequate time to implement legislative reform and adequately inform and educate the public on legislative changes.
- **Alignment with Global Norms:** By committing and adhering to these Benchmarks, Legislatures demonstrate commitment to globally recognised democratic principles such as ICCPR Article 25 and the UNCAC. These standards reflect evolving international practices on inclusive and transparent governance.

### Examples of Measures to Strengthen Electoral Conduct

- **Independent Monitoring Missions:** Inviting domestic and international observers (including those mandated by law) to assess whether elections comply with best practices.
- **Parliamentary Terms:** The legislative framework should be clear in how long a parliamentary term should be, under what circumstances may result in an election to be called, and who can call for election in theory and in practice.
- **Clear Campaign Spending Caps:** Setting maximum expenditure limits for parties and candidates, enforced and monitored by the relevant electoral authority.
- **Disclosure of Campaign Contributions:** Mandating real-time or periodic reporting of donations above a threshold, accessible to the public in a transparent online registry.

- **Voter Education Initiatives:** Encouraging or requiring the Electoral Commission to conduct public outreach on voter registration, polling processes, and citizens' rights.
- **Codes of Conduct:** A Code of Conduct is legislated for or developed via regulations by the Electoral Commission. Alternatively candidates and/or political parties sign up to, or agree to comply with, a voluntary Code around the election campaign.
- **Pre-election Consultation on Reforms:** Holding stakeholder discussions (with political parties, civil society groups) before passing major electoral laws, ideally well before the one-year cut-off.

## Practical Considerations

- **Local Constitutional and Legal Context:** Different jurisdictions may have varying approaches—some require a fully independent commission, while others have some oversight from Branches of government. Nonetheless, the core principle remains the same: management must be impartial, independent and trustworthy.
- **Enforcement Mechanisms:** Legislation should detail sanctions for breaches (e.g., exceeding spending caps). Enforcement must be impartial, avoiding selective or partisan use.
- **Capacity and Resources:** Building a well-resourced, professionally staffed electoral authority is critical. Where resources are limited, collaboration with international bodies or civil society partners may be beneficial in training or technical support.
- **Continuity vs. Flexibility:** While ensuring electoral predictability is key, there must also be room to adopt emerging best practices—provided they're introduced sufficiently in advance (per Benchmark 1.6).
- **Observation Missions:** Care must be taken when it comes to domestic observation missions over perceptions of independence and impartiality. A balance of domestic, regional and international observation missions can create a better balance.

These Benchmarks underscore how credible elections are non-negotiable for any robust parliamentary democracy. By affirming universal, equal suffrage (1.1), mandating transparent campaign financing (1.4), and requiring an independent authority (1.5), these Benchmarks should form the foundation for genuine elections. The Additional Benchmarks (1.6, 1.7) reinforce stability and fairness: major legal changes should not occur too close to the day of an election, and incumbents must not misuse parliamentary resources to maintain advantages over other candidates. Anchored in the ICCPR, UNCAC, the Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters and relevant SDGs, these measures collectively ensure that electoral processes reflect the genuine will of the electorate—essential for public trust and the legitimacy of the parliament that is constituted following the results of the election process.

The Charter of the Commonwealth sets out the values of the Commonwealth of Nations as well as the commitment to equal rights and democracy. It was adopted in 2012 and officially signed in 2013. In terms of democratic rights, it states that:

*"We recognise the inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes, in particular through free and fair Elections in shaping the society in which they live. Governments, political parties and civil society are responsible for upholding and promoting democratic culture and practices and are accountable to the public in this regard. Parliaments and representative local governments and other forms of local governance are essential elements in the exercise of democratic governance."*

It is also important to stress that although parliaments will have little to no involvement in the electoral process, they are responsible for ensuring a robust legislative framework is in place. In addition, they are responsible for limiting any incumbency bias for sitting Members who are seeking election. Therefore institutional stakeholders must ensure there is no perceived or actual imbalance for candidates at the election. For example, whereas sitting Members may still be able to draw a salary, they should not continue to have access to a vehicle which they could use for campaigning.

For more information on the role of parliaments around election time, it maybe worth looking at the CPA resource on [Transitioning to New Parliaments: Handbook for Parliaments in Election Planning](#).





VOTE  
DAY

## 2. Candidate Eligibility

### Minimum Benchmarks

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2.1 Restrictions on candidate eligibility shall not be based on religion, gender, ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality or any other characteristics that may make up individual or collective identities.

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2.2 Measures to encourage the representative political participation of marginalised groups shall be introduced to encourage improved political participation of these marginalised groups in national democratic processes.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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2.3 Legislatures should ensure that mechanisms are in place to monitor and evaluate measures that seek to improve political participation of marginalised groups between General Elections.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

The right to stand for election—and not be excluded by reason of identity or personal characteristic—is fundamental to a truly representative and inclusive parliament. Establishing clear, equitable rules for candidate eligibility promotes diversity, strengthens democratic legitimacy, and aligns with international obligations like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Under the Minimum Benchmarks (2.1, 2.2), parliaments must ensure that no one is barred from candidacy based on religion, gender, ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality or other identities, and must take steps to improve the representation of marginalised groups. The Additional Benchmark (2.3) recognises that passing supportive laws alone is not enough. Ultimately, legislatures should be proactive in encouraging diversity and importantly, also have mechanisms to track and evaluate whether these inclusivity measures are working in practice, thereby allowing for adjustments and improvements where necessary.

### Relevant SDGs and Other International Standards

- **SDG 5.5:** Ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership;
- **SDG 10.2:** Empowering and promoting social, economic, and political inclusion for all;
- **CEDAW:** Obligates States to guarantee women's equal rights in political and public life
- **CRPD:** Requires States to facilitate political participation and leadership by persons with disabilities





## Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Representative Democracy:** Effective parliaments reflect the people they serve. Restricting eligibility by characteristics such as race, gender, disability, or sexuality diminishes the legislature’s legitimacy as a representative body and can alienate entire segments of society from public life.
- **Enabling Marginalised Groups:** Many jurisdictions still grapple with systemic under-representation of certain groups—particularly women, some ethnic or religious minorities, and persons with disabilities. Minimum Benchmarks 2.1 and 2.2 address this by directly prohibiting discriminatory barriers and requiring that parliaments introduce measures to encourage the political participation of those historically excluded.
- **Strengthening Engagement and Trust:** Citizens are more likely to trust and engage with a legislature that visibly reflects the composition of the broader population. Open eligibility criteria and robust participation measures foster inclusive governance and bolster public confidence.
- **Alignment with SDGs and International Conventions:** By adhering to these Benchmarks, legislatures contribute to broader national goals under SDG 5.5 and 10.2, as well as obligations under instruments like CEDAW and CRPD, demonstrating their commitment to global norms of equality and non-discrimination.

## Examples of Measures to Encourage Political Participation

- **Reserved Seats or Quotas:** Setting aside a certain percentage of parliamentary seats or requiring parties to nominate candidates from under-represented demographics (e.g., youth, women, ethnic or religious minorities, persons with disabilities).
- **Training and Mentorship Programmes:** Promoting targeted leadership, public speaking, or policy courses to build capacity among under-represented groups.
- **Accessibility Reforms:** Encouraging sign language interpretation, wheelchair-accessible venues, and accessible campaign materials so persons with disabilities can effectively campaign.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Running education and outreach initiatives (sometimes in partnership with civil society organisations) to help marginalised communities navigate the electoral process and understand their eligibility rights.

## Practical Considerations

- **Local Context:** Implementation strategies may differ across jurisdictions. Some may enshrine quotas in election law; others may rely on voluntary commitments or party-level initiatives and may not wish to make such direct interventions.
- **Tracking Outcomes:** Parliaments must collect and publish reliable data on the diversity of candidates, the eventual elected members, and any barriers identified. Mechanisms may include an independent electoral commission’s oversight or a parliamentary committee dedicated to diversity and inclusion.
- **Harmonising with Broader Policy:** Measures for candidate eligibility should mesh with each jurisdiction’s constitution, anti-discrimination statutes, and other parliamentary rules—forming a cohesive framework rather than a set of fragmented or contradictory rules.

These Benchmarks underscore that, to build a truly inclusive, modern parliament, legal frameworks must address both the absence of discrimination (2.1) and the active promotion of inclusive participation (2.2). However, to demonstrate lasting impact, legislatures should also measure and refine these efforts when necessary and appropriate (2.3). By doing so, parliaments align themselves with international norms (CEDAW, CRPD) and the ambitions of the SDGs, ultimately reinforcing their own legitimacy and effectiveness as democratic institutions.

### 3. Political Parties

#### Minimum Benchmarks

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3.1 Any restrictions on the legality of political parties shall be narrowly drawn in law and should be consistent with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

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3.2 Rules governing public and private funding of political parties and candidates shall be fair, transparent and accountable.

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3.3 Legislatures shall have procedures in place for the formal recognition or registration of political parties which have representation in the Legislature.

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#### EXPLANATORY NOTES

#### Purpose and Scope

Political parties play a central role in any democratic system by structuring political competition, mobilising voters, and providing platforms for legislative agendas. The rules governing the formation, operation, and funding of political parties therefore have a direct bearing on electoral fairness, public trust in governance, and the effectiveness of parliamentary representation.

Under the Minimum Benchmarks (3.1, 3.2, 3.3), legislatures are expected to safeguard party pluralism and ensure that any constraints on party registration or activity are fully consistent with international human rights standards. They must also commit to transparency and accountability in political finance, as well as define formal mechanisms for recognising parties within the Legislature. Although there are no Additional Benchmarks listed in this section, parliaments may choose to go beyond these foundational requirements by introducing more detailed processes around political party regulation, internal democracy, and anti-corruption measures.

#### Relevant SDGs and Other International Standards

- **SDG 16.5:** Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms
- **SDG 16.7:** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels
- **ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights):** Article 22 underlines the right to freedom of association, which extends to forming and joining political parties
- **UNCAC (United Nations Convention Against Corruption):** Calls for effective, transparent political finance provisions that prevent undue influence or corrupt practices

These frameworks underscore the principle that legal and procedural constraints on parties must be justified, proportionate, and subject to robust oversight



## Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Safeguarding Freedom of Association:** Parties enable collective political expression, providing citizens with organised channels through which to influence policy and leadership. Overly restrictive party laws can risk undermining the free exchange of ideas and unduly limiting meaningful electoral choices.
- **Ensuring Transparency and Accountability:** Campaign financing and party funding are often where corruption risks loom largest. Benchmark 3.2’s emphasis on fairness, transparency, and accountability speaks directly to global concerns about money’s undue influence in politics. Clear public and private funding rules help prevent corruption and enhance voter trust.
- **Formal Recognition and Registration:** Recognising or registering political parties (Benchmark 3.3) gives them a legal identity to contest elections, have proportional allocation of seats in list systems and carry out advocacy. Such processes must be consistent and non-partisan, preventing arbitrary or discriminatory barriers to party formation.
- **Strengthening Representation:** Political parties help organise diverse societal interests within legislatures. Ensuring fair and open pathways for party creation and participation can enrich parliamentary debate and help legislatures better reflect the electorate’s varied perspectives.
- **Alignment with International Obligations:** By adhering to ICCPR Article 22 and UNCAC principles, parliaments affirm core democratic ideals while mitigating systemic governance risks. These Benchmarks thereby align domestic law and practice with a broader international consensus on political freedom and anti-corruption.
- **Clarity for Parliaments:** A clear legal framework around political parties help parliamentary institutions have clarity over Committee make-up, allocating of parliamentary resources and parliamentary business in the chamber, such as the distribution of time allowed for questions and contributions in debates. It can also assist in the establishment of caucuses whether they are cross-party or not.

## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Party Regulation

- **Disclosure Requirements:** Imposing transparent reporting on the size, source, and use of party funds, including in-kind contributions.
- **Independent Oversight Bodies:** Mandating that an electoral commission or similar neutral institution audits party accounts and enforces finance regulations.
- **Spending Caps:** Limiting campaign expenditures to level the playing field among large and small parties alike.
- **Equitable Access to Media:** Requiring public or privately regulated media outlets to allocate airtime or advertising space on a fair basis during election periods.
- **Party Registration Checks:** Ensuring any party registration or recognition requirements (e.g., minimum membership thresholds) do not unreasonably restrict political competition.

## Practical Considerations

- **Local Constitutional Context:** Some jurisdictions have more robust oversight structures or existing traditions around party financing and formation. Any newly enacted rules must harmonise with and not undermine these pre-existing frameworks.
- **Proportional Enforcement:** Overly punitive sanctions for minor regulatory breaches can dissuade legitimate political activity. Mechanisms should exist for warning, remedial actions, and appeals.
- **Ongoing Review:** Regulations around political parties may need continual refinement to address emerging issues (e.g., the role of digital platforms in fundraising or campaigning) and ensure alignment with evolving international best practice.

These Benchmarks underscore the vital role parties play in structuring democratic competition and ensuring substantive representation. By guaranteeing that restrictions are narrowly tailored (3.1), finance rules are transparent (3.2), and mechanisms for recognition are properly established (3.3), legislatures help safeguard both the freedom of association and the integrity of political processes. Anchored in ICCPR principles and UNCAC directives, these Benchmarks guide parliaments to foster an environment where parties can form freely, campaign honestly, and operate accountably—thereby enhancing the overall quality and legitimacy of democratic governance.

## 4. Incompatibility of Office

### Minimum Benchmarks

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4.1 No elected Member shall be required to take a religious oath against their conscience in order to take their seat in the Legislature and, where possible, the Legislature shall provide elected Members with an opportunity to make an alternative non-religious declaration before taking their seat.

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4.2 In a bicameral Legislature, a Member shall not simultaneously be a Member of both Houses.

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4.3 A Member shall not simultaneously serve in the Judicial branch or as a public servant of the Executive branch.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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4.4 The Legislature should have legislation, a constitutional provision, or established practice in place that ensures the size of the Cabinet is proportionate to the size of the Legislature as a whole.

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4.5 No elected Member should be prevented from taking their seat based on their religion, gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, or disability.

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4.6 In circumstances where a jurisdiction has national, subnational or territorial legislatures, and where Members may be a Member of more than one Legislature, the division of responsibilities should be clearly defined in national law.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

A robust separation of powers is essential to democratic governance, ensuring that no one person can simultaneously exert undue influence or control across multiple branches of the state. “Incompatibility of Office” Benchmarks safeguard the integrity of the Parliament by restricting legislators from simultaneously occupying specific offices in the Executive or Judiciary, or from simultaneously holding overlapping mandates in a bicameral system. These rules also protect the freedom of conscience, preventing lawmakers from being forced to swear oaths against their conscience. In so doing, these Benchmarks preserve legislative impartiality and uphold basic democratic norms of fairness and inclusivity.

### Relevant SDGs and Other International Standards

- SDG 16.6: Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights): Articles 18 and 19 protect freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as well as freedom of expression
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 21: Highlights the right of everyone to take part in government and access public services without discrimination





While no single international instrument addresses “incompatibility of office” exhaustively, these broader human rights principles affirm the importance of free choice in public service and the principle of separation of powers.

## Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Preventing Conflicts of Interest:** Barring a legislator from simultaneously serving in the Judiciary or Public Service (4.3) helps avoid conflicts of interest that could undermine impartial governance. Legislators should not be in a position to simultaneously create, interpret, and enforce laws.
- **Safeguarding Religious Freedom:** Requiring no religious oath against conscience (4.1) ensures that citizens of all beliefs or none can serve. This promotes non-discrimination and respects freedom of conscience, fostering inclusivity in public office.
- **Ensuring Clarity in Bicameral Systems:** Prohibiting membership in both Houses of a bicameral parliament (4.2) protects the integrity of distinct legislative chambers. It ensures each House can serve as a check on the other, an important tenet in many bicameral systems.
- **Maintaining Proportional Representation:** As set out in Additional Benchmark 4.4, a suitably sized Cabinet relative to the legislature as a whole preserves balance in governance. If the Executive is disproportionately large, it may compromise the independence and effectiveness of parliament’s oversight functions.
- **Inclusive Participation:** Additional Benchmark 4.5 clarifies that no one is prevented from taking their seat based on religion, gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, or disability. This reaffirms that office-holding eligibility remains open to all citizens on equal terms.

## Examples of Measures to Monitor Compatibility of Office

- **Mandatory Declaration of Offices:** Legislators must officially declare any other public roles upon election, triggering automatic or near-automatic resignation from conflicting positions.
- **Oath or Affirmation Options:** Constitutions or parliamentary rules specify that elected Members may choose a non-religious affirmation instead of a faith-based oath, and relevant materials across faiths are maintained (such as holy books/religious texts).
- **Clear Cabinet Size Limits:** Constitutional or statutory provisions set numerical limits on the proportion of Members who can serve as Ministers, ensuring the Parliament as a whole remains robustly independent.
- **Public Registers of Posts and Appointments:** Official registries listing the external offices or roles of each Member, aiding public transparency and verifying compliance with the “no dual office-holding” rule.

## Practical Considerations

- **National vs. Sub-National Arrangements:** Where allowances for sitting in multiple legislatures exist, which is the case in a number of jurisdictions, clarity is vital. The Additional Benchmark (4.6) is not intended to promote or require such allowances, which may be controversial and prohibited in other jurisdictions, but rather to encourage coordinated legislative action to define how a legislator’s duties may be split.
- **Exemptions and Transitional Periods:** Some parliaments allow newly elected Members a short grace period to resign incompatible positions. This ensures a smooth transition and respects prior commitments.
- **Enforcement Mechanisms:** In cases where a Member inadvertently violates incompatibility rules (e.g., by continuing in a prior role too long), there should be a transparent process for rectification—potentially including vacating the seat if the Member fails to comply.
- **Public Perception:** Adhering to these incompatibility rules fosters trust, as citizens see that legislators cannot accumulate excessive power or compromise the impartiality of government operations.
- **Proportionality:** Judging and maintaining proportionality between the size of a cabinet and the Legislature will be dependent on the size of the Legislature. It will necessarily be harder for those smaller legislatures, particularly those with consensus governments, to avoid situations where a large proportion of Members are also required to undertake duties and responsibilities in the Executive.

These Benchmarks fortify the principle that elected officials should serve without conflicts of interest, undue constraints on freedom of conscience, or the risk of amassing multiple roles across government branches. Minimum Benchmarks (4.1–4.3) reflect core democratic safeguards, while Additional Benchmarks (4.4–4.6) address proportionality, explicit non-discrimination, and multi-Legislature arrangements. By respecting freedom of conscience (4.1) and preventing entanglement in other powerful branches (4.2, 4.3), Parliaments reinforce their own integrity. Clarity in Cabinet size (4.4) and the right of all eligible Members to serve (4.5) further strengthen institutional credibility and inclusivity, aligning with broader global norms of openness and transparency.

## 5. Resignation and Removal

### Minimum Benchmarks

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5.1 Members shall have the right to resign from Parliament in accordance with processes clearly defined in the Legislature's Rules of Procedure, the jurisdiction's Constitution or any other related parliamentary law.

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5.2 The Legislature shall have provisions relating to the removal of Members which are narrowly defined, restricted and implemented in line with natural justice.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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5.3 The Legislature should have policies and practices in place to assist Members transitioning out of the Parliament (either by personal choice or as a consequence of election defeat).

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5.4 Electoral laws should give provision to allow for the right of recall whereby constituents, in proven instances of serious wrongdoing or dereliction of duty on the part of their elected representative can seek to have them removed from office between General Elections.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

A robust democracy not only defines how representatives are elected, but also how they may leave office. Clear rules governing resignation and removal underscore a parliament's commitment to upholding natural justice (further outlined elsewhere in these Benchmarks), protecting the rights of both legislators and the electorate, and preserving institutional credibility. These Benchmarks ensure that any departure—voluntary or forced—proceeds according to fair, transparent, and constitutionally grounded processes.

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Safeguarding the Legislator's Right to Step Down:** Benchmark 5.1 acknowledges that legislators may need to resign for various reasons—personal, health-related, professional or political—and ensures a smooth and dignified exit path.
- **Upholding Natural Justice:** Removal (5.2) must be narrowly defined, restricted, and implemented in line with established procedural fairness. Vague or overly broad grounds for removal risk undermining legislative independence and potentially enable politicised retaliation.
- **Facilitating Democratic Renewal:** Additional measures, like recalling under-performing representatives (5.4), offer voters a direct mechanism to hold their legislators accountable between general elections, thus expanding the electorate's influence over public officials.
- **Supporting Transitions:** Parliamentarians who retire or lose their seat may require assistance to reintegrate into non-parliamentary life. Benchmark 5.3 recognises the institution's responsibility to ensure that Members transitioning out of office receive appropriate guidance and resources. For more information,



read the Report on [Transitioning to Life After Parliament](#) which was developed by Deakin University, the Parliament of Victoria with the support of the CPA.

- **Strengthening Public Trust:** Transparent and fair processes for resignation and removal enhance public confidence. Citizens see that legislators cannot resign to evade accountability—nor can they be removed via politicised motives without proper due process.

## Examples of Measures to Monitor Resignation and Removal

- **Codified Resignation Procedures:** Requiring Members to submit a written resignation to the Speaker (and/or Clerk), who verifies compliance before publicly announcing the vacancy.
- **Independent Inquiry for Removal:** When allegations arise—whether misconduct or dereliction of duty—a special committee or ethics body conducts an impartial investigation and reports its findings, ensuring due process.
- **Transitional Support Schemes:** Offering confidential counselling, job placement services, or retirement planning for departing legislators, helping them adjust to life post-Parliament.
- **Recall Referendum Protocols:** Legislating specific petition thresholds, time frames, and campaign finance rules, balancing voters' right to remove an ineffective representative whilst providing protection against vexatious attempts.

## Practical Considerations

- **Safeguards Against Political Manipulation:** Legislators must be shielded from spurious removal efforts. Transparent triggers for impeachment or recall are essential to avoid weaponising the process for partisan advantage or allowing for technology-assisted campaigns through AI and automated bots.
- **Administrative Resourcing:** Transition support for outgoing Members (5.3) requires adequate budget, staff, and planning. Smaller legislatures may have to rely on existing public services or external providers to fill this particular need.
- **Political and Cultural Norms:** Introducing recall laws can shift electoral dynamics and parliamentary culture significantly. Thoughtful consultation with civil society and political parties helps ensure that the new mechanism is neither underutilised nor misused.
- **Definitions of “Natural Justice”:** Different jurisdictions may have different understandings of what is meant by ‘natural justice’ and may understand this principle by other names (such as ‘procedural fairness’). For the purposes of these Benchmarks, natural justice is to be interpreted and understood in line with that approach to procedural fairness outlined in *Erskine May* (available online). See Section 36 for related Benchmarks.

These Benchmarks champion two fundamental democratic principles: free choice in relinquishing office (5.1) and due process when a legislator’s conduct justifies potential removal (5.2). The Additional Benchmarks (5.3, 5.4) reflect new, progressive measures that address the practical realities of transitioning out of parliament and the emerging trend of in-term accountability via recall.

### PRIVILEGES AND PROCEDURES OF THE LEGISLATURE

#### 6. Privileges and Immunities

##### Minimum Benchmarks

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6.1 The Legislature's Powers, Privileges and Immunities shall be clearly enumerated in the Constitution and/or equivalent legal framework and be proportionate, reflecting the rule of law, good governance and rights and values of the jurisdiction.

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6.2 The Legislature shall be protected by the freedom of speech immunity, extending to Members within the Legislature. The immunity shall protect persons from legal liability for words spoken or acts undertaken while participating in or directly facilitating the Legislature's proceedings and shall restrict the use of such words or acts by the Judicial branch as evidence in related judicial proceedings.

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6.3 The freedom of speech immunity shall operate to enable the Legislature to carry out its constitutional functions effectively and free from interference or impediment.

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6.4 The Legislature shall have protection against potential misuse of the freedom of speech immunity. References to judicially suppressed or protected information, or to matters awaiting judicial decision, shall be made only in exceptional circumstances and with due regard to the separation of powers between the Legislature and the Judiciary.

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6.5 The Legislature shall have appropriate mechanisms in place for persons to respond to adverse references made to them during the Legislature's proceedings, such as a formal right of reply scheme.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Parliamentary privileges and immunities are critical tools that enable legislatures to function independently and effectively. They form a key component of the principle of ‘exclusive cognisance’. Freedom of speech, the most important privilege of Members, centred around parliamentary proceedings, allows Members to debate and scrutinise the Executive without fear of legal repercussions. Such safeguards are not designed as personal perks or blank cheques for Members; rather, they uphold legislative collective autonomy and preserve the separation of powers. This section clarifies the boundaries of these privileges, protects against misuse, and ensures appropriate recourse for individuals who believe their rights have been infringed during parliamentary proceedings.

### Relevant SDGs and Other International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels;
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 19:** Protects freedom of expression, which underpins robust parliamentary debate
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 19:** Reinforces free speech, subject to certain limitations necessary for respecting the rights of others

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Preserving Legislative Independence:** The ability of parliamentarians to speak freely (6.2, 6.3) and exercise other privileges underpins their role in legislating, scrutinising the Executive, and representing citizens without external intimidation.
- **Protecting Free Debate:** Members must be free from legal jeopardy for statements made or questions asked (6.2) so they can hold the Executive to account, expose potential misdeeds, and advocate for their constituents without fear of politicised reprisals.
- **Safeguarding Against Abuse:** Privileges can be misused if legislators reveal sensitive or sub judice (under judicial consideration) information. Benchmark 6.4 ensures that references to such information occur only in exceptional circumstances and with respect for judicial independence.
- **Right of Reply:** Benchmark 6.5 emphasises that private individuals or entities adversely named in parliamentary proceedings should have a formal mechanism to respond. This helps uphold fairness and protects reputations.
- **Clarity and Proportionality:** Ensuring that privileges and immunities are enumerated in the Constitution or a similar legal framework (6.1) provides transparency, preventing these powers from expanding arbitrarily beyond what is necessary.

### Examples of Measures to Protect Privileges and Immunities

- **Codified Definitions:** Enshrining the scope of parliamentary privilege in the Rules of Procedure and a clear and publicly available statutory document or constitutional article.
- **Formal Right of Reply Mechanisms:** Allowing individuals named in parliamentary debate to submit written rebuttals or clarifications, which are then appended to official records or tabled in the House.
- **Guidelines on Matters Sub Judice:** Requiring legislators to seek specific guidance from the Speaker and/or relevant legal counsel when referencing matters before the courts, balancing free debate with judicial independence.
- **Ethics or Advisory Committees:** Providing standing committees or ethics advisers with the authority to examine allegations of privilege misuse and recommend remedial action.

## Practical Considerations

- **Institutional Culture:** The effect of written rules depends on a parliamentary culture that prizes honest debate but disapproves of gratuitous attacks or revelations of sensitive court information.
- **Enforcement and Sanctions:** Should a Member overstep their privileges, a transparent disciplinary process, guided by either the Presiding Officer or a designated ethics committee, helps maintain standards.
- **Balance of Powers:** Benchmark 6.4 reminds legislators that references to judicially suppressed or sub judice matters carry the risk of undermining the courts. Adherence to this principle preserves the mutual respect essential for constitutional checks and balances.

These Benchmarks underline that legislative freedom of speech and related safeguards are institutional, rather than personally held benefits. By clearly outlining privileges (6.1) and limiting liability for parliamentary actions (6.2, 6.3), these Benchmarks empower Members to speak frankly on behalf of the people. Equally important are protections against misuse (6.4) and recourse for those adversely referenced (6.5). These measures strike a balance between guaranteeing robust debate in parliament and upholding individual rights, reinforcing the legislature's role as a transparent and accountable pillar of governance.







Scrabble tiles and their point values:

- K<sub>4</sub>
- M<sub>3</sub>
- I<sub>1</sub>
- N<sub>1</sub>
- O<sub>1</sub>
- D<sub>4</sub>
- L<sub>2</sub>
- I<sub>1</sub>
- E<sub>1</sub>
- A<sub>1</sub>
- D<sub>1</sub>
- R<sub>1</sub>
- U<sub>1</sub>
- L<sub>2</sub>
- E<sub>1</sub>
- S<sub>1</sub>
- S<sub>1</sub>
- G<sub>2</sub>



## 7. Rules of Procedure

### Minimum Benchmarks

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7.1 The Legislature's Rules of Procedure shall reflect and support the actual practice of the Legislature.

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7.2 Only the Legislature shall have the power and authority to adopt and amend its Rules of Procedure.

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7.3 The Legislature's rules, procedures and practice shall be reviewed and, where deemed necessary, updated after every General Election to enhance parliamentary effectiveness and relevance.

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7.4 Changes to the Legislature's Rules of Procedure shall be adopted with near unanimity

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7.5 The Legislature's Rules of Procedure shall allow Members to raise genuine and succinct points of order for the Presiding Officer to consider and decide upon.

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7.6 The Legislature's rules, procedures and practice shall be readily accessible to Members of the House and to the wider public.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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7.7 The Legislature should coordinate and deliver training for newly elected and returning Parliamentarians regarding the interpretation and use of the Standing Orders after every election and by-election.

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7.8 The Legislature should produce an accompanying Handbook which explains the importance of the Standing Orders in regulating how the Legislature conducts its affairs and which is made publicly available to citizens on the Legislature's website.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

A legislature's Rules of Procedure, also known as Standing Rules or Standing Orders, lie at the heart of its consistency, efficiency, fairness, and transparency. These rules govern how debates are conducted, how committees are formed, legislation is introduced and scrutinised, and how Members can engage with one another and raise points of order. By ensuring that the rules both reflect actual practice and remain accessible to all Members and the public, parliaments can deliver orderly, meaningful debates while safeguarding and encouraging minority voices and guaranteeing openness.

### Relevant SDGs and Other International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels;
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 19:** Emphasises the citizen's right to take part in governance, which is facilitated by clear legislative procedures
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 19 and 25:** Stresses freedom of expression and the right of citizens to participate in public affairs through representatives operating under fair Parliamentary processes

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Legislative Effectiveness:** Rules of procedure (7.1) ensure the House can manage its business efficiently and effectively: from scheduling debates to structuring voting and amendments, thereby preventing procedural chaos and otherwise avoidable deadlocks.
- **Autonomy of the Legislature:** By reserving the authority to adopt and amend its own rules (7.2), a parliament safeguards its independence from external interference, upholding the separation of powers.
- **Adaptability and Relevance:** Requiring periodic reviews, particularly after elections, (7.3) helps the Legislature stay responsive to evolving political, social, and technological contexts. Outdated procedures can hamper transparency and hinder modern parliamentary practices.
- **Inclusivity and Consensus:** The near unanimity requirement (7.4) in adopting rule changes ensures that major procedural revisions reflect broad consensus, thereby protecting minority party interests and the stability of parliamentary operations.
- **Clarity for Members and the Public:** Providing for succinct points of order (7.5) and ensuring that rules are accessible (7.6) enable Members to participate effectively. This also helps citizens understand legislative proceedings and fosters greater trust in the institution.

### Examples of Measures to Strengthen Rules of Procedure

- **Training:** Well trained and experienced Presiding Officers and Table Clerks who can interpret Rules of Procedure in a consistent and confident manner.
- **Standing Orders Committee:** Establishing a dedicated committee with the remit to propose updates to Standing Orders and coordinate with relevant stakeholders ensures systematic reviews.
- **Orientation Sessions for Members:** Conducting periodic workshops or seminars—especially after elections—to ensure that both new and returning legislators fully understand any procedural updates.
- **Public-Facing Online Portal:** Hosting all Standing Orders, procedural manuals, and updates on the parliamentary website in user-friendly formats, thereby demystifying internal processes.
- **Pilot Initiatives and Evaluations:** Trialling new rules on a temporary basis (for instance, hybrid sessions) and evaluating effectiveness before making them permanent.

### Practical Considerations

- **Balancing Tradition and Innovation:** Many legislatures uphold historical practices. Periodic reviews should carefully weigh which traditions remain effective against the need for modernisation.
- **Consensus-Building:** Because rule changes require near unanimity (7.4), parliaments must develop mechanisms—like multi-party committees—to reconcile differing opinions. “Near unanimity” will depend

on the size and political climate in each Legislature and it will be for the respective Legislature to determine how best to interpret what constitutes “near unanimity”.

- **Training and Resources:** Effective implementation of Additional Benchmark 7.7 depends on having knowledgeable trainers and accessible materials in multiple languages or formats as needed.
- **Public Engagement:** Making rules and procedures easy to find and understand helps citizens track legislative debates and decisions. This can involve infographics, translations, or summary guides for non-specialists.

These Benchmarks re-affirm that a parliament’s internal governance must be both adaptive and anchored in broad consensus. By ensuring that Rules of Procedure truly reflect how business is conducted (7.1), remain under the exclusive authority of the Legislature (7.2), and promote inclusivity and transparency (7.3–7.6), these Minimum Benchmarks balance efficiency with democratic integrity. The Additional Benchmarks (7.7, 7.8) further emphasise capacity-building and public understanding—both of which are critical for maintaining a modern, responsive legislature aligned with international best practices and SDG 16.6.





## 8. Presiding Officers

### Minimum Benchmarks

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8.1 The Legislature shall select or elect a Presiding Officer pursuant to criteria and processes clearly defined in the jurisdiction's Constitution and/or the Parliament's Rules of Procedure.

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8.2 The Presiding Officer shall maintain order so that the Legislature carries out its functions effectively and Members have full opportunity to participate in legislative proceedings in accordance with the Legislature's Rules of Procedure and established practice.

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8.3 The Presiding Officer shall decide all questions of procedure, and in doing so is guided by previous decisions and practice.

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8.4 Any sanctions (such as orders to leave the chamber) applied to Members in the House shall be proportionate only to the extent necessary to uphold the Presiding Officer's vested authority and unimpeded ability to chair proceedings

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8.5 Rulings made by the Presiding Officer shall be recorded, collated and published in a consistent manner and on a regular basis which are publicly available.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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8.6 The Presiding Officer should have access to a dedicated office providing independent and timely expert advice on legal and procedural matters.

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8.7 The Legislature should have at least one Deputy Speaker to support the work of the Presiding Officer who should be given clear roles and responsibilities.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Presiding Officers are entrusted with upholding order, fairness, and procedural integrity. Their authority shapes how debates are conducted, how Members interact, and whether all voices in parliament are heard equitably. Section 8 sets out baseline requirements for selecting Presiding Officers, delineating their powers, and ensuring they have sufficient support to execute their duties impartially and effectively.

### Relevant SDGs and Other International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Articles 19 and 25:** Emphasises free expression and the right to participate in government, both of which are safeguarded by impartial Parliamentary leadership
- **Commonwealth Latimer House Principles:** Upholds the independence of Parliaments and the need for procedures that maintain separation of powers and the rule of law

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Guaranteeing Order and Fairness:** The Presiding Officer’s chief role is to manage debate so that all Members can participate, ensuring that minority or opposition voices are neither stifled nor overshadowed.
- **Safeguarding Procedural Integrity:** By deciding questions of procedure (8.3) according to established precedents, the Presiding Officer ensures consistency and protects the House against arbitrary rulings.
- **Protecting Legislative Efficiency:** Where there is disruptive behaviour, the Presiding Officer’s authority to apply proportionate sanctions (8.4) keeps business flowing while preventing overreach that might hamper debate and representation.
- **Promoting Public Trust:** A transparent process for selecting the Presiding Officer (8.1) enhances the legitimacy of the legislative system, demonstrating that leadership is grounded in democratic mandates rather than political patronage.
- **Ensuring Adequate Support:** Additional Benchmarks (8.6, 8.7) recognise that Presiding Officers can only fulfil demanding duties if they have timely expert advice and at least one deputy to share the workload. This arrangement reflects modern best practices for efficient parliamentary governance.

### Examples of Measures to Support Presiding Officers

- **Transparent Election Protocols:** Detailed standing orders or constitutional articles outline how candidates for Speaker or equivalent post are nominated, campaign if appropriate, and win by simple or supermajority votes.
- **Published Rulings Archive:** Maintaining an online portal for all Speaker rulings fosters public and Member awareness. It also aids in standardising procedural decisions.
- **Legal Counsel Office:** Offering on-demand expertise—e.g., from a Parliamentary Legal Adviser ensures the Presiding Officer receives timely guidance around parliamentary powers and privileges.
- **Deputy Speaker Functions:** Spelling out the authority for a Deputy Speaker to preside over specialized debates (e.g., committee of the whole) or fill in when the Speaker is absent, minimising disruptions.

### Practical Considerations

- **Cultural and Political Context:** In some jurisdictions, the Presiding Officer is expected to act with strict impartiality; in others, they may retain partisan affiliations. Reforms might be necessary to align local traditions with the best practices of neutrality and independence.
- **Natural Justice:** As with other Members, Presiding Officers should have the right to natural justice in manner in which they are held to account by the wider parliamentary membership.
- **Training and Induction:** Given the importance of their role, newly elected Presiding Officers—or newly



appointed Deputy Speakers—should receive thorough orientation on the Standing Orders, relevant precedents, and good governance principles.

- **Conflict Resolution:** Mechanisms should exist for challenging or reviewing Presiding Officers' decisions in exceptional cases—e.g., through a parliamentary committee on procedure or an appeals system—though such reviews must be sparingly used to avoid undermining the Speaker's authority.
- **Workload Management:** Having multiple Deputy Speakers or structured delegation helps prevent burnout and fosters stable leadership over long legislative sessions.

These Benchmarks underline the pivotal role that Speakers, Chairpersons, and their Deputies play in orchestrating a balanced and effective legislature. Minimum Benchmarks (8.1–8.5) ensure democratic selection processes, uphold procedural consistency, and guard against abuses of disciplinary authority. The Additional Benchmarks (8.6, 8.7) promote institutional resilience by mandating specialised legal support and requiring at least one Deputy Speaker. Together, these provisions strengthen legislature capacity to manage diverse political views, maintain order, and preserve public confidence in Parliamentary proceedings—key pillars for any effective, modern democratic institution.









## 9. Convening Session and Quorums

### Minimum Benchmarks

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9.1 The Legislature shall meet frequently, in a consistent manner and at suitable intervals sufficient to fulfil its responsibilities.

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9.2 The Legislature shall have procedures in place for calling itself into regular, extraordinary or special sessions.

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9.3 Provisions and qualifying requirements for the Executive branch to convene an extraordinary or special session of the Legislature shall be clearly specified and adhered to.

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9.4 The Legislature shall have rules which stipulate what constitutes a minimum number of Members who must be present throughout the duration of the sitting, the means of verification and procedures for when the quorum is not met.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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9.5 The determination for when the Legislature sits should be made by the parliamentary leadership which should include the Executive and Opposition, and, where relevant, Independent Members.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Regularly convened parliamentary sessions and clearly defined quorum requirements are essential for a well-functioning legislature. Frequent sittings enable Members to debate and pass legislation, scrutinise the Executive, and represent the public interest without undue delay. At the same time, firm rules on minimum attendance (quorum) uphold legitimacy by ensuring decisions reflect a “critical mass” of legislators. Section 9 outlines these fundamental principles, setting the frequency of sessions and stipulating clear processes for calling both ordinary and special or extraordinary sessions.

### Relevant SDGs and Other International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), Article 25:** Emphasises the right to participate in public affairs, which includes maintaining legislative operations that are consistent and open to the public
- **Commonwealth Latimer House Principles:** Reinforce the separation of powers and highlight the importance of timely legislative activity for good governance

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Timely Legislative Business:** Regular sessions (9.1) ensure that urgent bills, budget approvals, and oversight activities do not stall, thereby promoting governmental accountability and effective governance.
- **Remaining Relevant:** (9.1) highlights the importance of parliaments remaining a relevant and active institution in public discourse. A slow and unresponsive legislature can become a irrelevant body if it doesn’t meet frequently.
- **Independence of the Legislature:** By granting the Legislature procedures to call itself into session (9.2), parliaments can act autonomously without reliance on the Executive’s initiative or agenda. Although in reality Executive approval may be essential.
- **Checks on Executive Power:** Appropriately restricting the Executive’s authority to convene a special session (9.3) protects the Legislature from potential manipulation and ensures extraordinary sittings occur only under clearly specified conditions.
- **Legitimacy of Proceedings:** A clearly defined quorum (9.4) guarantees that parliamentary decisions represent more than a token group and will be more likely to involve cross-party engagement. Low attendance can undermine credibility, while overly strict requirements and ‘high bars’ risk stalemates and deadlocks. Balanced rules maintain legislative efficiency and authenticity.
- **Flexibility in Timing:** The Additional Benchmark (9.5) regarding who determines sitting times—parliamentary leadership that includes the Executive, Opposition, and, *where relevant*, independent Members—fosters collaborative scheduling, preventing one faction from dominating or side-lining legislative business.

### Examples of Measures to Strengthen Scheduling and Quorum Practices

- **Annual Parliamentary Calendar:** Publicly releasing a year-long schedule of sitting days fosters transparency and helps Members, civil society, and the media plan engagement.
- **Publishing Attendance:** Making records of attendance public can hold Members to account by the Media and the public, and may encourage a greater degree of attendance if repeated absences disrupt parliamentary business.
- **Rules and Permissions:** Having clear rules on when a Member can be absent, how many occasions they can be absent for and mechanisms from seeking permission for absences from the Speaker can be techniques for ensuring better attendance.
- **Quorum-Bell System:** Employing an audible signal to recall Members when a quorum call is made, striking a balance between productivity and allowing Members short recesses. Other digital systems like WhatsApp groups administered by Whips can send a message to Members for quorum calls and voting.

- **Extraordinary Session Rules:** Detailing the exact number of Members or parties needed to request an urgent or extraordinary sitting, thereby preventing overuse of special sessions.
- **Digital or Hybrid Participation:** Where resources allow, permitting remote or hybrid attendance under special circumstances can help Legislatures maintain quorum despite emergencies or unexpected obstacles.

## Practical Considerations

- **Cultural and Political Context:** Some Legislatures have historically flexible schedules and standardising a calendar may require negotiation among party leaders.
- **Sanctions and Enforcement:** Procedures for addressing prolonged absence or deliberate quorum-breaking tactics should be defined. This might include warnings, or, in severe cases, referral to an ethics committee. Whereas non-government Members may use collective absences as a form of protest, such actions should be constrained within a rules-based parliamentary system.
- **Resource Limitations:** Smaller or more resource-constrained parliaments might struggle to meet overly frequent sessions. Benchmark 9.1 is drafted in such a way as to ensure sufficiency, not to impose infeasible demands.
- **Public Engagement:** An established schedule aids civil society and the media in monitoring legislative proceedings, reinforcing transparency and trust in parliamentary processes.

Section 9: Convening Sessions and Quorums underscores that democratic governance requires the legislature to meet regularly (9.1), maintain the ability to self-convene (9.2), and define clear rules for extraordinary sittings (9.3) and quorum thresholds (9.4). The Additional Benchmark (9.5) champions inclusive decision-making when determining sitting schedules, thereby preventing any single party from monopolising the legislative timetable. Collectively, these measures ensure legislative work is timely, representative, and well-coordinated—core attributes of a modern, responsive parliament aligned with global standards and SDG 16.6.







## 10. Agenda

### Minimum Benchmarks

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10.1 Members shall be provided with advanced sight of the agenda for the forthcoming sitting day.

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10.2 The House shall be provided with opportunities and mechanisms to decide or modify the proposed business of the House, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure.

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10.3 A moderate proportion of the Legislature's time shall be set aside for it to consider business proposed by non-Government and Independent Members by way of dedicated days periodically provided for in the Legislature's sitting calendar.

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10.4 There shall be an annual parliamentary calendar published online to promote transparency.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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10.5 The Legislature should apply flexible and family-friendly hours to its working day or permit hybrid participation to allow for better work-life balance for its Members

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

A structured and transparent agenda is the backbone of effective parliamentary proceedings. It ensures that legislators know what business lies ahead, how and when to prepare, and under what processes they may propose or amend items. Additionally, by setting time aside for non-government and independent initiatives, parliaments signal openness to the full range of perspectives, promoting a more comprehensive and inclusive legislative discourse. One of the greatest challenges parliaments face is ensuring that there is sufficient time allocated for Members to fulfil their parliamentary responsibilities, especially having sufficient opportunities to vocalise concerns of the wider citizenry. Section 10 establishes fundamental norms for disseminating daily agendas, enabling Members to shape and challenge that agenda, and securing the legislature's broader operational schedule.

### Relevant SDGs and Other International Standards

- **Commonwealth Latimer House Principles:** Advocate for transparency and inclusivity in legislative procedures

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Advance Awareness and Preparation:** Providing legislators with early sight of the agenda (10.1) allows them to research, consult, and prepare amendments or questions. This leads to better-informed debates and



more thorough scrutiny/oversight.

- **Executive Coordination:** A clearer sense of timings can help the Executive manage their parliamentary duties in terms of their availability and planning around chamber and committee attendance.
- **Democratic Participation:** Granting Members the right to vote on agenda amendments (10.2) ensures that minority parties, independents, or backbench Members can contribute, preventing the majority from monopolising parliamentary time.
- **Better attendance:** A parliamentary calendar would increase attendance as Members would be better at managing their other commitments around sitting days, in particular, when international travel is required.
- **Balanced Legislative Focus:** Setting aside a moderate proportion of time for non-government and independent business (10.3) encourages legislative innovation, fosters bipartisanship, and introduces a broader range of issues.
- **Transparency to the Public:** Requiring the publication of an annual parliamentary calendar (10.4) informs citizens, civil society, and the media about upcoming debates or oversight activities, thereby increasing opportunities for public input and scrutiny.
- **Workplace Inclusivity:** The Additional Benchmark (10.5) endorses flexible or family-friendly scheduling, including possible hybrid participation, recognising modern work-life realities, best practices on inclusivity and aiding Members—particularly those with care-giving duties—to maintain productivity and well-being.

## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Agenda Processes

- **Programming Committees:** A dedicated committee or multi-party panel which meets regularly to set and update the legislative agenda in consultation with the Presiding Officer, party whips, and Committee Chairs.
- **Online Agenda Publication:** Posting the daily or weekly Order Paper (agenda) on the official parliamentary website—well in advance—enables constituents and stakeholders to follow proceedings and even provide input where relevant.
- **‘Opposition or Independent Member Days’:** Allocating specific days where the entire programme is devoted to minority party or independent business ensures these groups have meaningful opportunities to introduce motions or bills.
- **Hybrid Sittings:** Using video-conferencing for some Members, especially under the Additional Benchmark (10.5), can help parliaments remain functional during emergencies (as was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic) or cater to those with mobility or care-giving constraints.

## Practical Considerations

- **Coordination with Government:** While the Executive typically has significant legislative proposals, parliaments must retain autonomy. A scheduling committee that includes Government, Opposition and Independents ensures balanced consideration of all items.
- **Managing Over-packed Agendas:** Overly ambitious schedules can hinder effective debate. Realistic agenda planning should align with available time, resources, and complexity of each item.
- **Continuous Consultation:** Agenda-setting processes should ideally involve ongoing dialogue with relevant committees, party leaders, and the Presiding Officer, preventing last-minute surprises or neglected business.
- **Transparent Amendments:** Mechanisms for amending the agenda (10.2) need clear guidelines on notice periods, majority thresholds, and any restrictions to preserve order and prevent filibustering.

These Benchmarks reflect the principle that parliamentary time must be allocated fairly, transparently, and in a manner that promotes proper debate. The Minimum Benchmarks (10.1–10.4) ensure early access to the schedule, give legislators a voice in shaping it, and mandate dedicated time for non-Government business. The Additional Benchmark (10.5) embraces modern and forward-thinking workplace policies—such as flexible hours or hybrid attendance—to accommodate diverse personal circumstances. Collectively, these measures foster an environment where legislative priorities are balanced, stakeholder engagement is facilitated, and Members can fulfil their responsibilities effectively.

## 11. Debate

### Minimum Benchmarks

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11.1 The Legislature shall establish and follow clear procedures for structuring debate and determining the order of precedence of motions tabled by Members.

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11.2 The Legislature shall provide adequate opportunity for Members to debate any Bill, resolution, or motion brought before them prior to a vote.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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11.3 The Legislature should have the technical and procedural capacity and security protocols to accommodate hybrid participation of Members in parliamentary debates.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Debate is at the core of parliamentary work—where bills are examined, policies scrutinised, and a diverse range of viewpoints heard. The Benchmarks under Section 11 ensure that debates are conducted with clarity, structure, and fairness, allowing legislators to contribute meaningfully before a final decision. They recognise the importance of thorough deliberation on all bills, motions, and resolutions, as well as the evolving needs for hybrid participation in a modern parliament.

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Thorough Legislative Scrutiny:** Adequate debate opportunities (11.2) ensure that bills, resolutions, and motions are subjected to multiple perspectives and critical assessments before a vote.
- **Transparency and Accessibility:** Clear procedures for structuring debate and establishing speaking orders (11.1) reduce confusion and foster a predictable environment, enhancing trust among Members and observers alike.
- **Respecting Diverse Views:** A well-managed debate encourages minority and opposition voices to be heard, reinforcing democratic pluralism and preventing the majority from dominating proceedings unfairly.
- **Flexibility for Modern Challenges:** The Additional Benchmark (11.3) recognises that in certain circumstances, parliaments may have need to conduct debates in hybrid or virtual formats, enabling continued participation despite crises or less severe practical constraints.
- **Strengthening Public Engagement:** When parliamentary debates follow predictable patterns and are open for public viewing—either physically or via broadcasting—citizens gain direct insight into the legislative process, which can lead to more informed and active civic participation.





## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Debate Processes

- **Speaking Time Allocation:** Establishing guidelines that distribute speaking time across all parties, balancing the majority's right to lead proceedings with the minority's right to respond and critique.
- **Debate Schedules:** Publishing a detailed schedule before each sitting day, including approximate debate durations for each agenda item, enhancing predictability and planning.
- **Use of Technology:** Providing secure video-conferencing and remote voting platforms for Members unable to physically attend, especially under the Additional Benchmark (11.3).
- **Whips' Coordination:** Party whips negotiate speaking orders, ensuring specialised Members can contribute to debates on topics matching their expertise, maximising the quality of discussion.

## Practical Considerations

- **Political Culture:** Some parliaments operate on a tradition of spontaneous debate; formal rules and speaking lists may initially meet resistance. Effective implementation hinges on balancing tradition with transparent, consistent structure.
- **Managing Obstructionist Tactics:** Rules may need to address filibustering or misuse of speaking times. Requiring the Presiding Officer to monitor and enforce time limits can help maintain orderly discussion.
- **Technological Reliability:** For Additional Benchmark (11.3), stable internet infrastructure and robust cybersecurity measures are prerequisites for successful hybrid debate formats.
- **Public Communication:** Summaries or transcripts of debates should be swiftly published, enabling media and citizens to follow the evolution of legislative proposals and positions.

These Benchmarks underscore that open, well-structured discussions are central to democratic lawmaking and oversight. Minimum Benchmarks (11.1–11.2) secure order and fairness in debate, making sure all legislation and motions receive adequate consideration. The Additional Benchmark (11.3) anticipates modern challenges—like global pandemics or geographically dispersed legislatures—by encouraging the technical capacity for hybrid participation. Collectively, these measures align with SDG 16.6 by promoting an accountable and transparent institution where the voices of all Members can shape outcomes in real time, to the benefit of both parliament and the public it serves.



## 12. Voting

### Minimum Benchmarks

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12.1 Plenary debates and votes in the Legislature shall be public.

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12.2 Only legislators sitting in a particular House shall vote on issues brought before that House.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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12.3 The Legislature should have the technological capability and security protocols to facilitate remote e-voting under specific and justifiable circumstances.

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12.4 The Legislature should have provisions within the Rules of Procedure to facilitate paired or proxy voting where a Member is unable to attend Parliament, due to care commitments, health issues or other circumstances preventing their attendance.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Voting is the decisive phase of parliamentary proceedings, where debates and proposals culminate in an outcome that directs policy or enacts legislation. Section 12 ensures that voting remains both transparent and legitimate, reflecting the will of Members. By maintaining openness in voting, parliaments enhance public trust and accountability. Simultaneously, rules determining who may vote on particular issues guard against undue influence or procedural confusion.

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Public Accountability and Trust:** By making votes public (12.1), constituents can see how their representatives decide on key issues, enhancing trust and enabling informed electoral choices in future.
- **Legislative Legitimacy:** Restricting voting to sitting Members (12.2) ensures decisions come from those formally invested with legislative authority, preventing any misinterpretation of the House’s will.
- **Adaptation to Modern Needs:** The Additional Benchmarks (12.3 and 12.4) account for circumstances like remote e-voting or paired/proxy voting, which address the evolving demands of parliaments in times of emergencies, health constraints, or care-giving responsibilities.
- **Efficiency and Flexibility:** By defining mechanisms such as paired or proxy voting, parliaments ensure that legitimate absences do not automatically disenfranchise Members or their constituents or impede vital legislative business.



## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Voting Practices

- **Recorded Division Procedures:** Using electronic voting boards or roll-call votes to provide a clear, immediate record of each Member's vote, subsequently archived for public inspection.
- **Remote Voting Protocols:** Establishing robust verification measures—such as secure logins or two-factor authentication—for e-voting to minimise fraud or technical errors, aligned with Additional Benchmark 12.3.
- **Pairing Arrangements:** Formalising a system where Members on opposing sides of an issue can agree to abstain or match each other's absence, ensuring the overall balance of votes remains representative.
- **Proxy Voting Guidelines:** Defining permissible contexts (e.g., parental leave, illness) and a transparent request-and-approval process for appointing a proxy, allowing accountability for how the proxy casts votes.

## Practical Considerations

- **Technological Feasibility:** For e-voting under Additional Benchmark 12.3, parliaments must ensure stable infrastructure, cybersecurity safeguards, protections against AI-facilitated manipulation and practical training for both parliamentary staff and Members.
- **Cultural and Legislative Traditions:** Some legislatures rely on traditional, centuries-old methods (like verbal "Aye"/"No" calls or physical divisions). Adapting new technologies may require transitional measures or pilot schemes.
- **Ensuring No Double Voting:** If proxy or e-voting systems are in place, clear rules must exist to prevent a Member (or an improperly assigned proxy) from casting more than one vote or voting on behalf of multiple absent legislators.
- **Public Documentation:** Publicising the results of each vote in a timely manner (through a Hansard transcript, official website, or dedicated bulletins) fosters accountability and encourages informed public discourse.

These Benchmarks underscore that decisive legislative actions must be publicly recorded, confined to duly appointed legislators, and supported by modernised systems where warranted. Minimum Benchmarks (12.1–12.2) secure transparency and legitimacy by making votes public and restricting them to authorised Members. The Additional Benchmarks (12.3–12.4) accommodate evolving parliamentary norms, permitting secure e-voting and facilitating paired or proxy arrangements for those unable to be physically present. Collectively, these measures advance SDG 16.6 by ensuring the legislative process remains transparent, adaptive, and accessible, safeguarding both the Legislature's efficacy and the public's faith in representative governance.

## 13. Petitions

### Minimum Benchmarks

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13.1 The Legislature shall have procedures in place to allow for the meaningful consideration of petitions.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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13.2 The Legislature should establish numerical signatory thresholds that oblige the Legislature to debate petitions on the Floor of the House or refer them to a relevant Committee.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Petitions offer a direct pathway for citizens to bring their concerns and demands before the Parliament. They serve as a tangible mechanism through which individuals or groups can influence the legislative agenda, highlight issues that may have been overlooked, and seek governmental accountability. Section 13 sets forth requirements that ensure parliaments systematically receive and respond to petitions in a meaningful manner, reinforcing the link between the electorate and their representatives.

### Relevant SDGs and Other International Standards

- **SDG 16.7:** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels
- **ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), Articles 19 and 25:** Emphasise free expression and the right of citizens to partake in their government, which extends to petitioning Legislatures
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 21:** Affirms everyone's right to participate in governance, aligning with the concept that public voices can shape legislative priorities

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Facilitating Public Engagement:** An accessible petition system is a straightforward means for citizens to communicate concerns and recommendations, ensuring that legislative processes remain grounded in the actual needs of the people.
- **Supplementing Formal Representation:** While elected Members represent their constituencies, petitions can highlight niche or urgent topics that may not surface through other parliamentary channels, broadening the scope of issues under consideration.
- **Promoting Transparency and Accountability:** Requiring parliamentary committees or the full House to respond to petitions fosters a culture where public calls to action actually receive due attention, rather than languishing in limbo.
- **Evidence of Public Support:** Under Additional Benchmark 13.2, setting signatory thresholds for mandatory debate guarantees that issues with demonstrated backing cannot be easily dismissed, encouraging lawmakers to address high-impact concerns, whilst filtering out those that might be too niche or frivolous.
- **Empowerment and Trust:** Citizens are more likely to trust and engage with parliaments when they see concrete avenues—like petitions—to influence or highlight legislative topics that matter to them.



## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Petitions Processes

- **Online Petition Platforms:** Implementing secure, user-friendly digital systems for citizens to file and sign petitions lowers the barrier to entry, enabling broader participation.
- **Petitions Committees:** Establishing a dedicated committee or sub-committee to scrutinise petitions, hold hearings, and liaise with petitioners ensures thorough, specialised review.
- **Tracking and Reporting:** Publishing real-time or regular updates on the status of each petition (e.g., “under review,” “referred to committee,” “scheduled for debate”) so that the public can follow progress.
- **Education and Outreach:** Conducting workshops or disseminating guides on how to craft effective petitions and gather signatures, encouraging civil society and youth groups to engage with Parliament.

## Practical Considerations

- **Resource Allocation:** Reviewing petitions can be resource-intensive, especially if thresholds are set low, and backlogs can quickly develop (see below). Adequate staffing and streamlined workflows are vital to handle volumes of submissions promptly.
- **Avoiding Overwhelming Backlogs:** Parliaments may need rules to handle a surge in petitions on the same issue (e.g., combining related petitions or establishing a minimum petition age before reintroduction).
- **Potential for Abuse:** Careful design is needed to discourage spurious petitions driven by narrow interests or malicious intent. Transparent procedures, signatory thresholds, and oversight committees can mitigate these risks.
- **Clarity on Rules of Procedure:** Parliaments need to make it clear how petitions can be presented and by whom.
- **Size of Jurisdiction.** In smaller jurisdictions there can be little to no use in petitioning when there is a greater degree of direct engagement and communication between the local community and their elected representatives. However, that being the case petitions can create a more open and transparent discourse between large groups of people and the Parliament. This is important in terms of public engagement and accountability.

These Benchmarks enshrine a direct democratic mechanism for citizens to present issues and demands to their elected representatives. Minimum Benchmark 13.1 establishes the foundation for an open, responsive system. Additional Benchmark 13.2 boosts accountability by mandating formal debate or committee review for petitions meeting a designated level of popular support. By facilitating straightforward participation and ensuring that lawmakers must address well-supported requests, these Benchmarks promote SDG 16.7’s vision of responsive and inclusive governance—reinforcing public trust and deeper civic engagement in the legislative process.



## 14. Records

### Minimum Benchmarks

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14.1 The Legislature shall maintain and publish readily accessible records of its proceedings, in a standard and consistent format.

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14.2 Records of proceedings from the previous sitting shall be made available to Members in advance of the following sitting.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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14.3 Records of proceedings should be maintained digitally and made publicly accessible and easily searchable.

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14.4 Audio and video recordings should be maintained, stored, and owned by the Legislature and restrictions and protocols will be in place to mitigate their unauthorised use or manipulation.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Parliamentary records—ranging from transcripts such as the Official Report or Hansard and committee minutes to audio and video files—document the lawmaking and oversight activities of the Legislature. They offer an official, verifiable account of each sitting, enabling Members, scholars, the judiciary, monitoring bodies, the media, and the public to track policy debates and decisions. Section 14 ensures these records are systematically maintained, made accessible in a timely manner, and protected from unauthorised manipulation. Legislative records have the same inviolability as legal records of courts, and should be treated and recognised as such.

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Transparency and Accountability:** Publishing thorough and consistent records (14.1) allows Members to have a clear record of what they have said. This is important when it comes to the parliamentary privileges associated with freedom of speech. They also have significant importance for citizens and stakeholders to verify the accuracy of reported legislative actions, reinforcing public trust.
- **Timely Access:** Making records from the previous sitting available before the next (14.2) ensures legislators can review debates, amendments, and votes, thus improving continuity and decision-making.
- **Preservation of Legislative History:** Meticulous documentation, including audio/video recordings (Additional Benchmark 14.4), safeguards the institutional memory of the Parliament, enabling future generations to study policy evolution.
- **Facilitating Research and Media Reporting:** When records are both comprehensive and user-friendly (14.1, 14.3), journalists, academics, and civil society groups can easily identify who said what, building more accurate narratives around legislative work.
- **Guarding Against Manipulation:** Mandating that digital files remain secure and are owned by the Parliament (14.4) thwarts tampering or the creation of misleading “deep fakes,” helping maintain the integrity of official proceedings.



## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Records Management

- **Digital Hansard Systems:** Converting verbatim transcripts into a well-indexed online repository where users can search by date, Member name, or keywords.
- **Multi-Format Publication:** Beyond text transcripts, publishing summary notes, highlight reels, and contextual briefings in accessible, possibly multilingual, formats.
- **Version Control and Backups:** Using versioning software and off-site backups to guard against data corruption and maintain a tamper-proof audit trail for legislative records.
- **Open Data Platforms:** Integrating parliamentary records into open data portals, enabling civic tech groups to create apps and visualisations that further public understanding of parliamentary actions.

## Practical Considerations

- **Resource Availability:** Digitising and preserving records can demand significant initial investments in technology and staff training, especially for smaller legislatures.
- **Legal Frameworks:** Copyright and data protection laws may shape how records are distributed, ensuring private or sensitive information is handled appropriately.
- **Long-Term Storage:** Secure archiving (particularly for audio or video) requires stable servers and consistent technical updates, including format migrations to prevent obsolescence.
- **Accessibility and Inclusive Design:** For persons with disabilities, features like closed captions for video recordings or screen-reader-compatible text are crucial to ensure equitable and universal access.

These Benchmarks emphasise that a transparent democracy hinges on accurate, timely, and secure documentation of parliamentary proceedings. Minimum Benchmarks (14.1–14.2) guarantee that records are maintained consistently and that Members can consult them before subsequent sittings. Additional Benchmarks (14.3–14.4) encourage parliaments to embrace digital archiving and robust ownership of recorded materials, thus adapting to modern expectations for immediacy and security. These provisions align with SDG 16.6, reinforcing institutions that are open, accountable, and responsive to the needs and inquiries of both Members and the wider public.

## 15. The Opposition, Party Groups and Interest Caucuses

### Minimum Benchmarks

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15.1 Laws, regulations or rulings shall clearly set out who should be the Leader of the Opposition and their manner of appointment.

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15.2 The Legislature shall ensure adequate facilities and allocation of resources for all Members of the Opposition, including the Leader.

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15.3 Criteria for the formation of parliamentary party groups, as well as their rights and responsibilities in the Legislature, shall be clearly stated in the Rules of Procedure.

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15.4 The Legislature shall provide adequate resources and facilities for party groups pursuant to a clear, proportionate, and transparent formula that does not unduly advantage the party of Government.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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15.5 Members should have the right to form non-partisan interest caucuses around issues of common concern which are allocated adequate facilities and resources to conduct their work.

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15.6 There should be a women's/gender caucus which should be recognised and provided with appropriate and requisite resources by the Legislature.

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15.7 The Legislature should establish Rules of Procedure for parties and party groups when coalition parties are formally or informally established to ensure fairness and balance on Committees, as well as the allocation of resources and parliamentary time.

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15.8 The Legislature should have provisions in place which clarify the status of Members who leave voluntarily or involuntarily from their political party and who move to another party or become independent.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

A well-functioning democracy depends on space for opposition voices, formalised party groups, and non-partisan interest caucuses. These provisions ensure that legislative business is not dominated by a single party, and that citizens' diverse perspectives are duly represented. Section 14 sets the standards for establishing a recognised opposition, guaranteeing resources for all party groups, and enabling interest-based caucuses to form and operate. This framework fosters collaboration, competition of ideas, and effective checks on the Executive.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), Article 25:** Stipulates the right of citizens to participate in public affairs, which implicitly demands that multiple political viewpoints receive fair representation
- **Commonwealth Latimer House Principles:** Emphasise balanced governance, respect for minority voices, and well-defined rules that protect parliamentary opposition

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Ensuring Effective Scrutiny:** A formal Opposition (15.1–15.2) helps scrutinise government actions, preventing unilateral decision-making. Clear recognition and adequate facilities empower minority or non-governing parties to fulfil their oversight role.
- **Fair Resource Allocation:** Granting resources to party groups proportionate to their membership (15.3–15.4) fosters a level playing field, so that smaller parties or Independent Members are not unduly disadvantaged.
- **Encouraging Specialisation and Collaboration:** Non-partisan interest caucuses (15.5) unite Members around common concerns (e.g., environment, disability rights), transcending party lines. This can yield more nuanced and bipartisan policy discussions.
- **Facilitating Gender and Diversity Representation:** Additional Benchmarks (15.5–15.8) reinforce the importance of gender caucuses, coalition rules, and clarity for Members who shift party affiliation. These measures adapt to evolving democratic norms, ensuring inclusivity and stable governance structures.
- **Promoting Public Confidence:** Clearly defined roles and resources for parties and caucuses demonstrate transparency in legislative organisation, increasing citizens' trust that multiple viewpoints are genuinely accounted for in policy formation.

### Examples of Measures to Strengthen Records Management

- **Opposition Offices or Secretariat:** Providing an institutional office or secretariat for the Opposition helps them research policy, draft bills and amendments, and coordinate oversight activities effectively.
- **Official Recognition Procedure:** Requiring that a party group submit documentation—such as by-laws, membership lists, or a leadership structure—before formal recognition, ensuring clarity and accountability.
- **Caucus Liaison Units:** Designating staff (within the Parliamentary Service) to guide and advise newly formed interest caucuses on procedures, resource allocation, and event planning.
- **Written Coalition Agreements:** Where applicable, encouraging coalition partners to produce a publicly available agreement that outlines policy priorities, committee seat distribution, and conflict resolution processes.

### Practical Considerations

- **Cultural and Political Context:** In jurisdictions with long-standing two-party traditions, formalising multi-party or interest-based caucuses might require an adjustment period. Equally, legislatures with a history of coalition governance may already have robust frameworks.



- **Preventing Resource Abuse:** Mechanisms to audit the use of allocated funds (15.4) ensure accountability and help prevent misuse of parliamentary budgets by party groups.
- **Transition Policies:** Additional Benchmark 15.8 addresses the potential for party-switching, which can lead to legislative instability. Clear guidelines on caucus membership and resources can help to maintain continuity.
- **Mainstreaming:** Beyond Benchmark 15.6, legislatures may consider caucuses or committees on youth, disabilities, or marginalised communities. Ensuring the success of these groups may involve designated budgets and staff.

These Benchmarks highlight that parliamentary legitimacy and effectiveness rely on structured pluralism. Minimum Benchmarks (15.1–15.4) guarantee official recognition of the Opposition, fair resource distribution, and support for interest caucuses. The Additional Benchmarks (15.5–15.8) ensure that specialised caucuses—especially those focused on gender—and coalition governance arrangements receive formal backing, while clarifying the status of Members who move between parties. By giving voice to diverse political and policy interests, these measures align with SDG 16.6, bolstering accountability, inclusivity, and transparent legislative processes.





### 16. Legislative Function

#### Minimum Benchmarks

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16.1 The approval of the Legislature shall be required for the passage of all legislation, including annual/multi-annual national budgets.

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16.2 The Legislature shall have the power to enact resolutions or other non-binding expressions of its will.

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16.3 The Legislature shall scrutinise secondary, delegated or subordinate legislation including its authority and scope.

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16.4 The Legislature shall provide adequate resources for Members to draft legislation or potential amendments to any legislation tabled in the House.

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#### Additional Benchmarks

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16.5 The Legislature should undertake equality impact assessments with respect to the development of legislation, policies and budgets and publish the subsequent report.

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16.6 The Legislature should encourage the production of explanatory briefing notes to accompany legislation for the benefit of Members.

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16.7 All parliamentary Bills should be available on the Legislature's website for the public to access and the Legislature should ensure that all Acts of the Legislature are publicly available online.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

The Legislature's core responsibility is the enactment, scrutiny, and amendment of laws that govern society. Section 16 prescribes the essential components of this function, from requiring legislative approval for all primary legislation to ensuring resources for legislative drafting and for scrutinising proposed laws effectively. These Benchmarks guarantee that lawmaking is thorough, equitable, and transparent, thus underpinning the rule of law and democratic governance.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **Commonwealth Latimer House Principles:** Emphasise the separation of powers and the legislature's independent role in shaping legislation

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Ensuring Democratic Approval:** Mandating that the Legislature must approve all legislation (16.1) preserves the principle that laws reflect the collective will of elected representatives rather than unilateral Executive decree.
- **Scrutiny of Subordinate Legislation:** By examining secondary or delegated legislation (16.3), parliaments maintain oversight of Executive powers, preventing regulatory overreach and protecting individual rights.
- **Resourcing Effective Lawmaking:** Providing legislators with sufficient drafting support (16.4) enables high-quality, evidence-based legislative proposals. Ill-prepared bills can lead to ambiguity or unintended legal consequences.
- **Transparency and Public Engagement:** When parliaments encourage explanatory notes for each bill (Additional Benchmark 16.6) or undertake equality impact assessments (16.5), they empower citizens and civil society to understand and contribute to the legislative debate.
- **Open Access to Laws:** Requiring that Bills and Acts be publicly available (16.7) aligns with global norms of transparency, ensuring laws are not hidden from the very people they govern.

### Examples of Measures to Strengthen the Legislative Function

- **Legislative Drafting Offices:** Establishing specialised departments or offices within the Parliament to assist Members and committees with drafting, thus promoting uniformity and clarity in all proposed legislation.
- **Pre-Legislative Scrutiny:** Organising stakeholder consultations or committee reviews before a bill is formally introduced, allowing iterative and to some extent non-political input and early detection of flaws or ambiguities.
- **Equality Assessments:** Aligning with Additional Benchmark 16.5, parliaments can adopt standard templates or methodologies—e.g., “Gender and Diversity Impact Assessments”—to systematically evaluate proposed laws.
- **Public Bill Explanatory Notes:** Compiling a plain-language summary of each bill's objectives, policy context, and cost/benefit analysis, typically posted on the Parliament's official website for public consumption.

### Practical Considerations

- **Time Management:** Thorough scrutiny of each bill can take significant amounts of time. Rules of Procedure should balance the need for robust debate with timely enactment of vital legislation.
- **Digital Accessibility:** Providing user-friendly online platforms for publishing bills, amendments, and impact assessments broadens civic involvement, but demands stable technology infrastructure.
- **Limited Resources or Technical Capacity:** When it comes to impact assessments, these may be outside of the capabilities of the Legislature and therefore should be down to the Executive to develop. However, the Legislature should insist that such assessments are developed alongside other supporting informative briefings.
- **Cultural and Political Norms:** Some legislatures rely heavily on Executive-led drafting, while others encourage Private Members' bills. Reforms may be needed to strike the right balance of legislative initiative and inclusiveness.



These Benchmarks codify how modern parliaments develop, debate, and enact legislation that reflects the public interest. Minimum Benchmarks (16.1–16.4) guarantee that all legislation receives a proper parliamentary approval process, while resources are made available for high-quality drafting. The Additional Benchmarks (16.5–16.7) enhance transparency and inclusivity through equality impact assessments, explanatory notes, and public availability of bills and acts. These measures underscore the legislature’s independence and accountability obligations, aligning squarely with SDG 16.6 by fostering open, effective, and equitable lawmaking for all.



legislation

□ legislator noun.

**legislation** ► noun laws.  
SYNONYMS law, rules, rulings, regulations, acts, bills, statutes; N. A. formal ordinances.

legislative • adjective 1 having the power to make laws 2 relating to laws.

## 17. Legislative Procedure

### Minimum Benchmarks

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17.1 In bicameral Legislatures, there shall be clearly defined roles for each House in the passage of legislation.

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17.2 The Legislature shall have the right to override an Executive veto on any piece of legislation it has passed.

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17.3 The Executive shall transmit Bills and other documents requiring parliamentary action for timely distribution to Members.

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17.4 Unless under exceptional circumstances, legislation shall not pass through more than one stage of proceedings on a single sitting and any exceptions must be transparent, narrowly defined, and extraordinary in nature.

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17.5 The Legislature shall establish procedures for systematically monitoring the effective implementation and consequences of legislation it has passed.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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17.6 The Legislature should have mechanisms in place to consider draft legislation which shall include sufficient opportunities for the public to offer input.

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17.7 The passing of any emergency legislation should be limited in scope, temporary in nature, and include relevant sunset clause provisions.

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### Purpose and Scope

Legislative procedures are the formal pathways through which bills are introduced, debated, amended, and ultimately enacted or rejected. Section 17 underlines core principles such as clarity of roles in bicameral systems, the right of the Legislature to override Executive vetoes, and the systematic monitoring of laws once passed. These Benchmarks ensure that the legislative journey is neither rushed nor opaque, and that the public interest remains central throughout the process. Time is an essential resource for Members, especially when it comes to legislative scrutiny. An Executive that intentionally restricts such time-resource is potentially undermining the capability of the Legislature to fulfil one of its primary functions.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), Article 25:** Implies that legislative bodies must follow fair, open, and predictable procedures for lawmaking, enabling elected representatives to reflect the public will
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 21:** Highlights the citizen's right to be involved in their government, necessitating procedures that allow effective Parliamentary scrutiny and oversight

No single international instrument fully details legislative procedure. However, these broad commitments to transparency, accountability, and public engagement relate somewhat to the design and implementation of robust procedural frameworks.

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Role Clarity in Bicameral Systems:** Establishing distinct roles for each House (17.1) averts duplication, confusion, or power struggles in the legislative process, ensuring, in theory, a smooth passage or rejection of bills.
- **Balancing Executive Power:** The right to override an Executive veto (17.2) protects democratic checks and balances. This authority ensures that an elected assembly can still enact legislation that reflects the popular will.
- **Consistency and Fairness:** Delivering bills and relevant documents in a timely manner (17.3) allows legislators to scrutinise proposals thoroughly. Last-minute releases and deluges towards the end of a parliament can hamper informed debate and place unnecessary stress on Members and staff.
- **Safeguarding Quality and Integrity:** Restricting bills from passing multiple stages in a single day (17.4) shields against hasty decision-making. Transparency about exceptional circumstances ensures that any departure from standard practice remains justifiable and extraordinary.
- **Monitoring Laws in Practice:** The requirement to systematically monitor and evaluate legislation (17.5) strengthens post-legislative scrutiny, enabling Parliaments to identify unintended consequences and consider amendments where necessary.

### Examples of Measures to Strengthen Legislative Procedures

- **Pre-Legislative Consultation:** Encouraging or mandating public calls for evidence before a bill's formal introduction, aligning with Additional Benchmark 17.6.
- **Legislative Calendars:** Publishing a transparent schedule of planned readings, committee stages, and reporting deadlines to help Members and citizens track legislative progress.
- **Sunset Clause Templates:** Providing a standardised model for emergency legislation (17.7), ensuring automatic expiration unless renewed through normal Parliamentary procedures.
- **Post-Legislative Impact Reviews:** Establishing a dedicated committee or unit to track whether a law's intended policy outcomes have materialised, as guided by 17.5.



## Practical Considerations

- **Timeliness vs. Thoroughness:** Parliaments must strike a balance between responding to urgent policy demands and maintaining space for scrutiny. Overusing “exceptional circumstances” clauses (17.4) can undermine trust in the legislative process.
- **Who Decides and Why:** There should be clarity and transparency around the use of ‘emergency legislation’ rules. Who has made this decision and why should this piece of legislation need to be passed so urgently? Are Members and citizens informed as to why a piece of legislation should be rushed through. Likewise legislation that is deemed to be ‘non-controversial’ and therefore open to rushed procedures should be justified and explained to the public.
- **Public Engagement Resources:** Implementing Additional Benchmark 17.6 may require online platforms for submissions, staff to summarise evidence, and user-friendly resources explaining legislative proposals.
- **Local Constitutional Arrangements:** Some constitutions might already articulate veto override procedures (17.2) or enforce a specific legislative timeline. Reforms to comply with these Benchmarks should respect higher-level legal frameworks.
- **Monitoring and Data Collection:** A robust post-legislative evaluation programme (17.5) relies on reliable data—e.g., metrics on policy outcomes, stakeholder feedback—and the expertise to interpret it.

Section 17: Legislative Procedure emphasises a reasoned, open, and step-wise approach to lawmaking. Minimum Benchmarks (17.1–17.5) safeguard clarity in bicameral responsibilities, protect against rash enactments, and ensure sustained oversight. The Additional Benchmarks (17.6–17.7) expand on best practices for public consultation and limit the misuse of emergency legislation. Aligned with SDG 16.6, these measures strengthen the Parliament’s capacity to produce laws that are democratic, transparent, and responsive to evolving societal needs.





## 18. Legislative Committees

### Minimum Benchmarks

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18.1 There shall be a presumption that the Legislature will refer legislation to a relevant parliamentary Committee, and that any exceptions must be transparent, narrowly defined, and extraordinary in nature.

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18.2 Committees shall scrutinise legislation referred to them and have the power to recommend amendments to the content or scope of that legislation.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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18.3 The Legislature should include provisions in its Rules of Procedure that permit two or more committees to work jointly to scrutinise legislation.

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18.4 Parliamentary Committees should be provided with the scope and necessary resources to undertake post-legislative scrutiny and monitor the implementation and impact of laws passed.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Legislative Committees provide parliaments with an in-depth mechanism to examine proposed legislation, investigate policy issues, and carry out oversight activities. By working in smaller, more specialised groups, committees allow Members to focus on specific areas of law and governance, fostering robust scrutiny and informed decision-making. Section 18 outlines how committees receive legislation, the nature of their powers to propose amendments, and how committees can work jointly when needed.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **Commonwealth Latimer House Principles:** Underscore the importance of scrutiny and checks on executive power, achievable through well-structured committee systems

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Deeper Legislative Examination:** By reviewing bills (18.1, 18.2), committees can conduct consultations, analyse technical aspects, and propose targeted amendments—improving the overall quality of legislation.
- **Enhanced Oversight:** Committees often keep an ongoing watch on executive activities, finances, and policy implementations. This granularity of focus helps detect inefficiencies or abuses that might be overlooked in plenary debates.



- **Inclusivity and Expertise:** Smaller forums allow for more interactive dialogue, including testimonies from experts and stakeholders. This fosters collaborative and evidence-based lawmaking.
- **Flexibility in Legislative Work:** Additional Benchmarks (18.3, 18.4) account for modern expectations around multi-committee collaboration and post-legislative scrutiny, ensuring committees evolve alongside increasingly complex governance challenges.
- **Public Engagement:** Committee meetings—especially those open to the public—empower civil society to engage directly with elected representatives, fostering transparency and trust.

## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Committee Work

- **Mandatory Referral of Bills:** Implementing standing orders that require all non-urgent legislation to be examined by a committee is essential in bolstering thorough analysis.
- **Expert Witnesses:** Permitting committees to call independent experts or specialists to provide testimony, data, or analysis, enhancing decision-making accuracy.
- **Joint Committee Sessions:** Formal rules allowing committees to meet together when addressing cross-cutting issues like environmental policy or national security, reflecting Additional Benchmark 18.3.
- **Post-Legislative Review Frameworks:** Adopting a structured schedule (e.g., three years after enactment) to systematically revisit major laws, aligning with Additional Benchmark 18.4.

## Practical Considerations

- **Committee Composition:** Parties are typically able to nominate their Members to committees proportionate to their representation in the Parliament. Ensuring balanced membership across committees can prevent partisan overshadowing.
- **Staff and Budget:** Committees require appropriate and dedicated administrative, legal, and research support. Under-resourcing can compromise their effectiveness, especially if multiple committees share staff, though some legislatures may be limited by their own human resource constraints.
- **Coordination and Duplication:** Where multiple committees hold overlapping remits, clarity in their respective terms of reference helps avoid duplication. Joint sessions can address issues that inherently span multiple policy domains.
- **Public Access and Transparency:** Providing open sessions, publishing committee reports, and live-streaming hearings (when resources allow) further encourages civic participation and trust.

These Benchmarks affirm that specialised, smaller groups within a legislature are crucial for meticulous and in-depth lawmaking and oversight. The Minimum Benchmarks (18.1–18.2) ensure most bills pass through committee scrutiny and empower committees to propose amendments. The Additional Benchmarks (18.3–18.4) encourage multi-committee collaboration and emphasise post-legislative scrutiny, reflecting modern governance complexities and an ongoing responsibility to assess enacted laws. Collectively, these Benchmarks align with SDG 16.6 by cultivating a parliamentary environment that is accountable, knowledgeable, and responsive to evolving policy challenges.



### 19. Committee Functions

#### Minimum Benchmarks

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19.1 The Legislature shall have the right and sufficient resources to form permanent and temporary Committees.

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19.2 The Legislature's assignment of Members on each Committee shall reflect the political composition of the Legislature.

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19.3 The Legislature shall establish and follow a transparent method for selecting or electing the Chairpersons of Committees.

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19.4 Once established, Committees shall meet regularly in a timely and effective manner.

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19.5 All Committee votes and substantive decisions, as well as the Committee's reasons for them, shall be made public in an accessible and timely manner.

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19.6 Where Committees produce reports, these shall be laid in the Legislature in a timely fashion.

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#### Additional Benchmarks

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19.7 Parliamentary Committees should, where possible and deemed beneficial, conduct a certain proportion of their work away from the Parliamentary Precinct to increase the Legislature's interaction with relevant external stakeholders.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

In addition to their lawmaking duties, legislatures rely on committees to provide in-depth oversight and analysis across a wide range of policy areas. Section 19 prescribes the essential mechanisms for forming committees, selecting their Members and Chairpersons, and conducting their affairs transparently. These Benchmarks ensure that committees have the operational means, political balance, and procedural clarity to undertake their responsibilities effectively—and that the Legislature as a whole benefits from their findings.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **Commonwealth Latimer House Principles:** Emphasise checks and balances, including the need for committees to operate independently of undue Executive influence

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Operational Flexibility:** Allowing the creation of both permanent and temporary committees (19.1) gives parliaments the agility to address evolving or urgent matters, from budget reviews to topical inquiries.
- **Fair Political Representation:** Reflecting the legislature’s political composition in committee membership (19.2) ensures each party’s proportional voice is heard, preventing any faction from monopolising investigations or legislative refinement.
- **Transparent Leadership Selection:** A clear, open process for appointing committee Chairpersons (19.3) upholds confidence in committees’ impartiality, mitigating concerns of partisanship or bias.
- **Effective and Regular Work:** Timely meetings (19.4) drive forward consistent progress on legislative review, oversight inquiries, and stakeholder consultations, rather than sporadic or crisis-driven meetings.
- **Open Decision-Making:** Publishing committee votes, attendance, decisions, and justifications (19.5–19.6) invites public scrutiny, supporting accountability and enhancing the credibility of committee recommendations.

### Examples of Measures to Strengthen Committee Functions

- **Committee Services Directorate:** A specialised support unit providing logistical coordination, research analysis, and administrative assistance so that committees can operate consistently and efficiently.
- **Community Hearings:** Aligning with Additional Benchmark 19.7, committees might hold hearings in different regions to solicit local perspectives, bridging the gap between citizens and the legislative process.
- **Performance Indicators:** Tracking metrics such as the number of bills scrutinised, amendments recommended, or frequency of post-report follow-ups allows committees to measure impact, reflecting Additional Benchmark 19.8.
- **Chairperson Election Procedures:** Publicly documented rules clarifying whether Chairpersons are chosen by secret ballot or consensus, ensuring Members and the public understand how leadership is determined.

### Practical Considerations

- **Limited Resources:** Smaller or less-funded parliaments must prioritise committee mandates carefully, ensuring each has the staff and expertise to perform effectively. There is little to no point in creating committees if they do not function.
- **Avoiding Over-Commitment:** Overlapping membership across many committees can lead to scheduling clashes and diluted attention. A balanced approach helps Members participate effectively in each assigned forum. Having committees cover multiple portfolios, having more frequent meetings or including lay-members may assist with attendance and engagement.
- **Political Negotiations:** Deciding which party leads each committee often involves power-sharing agreements. Transparent processes (19.3) mitigate suspicion of undue influence.

- **Public Access:** Enabling media coverage, timely publishing of transcripts, and in some cases live-streaming committee sessions fosters greater accountability and encourages feedback from stakeholders.

Section 19: Committee Functions ensures that parliaments can establish well-resourced committees capable of tackling specialised legislative and oversight tasks. Minimum Benchmarks (19.1–19.6) specify how committees are formed, chaired, and how they publicise decisions, safeguarding political fairness and consistent operations. The Additional Benchmarks (19.7–19.8) encourage out-of-chamber engagement and systematic evaluation of committee work, reinforcing the legislature’s broader role as a transparent, accountable institution. Collectively, these measures align with SDG 16.6, enhancing parliaments’ ability to address complex issues thoroughly and inclusively.







## 20. Committee Powers

### Minimum Benchmarks

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20.1 Committees shall have the power to summon persons, papers and records, and this power shall extend to inviting witnesses and taking evidence from the Executive branch, including officials.

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20.2 Committees shall have the right and sufficient resources to consult and/or employ experts.

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20.3 Committees shall seek and receive a wide and diverse range of submissions from the public, especially from marginalised groups about the business before them and provide reasonable time for written submissions to be prepared.

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20.4 Committees shall hear evidence in public unless there is good reason to hear particular submissions in closed session.

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20.5 Legislatures shall protect informants, such as whistleblowers or public servants, and witnesses presenting relevant information to Committees about corruption or unlawful activities.

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20.6 Only Members appointed to the Committee, or authorised substitutes, shall have the right to vote in Committee.

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20.7 The Legislature shall be empowered to require the Executive to officially respond to all reports and recommendations published by Committees of the Legislature in a timely manner.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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20.8 The Legislature should have the powers to utilise lay Members as ex officio members of Committees.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Parliamentary committees require well-defined powers to effectively gather information, scrutinise government activities, and engage stakeholders. Section 20 details the key powers committees must hold, from summoning witnesses and evidence to safeguarding informants, ensuring that committees can operate autonomously and offer credible oversight. It also addresses additional provisions for using lay or expert ex officio members, thereby enriching the quality and diversity of expertise informing parliamentary decisions.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- SDG 16.6: Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Operational Capability:** Without robust and clear powers to summon individuals and have unfettered access to key documents and materials (20.1), committees can be significantly hampered in their duties. As with section 19, committees should have the powers to supplement their numbers through the utilisation of lay members who can provide external views and expertise, and a non-political perspective (20.8).
- **A Diversity of Voices:** If committees call on the ‘usual suspects’ for evidence or testimony, the information received could be biased and one-sided. A plurality of diverse views (20.3) can enrich the quality or enquiries and subsequent reports.
- **Responsibilities and Powers:** Parliamentary committees have comparative powers of courts, but with those powers comes responsibilities to have a duty of care for those who supply information whether that be from a whistleblower or testimony from public servants (20.5).
- **Interplay with the Executive:** The power of a committee should, to a limited extent, be projected on to the Executive in so far as it can compel the Executive to act upon a committee report and recommendation, even if that means a simple response. Otherwise the impact and functionality of a committee can be extremely limited and not meet the expectations of Members and the public (20.7).

### Examples of Measures to Strengthen Committee Powers

- **Formal Summons Protocols:** Establishing a clear procedure for issuing subpoenas or formal requests for information (20.1) ensures timely compliance and clarifies legal obligations.
- **Expert Advisory Panels:** Creating a roster of recognized specialists (e.g., economists, academics, scientists) can facilitate committees’ consultation rights under 20.2.
- **Public Call for Evidence:** Publishing calls for written submissions, with guidelines to encourage engagement from civil society, think tanks, and individual constituents, aligning with Benchmarks 20.3–20.4.
- **Whistleblower Protections:** Embedding or referencing national anti-retaliation laws within committee rules, ensuring that employees testifying about misconduct receive legal shielding (20.5).
- **Lay or Ex Officio Participation:** Drafting guidelines to define the roles and limits of ex officio participants, ensuring they contribute expertise under Additional Benchmark 20.8 but do not usurp elected Members’ decision-making authority.

### Practical Considerations

- **Enforcement and Compliance:** Summoning powers (20.1) may require judicial backing if non-compliance becomes an issue. Legislatures should cooperate with courts or law enforcement for effective enforcement but should be mindful of the separation of powers.
- **Balancing Openness and Confidentiality:** While open hearings (20.4) encourage transparency, committees must manage sensitive topics (e.g., national security, personal data) through closed sessions where warranted by law.

- **Resource Constraints:** Facilitating expert consultations, whistleblower protections, and public input can demand additional staff, finances, and training. Smaller legislatures should adapt strategies to their capacity.

These Benchmarks ensure that committees possess the legal and procedural authority to investigate matters thoroughly and hold the Executive to account. Minimum Benchmarks (20.1–20.7) provide for summoning evidence, expert consultations, inclusive public input, and protections for whistleblowers—factors integral to meaningful legislative oversight. The Additional Benchmark (20.8) enables committees to incorporate lay or ex officio expertise, reflecting evolving demands for nuanced policy knowledge. By expanding these powers and protections, parliaments align themselves with SDG 16.6 in fostering transparent, effective, and participatory governance.





### 21. Oversight Function

#### Minimum Benchmarks

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21.1 The Legislature shall have mechanisms to obtain information from the Executive branch sufficient to exercise its oversight function in a meaningful and timely manner. There shall be clear and effective procedures requiring the Executive to provide timely responses to oral and written questions.

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21.2 The oversight authority of the Legislature shall include, where applicable, effective scrutiny of the military, security and intelligence services.

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21.3 The oversight authority of the Legislature shall include effective scrutiny of state-owned enterprises.

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21.4 The oversight authority of the national Legislature shall include effective scrutiny of compliance with international treaties and obligations, including international human right instruments and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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21.5 The Legislature shall establish an independent Ombudsman, Integrity Commission or similar office, with the mandate to examine complaints made against Government agencies or public bodies.

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21.6 The Legislature shall establish an independent Human Rights Commission, or similar office, with the mandate to protect against human rights violations.

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21.7 The Legislature shall receive annual reports and scrutinise the activities of all independent constitutional bodies, such as Human Rights Commissions, anti-corruption bodies and Ombudsmen.

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21.8 The Legislature shall ensure that independent constitutional bodies receive adequate resources and that the work of such institutions is not subject to political pressure from the Executive.

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#### Additional Benchmarks

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21.9 The Legislature should, wherever possible, make publicly available its reports into the activities of all state-owned enterprises and independent constitutional bodies included in its oversight authority, as well as its jurisdiction's compliance with international treaties and obligations.

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21.10 In circumstances where a jurisdiction has national, subnational or territorial Legislatures, there should be a mechanism in place to enable subnational and territorial legislators to have oversight of the national Executive on matters pertinent to that jurisdiction.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

One of the Legislature's most critical roles is to oversee the Executive, ensuring that government policies, finances, and operations are transparent, lawful, and aligned with the public interest. Section 21 outlines how parliaments can obtain the information needed to carry out oversight, scrutinise security or intelligence sectors, monitor state-owned enterprises, and hold independent constitutional bodies accountable. By doing so, these Benchmarks empower legislators to identify and address misuse of power, corruption, or administrative inefficiencies, thereby reinforcing democratic governance.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), Article 25:** Underscores the right to partake in public affairs, implying that citizens depend on their representatives to hold the Executive accountable
- **Commonwealth Latimer House Principles:** Stress the importance of checks and balances, including the Parliamentary duty to supervise executive action

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Preventing Abuse of Power:** Effective oversight (21.1, 21.2) deters the Executive from exceeding lawful authority, mitigating the risks of corruption or policy failures hidden from public scrutiny.
- **Enhancing Transparency and Public Trust:** By regularly evaluating government performance and obtaining timely responses to questions (21.1), legislatures build trust, showing citizens that the government is answerable to elected representatives.
- **Comprehensive Security Oversight:** Security and intelligence services (21.2) often operate under secrecy, therefore making parliamentary supervision crucial to ensuring these agencies act within legal boundaries and respect human rights.
- **Scrutinising State-Owned Enterprises:** Government-linked companies (21.3) can involve large sums of public money. Oversight ensures efficiency, prevents conflicts of interest, and identifies any improper operations.
- **Protecting Constitutional Mandates:** Independent bodies such as ombudsmen or human rights commissions (21.5–21.8) further the rule of law, but they need parliamentary support and supervision to function effectively and remain protected from Executive or partisan pressures.

### Examples of Measures to Strengthen Oversight Functions

- **Question Times and Interpellations:** Scheduling regular sessions where Members query Ministers and expect timely answers, complementing the written Q&A processes mandated by 21.1.
- **Security and Intelligence Committees:** Forming specialised committees with clearance to review classified information about security agencies or operations, aligning with 21.2.
- **Public Hearings for SOEs:** Requiring state-owned enterprises (21.3) to present annual performance reports and appear before committees for scrutiny and questioning.

- **Independent Body Liaison:** Creating a liaison office within the Parliament to coordinate with Ombudsmen, Human Rights Commissions, and anti-corruption bodies, guaranteeing that resources and independence (21.7–21.8) are consistently maintained.

## Practical Considerations

- **Information Gaps:** Legislatures must ensure they have the legal standing to compel information. Without robust subpoena powers or legal recourse for non-compliance, oversight can be ineffective.
- **Committee Specialisation:** Complex oversight areas—like national security or treaty obligations—often benefit from specialised committees, dedicated staff, and potentially secure facilities.
- **Resource Constraints:** Smaller parliaments might struggle to fund multiple oversight structures. In such cases, a single oversight committee with broad powers might be more practical, supplemented by external expert support.
- **Coordination with Other Bodies:** Overlapping mandates between an ombudsman, an ethics commission, and the Legislature can cause confusion. Clarity and cooperation ensure that each entity complements the other's oversight role.
- **Public Accessibility:** Publishing oversight reports, meeting transcripts, and even scheduling public dialogues fosters transparency, upholding the principle that legislative scrutiny is conducted on behalf of citizens.

These Benchmarks underscore the Legislature's pivotal role in holding the Executive accountable through continuous, structured scrutiny. The Minimum Benchmarks (21.1–21.8) mandate timely information-sharing, oversight of crucial sectors (security, state enterprises), and the safeguarding of independent constitutional bodies. Additional Benchmarks (21.9–21.10) reinforce transparency by requiring the publication of legislative findings and ensuring that subnational or territorial legislators have avenues to challenge central government actions. These measures align strongly with SDG 16.6 by fostering open, capable, and accountable governance, integral to a healthy democracy.



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## 22. Financial and Budgetary Oversight

### Minimum Benchmarks

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22.1 Budgetary approval and scrutiny procedures shall be clearly specified in the Legislature's Rules of Procedure, the jurisdiction's Constitution or other relevant parliamentary legislation.

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22.2 The Legislature shall have a reasonable period of time in which to adequately scrutinise and debate the proposed national budget.

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22.3 The Legislature shall establish active oversight Committees which engage in effective scrutiny of Government expenditures.

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22.4 Oversight Committees shall provide meaningful opportunities for minority or opposition parties and independent Members to engage in their activities.

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22.5 In addition to the draft annual budget, the Legislature shall receive and assess longer-term budget strategies and be informed of the main assumptions that underpin annual revenue and expenditure projections.

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22.6 The Legislature shall receive regular in-year budget reports and an audited annual financial statement from the Executive within 12 months after the end of the fiscal year.

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22.7 The Legislature shall have access to sufficient financial scrutiny resources and/or independent budget and financial expertise to ensure that financial oversight is conducted effectively.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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22.8 The Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) should be a Member of the official Opposition or drawn from an alternative non-Government party. Where this is not possible, by virtue of the composition of the Legislature, the Chair should be a Member with sufficient independence from the Executive.

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22.9 The Legislature should be provided with the scope and resources to undertake gender budgeting when carrying out oversight of executive spending.

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### Purpose and Scope

One of the Legislature's core mandates is the scrutiny of government spending, revenue-raising measures, and the overall budgetary process. Section 22 details the essential parliamentary mechanisms for reviewing and approving national budgets, monitoring expenditures in real time, and ensuring committees can effectively oversee financial matters. By laying out transparent financial oversight procedures, these Benchmarks enable parliaments to uphold fiscal responsibility, deter corruption, and maintain public trust in how public funds are managed.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **International Monetary Fund (IMF) Code of Good Practices on Fiscal Transparency:** Provides guidance on budget disclosures and legislative roles in financial oversight
- **CAPAC Principles:** Commonwealth Association of Public Accounts Committees (CAPAC) have developed a list of principles which seek to promote standards of good practice, in line with Commonwealth principles, to assist CAPAC Member Committees in being effective, transparent and independent

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Protecting the Public Interest:** Thorough scrutiny of budgets (22.1–22.2) prevents potential misallocation, overspending, poor debt management or corruption, ensuring that public funds align with policy goals.
- **Legislative Accountability and Independence:** A robust oversight committee system (22.3–22.4) provides formal channels for monitoring spending, enabling both majority and minority Members to hold the Executive accountable.
- **Informed Decision-Making:** Providing parliaments with budget strategies and assumptions (22.5) fosters evidence-based policy development, avoiding hasty or under-researched fiscal decisions.
- **Real-Time Monitoring:** Access to in-year budget reports (22.6) allows Legislatures to respond promptly to discrepancies or concerns, rather than waiting until the fiscal year ends.
- **Expertise and Capacity Building:** Guaranteeing sufficient financial scrutiny resources (22.7) helps Members evaluate complex fiscal documents effectively. Legislators rely on professional support (e.g., researchers, economists, accountants) to make informed assessments.

### Examples of Measures to Strengthen Oversight Functions

- **Dedicated Budget Office:** Establishing an in-house Parliamentary Budget Office to provide legislators with unbiased fiscal and economic analysis, forecasting, and costings for proposed legislation.
- **Pre-Budget Consultations:** Permitting committees to hold public hearings or invite civil society and experts for input on budget priorities before the draft budget is tabled.
- **Real-Time Spending Dashboards:** Implementing digital platforms that display ongoing government expenditures against budget allocations, enabling quick detection of anomalies or overspends.
- **PAC Opposition Chair:** Under Additional Benchmark 22.8, many parliaments assign an Opposition Member as Public Accounts Committee Chair, bolstering the committee's independence and credibility.

### Practical Considerations

- **Time Constraints:** Legislatures require a balance between thorough budget scrutiny and timely passage of financial bills to prevent government shutdowns or lapses in funding.
- **Coordination with Audit Offices:** Collaboration with Supreme Audit Institutions (referenced in Section 23) ensures PACs can examine third-party audit findings, strengthening oversight synergy.
- **Capacity Gaps:** Smaller or less-resourced parliaments may face difficulties hiring expert staff. In such cases, partnerships with external think tanks or international institutions can supplement in-house expertise. However, legislatures should also encourage Members are given adequate training around financial scrutiny.



- **Public and Media Engagement:** Publishing plain-language summaries of budget proposals and updates fosters broader public discourse around government spending priorities.
- **Sufficient independence from the Executive:** Refers to Members who are not part of the Government or Executive branch, such as Ministers or parliamentary secretaries, and who can demonstrate the capacity and ability to hold the Executive to account—often referred to as a ‘*Backbencher*’.

Section 22: Financial and Budgetary Oversight underlines the legislature’s duty to ensure that public funds are allocated, managed, and audited in ways that reflect broad societal needs and maintain accountability. The Minimum Benchmarks (22.1–22.7) set out how budgets must be introduced, debated, monitored, and analysed, while Additional Benchmarks (22.8–22.9) refine these processes with impartial leadership in PACs and a lens toward gender-responsive budgeting. Together, these measures align with SDG 16.6, reinforcing effective, accountable, and transparent fiscal governance—a cornerstone of modern democratic practice.









## 23. Auditing Function

### Minimum Benchmarks

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23.1 There shall be an independent, non-partisan Supreme or National Audit Office whose reports are tabled in the Legislature regularly and in a timely manner.

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23.2 The Supreme or National Audit Office shall be provided with adequate resources and legal authority to conduct audits in a timely manner in line with the Lima Declaration of Guidelines on Auditing Precepts.

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23.3 All reports of the Supreme or National Audit Office shall, by default, be referred to the Public Accounts Committee, or a designated Committee, for further report in line with Commonwealth Association of Public Accounts Committees (CAPAC) provisions.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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23.4 The Legislature should establish an internal Parliamentary Budget Office to provide its Members with independent expert advice to support their scrutiny of various auditing activities.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Auditing is a core pillar of financial oversight, providing an unbiased assessment of whether public funds are used effectively and lawfully. Section 23 mandates the establishment of an independent Supreme or National Audit Office (SAI or NAO), ensuring that parliaments receive timely, professional evaluations of government expenditures. These Benchmarks also call for adequate resources and authority to conduct audits, and a structured channel for committees (often the Public Accounts Committee) to investigate audit findings. By setting out these criteria, parliaments can confidently act on evidence of inefficiency or wrongdoing, preserving public trust in governance.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) Lima Declaration of Guidelines on Auditing Precepts:** Emphasises the independence of national audit institutions and their critical role in transparent governance
- **United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC):** Encourages states to strengthen auditing mechanisms to detect and prevent the misuse of public resources



## Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Safeguarding Public Funds:** Independent audits (23.1, 23.2) serve as an early-warning system against fraud or mismanagement, ensuring tax revenue or foreign aid is spent in line with legislative intent.
- **Strengthening Legislative Oversight:** By referring auditor reports to parliamentary committees—particularly Public Accounts Committees (23.3)—legislatures can hold the Executive to account in a systematic and evidence-based manner.
- **Maintaining Auditor Independence:** Adequate legal authority and resources, as well as insulation from political pressure (23.2), allow audit institutions to operate free from conflicts of interest, safeguarding the integrity of their findings.
- **Enhancing Public Trust and Transparency:** Publishing audit reports fosters transparency, letting citizens and civil society scrutinise government spending and hold leaders accountable at the ballot box or through public discourse.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Audit findings highlight not only irregularities but also best practices, driving better financial management and policy outcomes over time.

## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Oversight Functions

- **Secure Tenure and Budget for the Auditor General:** Providing legislative or constitutional safeguards against removal ensures auditors can investigate sensitive cases without fear of political retaliation, aligning with 23.2.
- **Cooperation and Good Relationships:** It is vital that the PAC and wider parliamentary stakeholders develop and maintain a positive and mutually beneficial relationship with the SAI. The Chair of the PAC and the Auditor General (or equivalent) should be central to this dynamic.
- **Regular Publication of Audit Findings:** Publishing routine, timely reports—along with user-friendly summaries—enables easy access to the data for both legislators and the public.
- **PAC Hearings:** Organising committee hearings where the Auditor General briefs Members on key findings from each audit cycle, clarifying complexities or recommending further action.
- **Internal Parliamentary Budget Office:** In line with Additional Benchmark 23.4, a PBO can offer real-time analysis of fiscal policies, bridging any gaps between audit cycles and enabling rapid legislative intervention where needed.

## Practical Considerations

- **Capacity and Expertise:** Smaller or less-resourced jurisdictions may need external technical assistance or cooperative arrangements to strengthen audit practices and/or to establish a PBO.
- **Access to Information:** Audit bodies must have legal backing to demand data from all government levels. A lack of cooperation or timely data provision can undermine the audit's effectiveness.
- **Follow-Up Mechanisms:** Merely publishing reports does not guarantee reforms. Parliaments should have established procedures for ensuring the Executive addresses and implements audit recommendations.
- **Integration with Financial Oversight Committees:** Close coordination between the auditing institution and committees like Public Accounts or Finance ensures that findings feed seamlessly into legislative scrutiny.

These Benchmarks ensure that parliaments have the data and independent assessments needed to oversee the Executive's use of public funds rigorously. Minimum Benchmarks (23.1–23.3) lay out the requirement for a Supreme or National Audit Office with robust independence and timely reporting to the Legislature, while Additional Benchmark (23.4) advocates creating a Parliamentary Budget Office for continuous financial advice. Together, these measures align with SDG 16.6 and the Lima Declaration, reinforcing a framework where inefficiencies and malfeasance can be detected, debated, and addressed under Parliament's watchful eye.

## 24. No Confidence and Impeachment Provisions

### Minimum Benchmarks

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24.1 In bicameral systems, only a popularly elected lower House shall have the power to bring down the Government.

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24.2 The Legislature shall have mechanisms to impeach or censure the Executive branch or express no-confidence in the Government.

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24.3 If the Legislature expresses no confidence in the Government, the Executive is obliged to offer its resignation. If the Head of State agrees that no other alternative Government can be formed, a General Election shall be held in an appropriate time frame that is clearly specified in the jurisdiction's Constitution or any other related law.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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24.4 The Executive Head of Government should be required to come before the Legislature at least once every calendar year to provide Members with an update on the priorities and performance of the Government.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Legislative power to remove the Government or impeach executive officers underscores the principle that public officials remain accountable to the elected representatives of the people. Section 24 establishes clear, constitutionally grounded procedures for motions of no confidence, censure, or impeachment. These measures protect against arbitrary or politically motivated dismissals while ensuring that an unpopular or unethical Executive cannot cling to power indefinitely. By specifying who has the authority to initiate and resolve these proceedings, the Benchmarks reinforce democratic checks and balances.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **Commonwealth Latimer House Principles:** Emphasise that the Legislature, as a separate branch of government, must hold the Executive to account, including through no-confidence votes or impeachment where warranted





## Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Safeguarding Democratic Legitimacy:** By enabling a popularly elected House to bring down the Government (24.1), parliaments ensure that the Executive remains responsive to the electorate’s representatives.
- **Upholding Accountability:** Impeachment or censure mechanisms (24.2) deter abuses of power, corruption, or misconduct, providing a structured forum for allegations to be tested in a transparent manner.
- **Clarity in Bicameral Systems:** Restricting no-confidence powers to the directly elected chamber prevents confusion or deadlocks between Houses, especially in jurisdictions where one House may be partially appointed or indirectly elected.
- **Transparent Government Dissolution:** If a no-confidence motion passes (24.3), the Executive must either resign or, if no alternative government is feasible, trigger an election. Such clear procedures forestall constitutional crises and excessive politicking.
- **Constructive Dialogue and Oversight:** Additional Benchmark (24.4) establishes a requirement for the Head of Government to periodically update the Legislature on policy priorities and performance, promoting continuous scrutiny and reducing the likelihood of sudden no-confidence motions based on insufficient information.

## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Oversight Functions

- **Clear Thresholds:** Requiring a simple or supermajority for a successful no-confidence motion, as specified in constitutional or Rules of Procedure, clarifies the burden for removing the Government.
- **Structured Hearings:** Where impeachment is pursued, legislatures may hold formal investigative hearings (akin to a trial), ensuring due process and transparency, before a final vote on removal.
- **Annual Address to Parliament:** Enforcing Additional Benchmark 24.4, the Head of Government might deliver a “State of the Nation” or equivalent speech, followed by debate in the Legislature.
- **Public Documentation:** Publishing the text of no-confidence motions, impeachment charges, and official responses fosters public understanding and trust in the constitutional process.

## Practical Considerations

- **Preventing Abuse:** While a no-confidence motion is essential for accountability, parliaments must guard against frivolous or recurrent attempts that destabilise governance. Some jurisdictions set cooling-off periods between motions.
- **Legal Protection:** Impeachment procedures may require high thresholds (like a two-thirds majority) for final removal to ensure that such a step is taken only in cases of severe misconduct, not partisan disputes.
- **Timing of Dissolutions:** Constitutional or legislative rules may fix a timeline for new elections if no alternative government emerges following removal of the previous government. This ensures no prolonged power vacuum or prolonged caretaker regime.
- **Public Perception:** High-profile removal processes can polarise public opinion. Ensuring open proceedings, evidence-based accusations, and fair hearing protocols helps maintain legitimacy and respect for the outcome.

These Benchmarks reaffirm that parliaments require robust and effective legal means to remove an unfit Government or executive officials who lose public trust or violate the law. Minimum Benchmarks (24.1–24.3) address bicameral contexts, explicit mechanisms for censure, and the obligation to dissolve or resign after a no-confidence vote. The Additional Benchmark (24.4) advances ongoing accountability by mandating an annual report or address from the Head of Government. In line with SDG 16.6, these measures foster an accountable, transparent legislative-executive dynamic, ensuring that governance ultimately reflects the electorate’s will.

### 25. Representational Function

#### Minimum Benchmarks

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25.1 The Legislature shall be organised in such a way as to enable the substantive representation of women in its work.

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25.2 The Legislature shall provide all legislators with adequate and appropriate resources enabling them to effectively fulfil their constituency responsibilities.

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#### Additional Benchmarks

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25.3 The Legislature should establish formal mechanisms of interacting with external stakeholders, including local government personnel, civil society groups, representatives of youth communities.

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25.4 The Legislature should maintain a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy as part of its broader strategic plan, with the express purpose of ensuring that the composition of the Administration of Parliament reflects the wider population within its jurisdiction.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Parliamentarians serve not only as lawmakers and overseers of government but also as direct representatives of their constituents. Section 25 ensures that the Legislature is structured and resourced to allow Members to advocate for local and national interests effectively, and to enable diverse voices—particularly those of under-represented groups, including women—to influence legislative agendas. By specifying the minimum and additional Benchmarks, this section upholds the principle that an ‘Inclusive Parliament’ better reflects the society it serves.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- SDG 5.5: Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership
- SDG 10.2: Promote social, economic, and political inclusion for all
- SDG 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels



- **ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), Article 25:** Underscores the right of citizens to participate in public affairs through freely chosen representatives

## Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Reflecting the Electorate:** Enabling the substantive representation of women (25.1), as well as other under-represented groups, strengthens the Parliament’s legitimacy, ensuring that legislative outcomes account for diverse perspectives.
- **Effective Constituency Relations:** Providing legislators with adequate resources for constituency engagement (25.2) enhances direct communication between representatives and the people they represent.
- **Community Access and Dialogue:** Additional Benchmarks (25.3, 25.4) encourage formal mechanisms for interacting with external stakeholders and implementing strategic diversity measures. This fosters ongoing dialogue with civil society, youth, and various communities, keeping legislation grounded in citizen needs.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Focusing on diversity (25.4) signals that parliaments value fair representation across gender, ethnicity, age, and other demographics. A more inclusive composition strengthens public trust in democratic institutions.
- **Responsive Governance:** Strong representational functions help parliaments pivot quickly to address local crises or emerging national concerns, as Members remain well-informed about constituency issues.

## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Representation

- **Constituency Development Funds (CDF):** Funding dedicated constituency offices (or staff resources) so that Members can hold surgeries or consultations, bridging the gap between citizens and legislative affairs.
- **Dedicated Women’s Caucus or Diversity Panels:** Reinforcing 25.1 and 25.4 by establishing parliamentary groups focused on improving the representation and legislative influence of under-represented communities.
- **Regular Reporting:** Encouraging each Member to produce an annual constituency outreach report, detailing their engagement with local priorities and their follow-up actions in the Parliament.

## Practical Considerations

- **Resource Allocation:** Budgetary limitations might hinder robust constituency offices or staff expansions. Smaller parliaments may often employ shared facilities or rotate staff to cover multiple commitments and responsibilities.
- **Cultural and Political Context:** Some jurisdictions might face entrenched barriers to equal representation (e.g., historical under-representation of women or certain ethnicities). Additional policy levers, like capacity-building programmes or mentorship schemes, may be required but may also need entrenched power structures to be convinced and brought on board.
- **Measuring Diversity Efforts:** Tracking data on female and minority leadership roles in committees or party structures ensures that inclusivity measures are implemented and reviewed, not merely kept as aspirational matters.
- **Balancing Rural vs. Urban Needs:** Constituencies vary widely in size, infrastructure, and digital connectivity. Resource allocations (25.2) might need tailoring to these differences to ensure equity in representation capabilities.

Section 25: Representational Function underscores that effective parliaments must serve as a conduit for the electorate’s diverse interests, mandating practical support for Members’ constituency work (25.2) and structural inclusion of women and other under-represented groups (25.1). Additional Benchmarks (25.3–25.4) extend these principles by requiring formal stakeholder engagement channels and a broader Diversity and Inclusion strategy. Aligning with SDGs 5.5, 10.2, and 16.7, these Benchmarks collectively foster a parliament that is both reflective of and responsive to the society it governs. For further related information and guidance, stakeholders should consider looking at the [CWP Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines: Standards and a Checklist for Parliamentary Change](#). These guidelines help parliaments to become gender sensitive institutions.

## 26. Public Outreach, Education and Engagement

### Minimum Benchmarks

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26.1 Opportunities shall be given for public input into the legislative process and committee work, including the annual budget cycle.

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26.2 Information shall be provided to the public in a timely manner regarding matters under consideration by the Legislature.

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26.3 The Legislature shall promote the public's understanding of the work of the Parliament.

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26.4 The Legislature shall identify demographic groups whose perspectives are not well represented in parliamentary decision-making and make concerted efforts to increase their participation.

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26.5 The Legislature shall have an independent website that is publicly accessible and regularly updated to enhance information sharing and promote interaction with its own citizens and the outside world.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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26.6 The Legislature should operate or otherwise substantively support a Youth Parliament or related youth engagement programme to encourage and educate young people within its jurisdiction.

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26.7 The work of the Legislature and the political environment in the related jurisdiction should form part of the educational curriculum.

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26.8 The Legislature should hold Open Days or equivalent which are open all members of the electorate, who wish to visit the Legislature as part of a Public Engagement strategy.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Parliaments have a democratic duty not only to legislate, but also to communicate openly with the public about their work. Section 26 covers the strategies, platforms, and educational initiatives that ensure citizens can follow legislative activities, contribute opinions, and learn about parliamentary functions. These Benchmarks affirm that transparency, inclusive participation, and proactive engagement are pillars of modern legislative practice.





## Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 16.7:** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels
- **The International Declaration on Parliamentary Openness (2012):** Encourages legislatures to commit to transparency, accessibility, and the proactive release of information

## Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Promoting Transparency and Trust:** Providing accessible information on legislative activities (26.2, 26.5) builds public trust in the Parliament’s decisions, reducing misconceptions and fostering accountability.
- **Fostering Inclusive Participation:** Opportunities for public input (26.1) allow civil society, marginalised communities, and everyday citizens to influence policy outcomes and highlight overlooked perspectives.
- **Enhancing Civic Knowledge:** Deliberate promotion of the Legislature’s work (26.3) and integration into educational curricula (26.7) equip citizens—particularly youth—with the tools to engage in democratic processes effectively.
- **Addressing Representation Gaps:** Benchmark 26.4 pushes parliaments to identify demographics that remain under-represented or disengaged, thereby developing targeted outreach initiatives to encourage their voice in parliamentary matters.
- **Modernising Citizen Engagement:** An independent, regularly updated website (26.5) and structured youth programmes (26.6) reflect evolving best practices for real-time information sharing, digital participation, and building a new generation of informed leaders.

## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Outreach, Education and Engagement

- **Online Submission Platforms:** Enabling digital portals through which citizens can offer feedback on draft legislation or committee topics in alignment with 26.1.
- **Community Workshops:** Hosting regional forums, interactive fairs, or roadshows that promote the Legislature’s role and gather grassroots perspectives, aiding 26.4.
- **Youth and Student Programmes:** Organising mock parliamentary debates, essay contests, and educational tours for schools, reflecting both 26.3 and 26.7’s emphasis on public awareness and curriculum integration.
- **Multilingual Publishing and Broadcasting:** Providing simultaneous translation of key legislative proceedings and publishing summaries in widely spoken local languages, addressing varied demographics for inclusiveness (26.2).

## Practical Considerations

- **Budget Constraints:** Public events, robust websites, and school outreach initiatives may require dedicated funding and skilled personnel. Smaller Legislatures could consider partnerships with NGOs or international donors.
- **The Digital Divide:** Whilst websites (26.5) and online submissions are modern standards, not all communities have reliable internet access. Traditional communication channels (print media, radio) still hold value.
- **Measuring Impact:** Tracking visitor analytics on the website, attendance at open days (26.8), or youth interest in politics post-engagement can help refine outreach approaches.
- **Cultural Relevance:** Curriculum embedding (26.7) must be context-sensitive. Efforts to teach Parliamentary history or processes might involve local educators, aligning with national educational standards.

Section 26: Public Outreach, Education and Engagement underscores that a democratic Parliament cannot remain insular; it must actively seek and integrate citizens’ voices. Minimum Benchmarks (26.1–26.5) define the necessity of providing public input channels, timely updates, and targeted inclusion of under-represented demographics. Additional Benchmarks (26.6–26.8) further advocate for structured youth participation, integration of parliamentary knowledge into schooling, and the hosting of Open Days. Aligned with SDG 16.7 and the spirit of the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness, these measures ensure that legislatures are transparent, collaborative, and instructive in their approach to engaging the people they serve. For further information, stakeholders could refer to the [CPA’s Engagement, Education and Outreach Handbook](#) for Commonwealth Parliaments which provides guidance on how to increase public engagement and outreach, and to ensure the public get a greater say in how they are governed. For guidance on establishing and running Youth Parliaments, stakeholders can also refer to the [CPA’s Toolkit on Youth Parliaments](#).

## 27. Media Relations

### Minimum Benchmarks

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27.1 The Legislature shall ensure that representatives of the independent Media are given appropriate access to the proceedings of the Parliament without compromising the proper functioning of the Legislature and its Rules of Procedure.

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27.2 The Legislature shall have a non-partisan Media relations facility that is fit for purpose.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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27.3 The Legislature should produce a companion guide for representatives of the Media to support their reporting of parliamentary activities.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

A free and independent media is essential for democratic accountability, enabling citizens to receive timely, accurate information on the work of their elected representatives. Section 27 outlines how legislatures should provide media access to parliamentary proceedings while safeguarding institutional integrity and parliamentary rules. By establishing dedicated facilities and clear guidelines, the Benchmarks promote balanced, non-partisan reporting, ensuring that parliamentary business is both transparent and effectively communicated to the public.

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Transparency and Accountability:** Granting appropriate media access (27.1) allows the public to follow legislative developments, fostering trust and deterring misconduct through the scrutiny of informed journalists.
- **Non-partisan Information Flow:** A dedicated media relations facility (27.2) ensures consistent, fact-based communication, reducing the risk of partisan spin or selective information being released to the public.
- **Safeguarding Parliamentary Dignity:** While openness is vital, oversight of media interactions and accreditation procedures protects parliamentary decorum, preventing disruptions or security risks.
- **Public Education:** Additional Benchmark (27.3) encourages the production of a media guide, helping reporters understand legislative jargon, processes, and timelines so they can relay accurate interpretations to the public.
- **Efficient Communication Channels:** Well-structured relations with the media reduce miscommunication, ensuring that official statements, transcripts, and clarifications flow reliably and accurately.



## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Media Relations

- **Accreditation Systems:** Providing clear, transparent guidelines for press accreditation, including day passes for visiting journalists and annual passes for regular correspondents, enabling stable, consistent coverage.
- **Dedicated Briefing Rooms:** Maintaining press conference facilities with audiovisual equipment so that parliamentary leaders or committee chairs can address the media easily and effectively.
- **Online Press Portal:** Hosting a password-protected portal containing official press releases, daily agendas, transcripts, and high-resolution images, aligning with Benchmarks 27.1–27.2.
- **Media Guide:** Under Additional Benchmark 27.3, parliaments can produce a concise reference document explaining parliamentary protocols, the legislative cycle, and guidelines for media conduct within the chamber.

## Practical Considerations

- **Parliamentary Security and Decorum:** Even as the media is granted near-unfettered access, certain rules—like no disruptive equipment in the chamber—may be justified to maintain the Legislature’s proceedings.
- **Cultural and Technological Diversity:** Some Parliaments support media coverage in multiple languages, or adapt for journalists who rely on radio or traditional press. Online or social media credentials may require flexible policies.
- **Handling Sensitive Topics:** Legislatures might restrict filming or broadcasting for certain closed committees or confidential debates. Transparent guidelines prevent allegations of censorship or bias.
- **Resource Allocation:** Maintaining a dedicated media relations unit requires skilled staff, a stable budget, and collaboration with Parliamentary communications teams. Smaller Legislatures might consider shared resources or partial outsourcing.
- **Government Information Services:** In many smaller jurisdictions, the Legislature, due in part to limited resources, will be reliant on the Executive to provide an information service and in particular media relations. However, to ensure a balanced and neutral perspective, it is important that such services are provided by the Legislature.

These Benchmarks formalise how parliaments should accommodate and engage with journalists. Minimum Benchmarks (27.1–27.2) demand that the Legislature grant media representatives suitable access to proceedings, supported by a neutral press office. However, such access should not be disruptive to legislative business. The Additional Benchmark (27.3) highlights the benefit of an accompanying media guide for consistent, accurate reporting. These measures collectively uphold SDG 16.6 and the right of the public to receive reliable information about legislative processes, thereby fortifying transparency, accountability, and civic engagement.

## 28. Accessibility

### Minimum Benchmarks

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28.1 For formal parliamentary and informal activities, the Legislature shall be accessible and open to all citizens with particular due consideration for persons with disabilities.

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28.2 Where the jurisdiction's Constitution or parliamentary rules provide for the use of multiple working languages, the Legislature shall make every reasonable effort to provide for the simultaneous interpretation of Plenary/Committee debates and translation of accompanying records.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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28.3 The Legislature should carry out full and regular accessibility audits of the Parliamentary precinct.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Inclusive parliaments ensures that all citizens—regardless of physical ability, linguistic background, or other characteristics—can participate in and observe legislative processes. Section 28 mandates that parliaments address physical, technological, and language-related barriers, reinforcing a commitment to equal opportunity in democratic governance. By carrying out regular accessibility audits and providing necessary accommodations, these Benchmarks enable parliaments to fully represent the diversity of the populations they serve.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 10.2:** Empower and promote social, economic, and political inclusion of all
- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD):** Stresses that public institutions, including legislatures, must ensure accessibility and provide reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Inclusive Representation:** Ensuring that all citizens, including persons with disabilities (28.1), can physically or digitally access parliamentary proceedings upholds the principle that governance is for everyone.
- **Public Engagement and Transparency:** Providing simultaneous interpretation and translation services (28.2) breaks down linguistic barriers, enabling broader segments of society—including non-dominant language speakers—to follow debates and understand legislative outcomes.





- **Legal Compliance and Good Practice:** Meeting or exceeding (“goldplating”) CRPD obligations positions parliaments as leaders in demonstrating how public institutions can comply with global norms on inclusion and nondiscrimination.
- **Reflecting Social Diversity:** By being mindful of accessibility, parliaments more accurately mirror the society they govern, forging trust and credibility among citizens who might otherwise feel shut out.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regular accessibility audits (28.3) ensure parliaments do not merely adopt a one-time solution but remain vigilant about evolving best practices, new technologies, and changing demographic needs.

## Examples of Measures to Improve Accessibility

- **Physical Infrastructure Upgrades:** Installing ramps, lifts, tactile paving, accessible restrooms, and designated seating areas in galleries to align with best practices under 28.1.
- **Assistive Technologies:** Providing hearing loops, braille or large-print materials, screen-reader-compatible websites, sign-language interpretation, and subtitles for live or recorded proceedings.
- **Multi-Language Services:** Under 28.2, scheduling translation for official documents, committee reports, and question periods; employing interpreters for key debates or press conferences.
- **Annual Accessibility Audits:** Conducting official reviews to identify structural or procedural barriers. Publishing reports that recommend improvements, in line with Additional Benchmark 28.3.

## Practical Considerations

- **Budgetary Implications:** Infrastructure modifications, translation services, and technology upgrades can be resource-intensive. Smaller legislatures may need phased approaches or external support.
- **Legal Framework:** National disability acts or constitutional provisions might require certain accessibility standards, guiding the scope and pace of reforms.
- **Staff Training:** Parliament staff should be trained to assist persons with disabilities, including providing orientation on using new accessibility features and offering respectful customer service.
- **Technological Consistency:** Parliaments with advanced e-platforms must ensure ongoing compatibility with assistive technologies, requiring regular software updates and user testing.

These Benchmarks underscore that a legislature committed to equal representation must be physically, technologically, and linguistically open to all citizens. The Minimum Benchmarks (28.1–28.2) address core inclusivity needs—paying special attention to persons with disabilities and respecting multiple working languages—while the Additional Benchmark (28.3) promotes periodic, structured audits that keep accessibility measures up-to-date. In alignment with SDGs 10.2 and 16.6, and reflecting CRPD obligations, these measures ensure parliaments do not inadvertently exclude any demographic from observing or participating in legislative affairs. For further information, stakeholders could refer to the [CPA's Disability Inclusive Communications Guidelines](#). The Guidelines provide guidance to legislatures on how to enhance and sensitize their communications with persons with disabilities.

## 29. Freedom of Information

### Minimum Benchmarks

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29.1 There shall be an effective Freedom of Information regime to give the public access to information held by relevant public authorities.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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29.2 The Legislature should establish a formal position with overarching responsibility for coordinating any Freedom of Information requests submitted by members of the public.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Freedom of Information (FOI) frameworks allow citizens, researchers, and the media to request and obtain official documents, thereby ensuring government actions remain transparent and open to scrutiny. Section 29 recognises that parliaments, too, must be subject to FOI rules or comparable laws, enabling meaningful public insight into legislative operations. By establishing clarity about what information is accessible and how requests should be handled, these Benchmarks cultivate a culture of openness, accountability, and trust in public institutions.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 10.2:** Empower and promote social, economic, and political inclusion of all
- **Convention against Corruption (UNCAC):** Encourages states to adopt measures enhancing transparency in public administration

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Enhanced Accountability:** FOI laws empower citizens to examine parliamentary documents, such as internal reports or budget details, preventing secrecy and deterring wrongdoing or misuse of authority.
- **Public Trust and Engagement:** Transparent legislatures encourage civic participation, as constituents can monitor legislative activity, question decisions, and engage with representatives armed with accurate information.
- **Legislative Legitimacy:** When parliaments demonstrate that they are not exempt from FOI (29.1), they model the same accountability they demand of the Executive and other public bodies.
- **Informed Debate:** FOI requests can reveal data that enriches policy discussions both inside and outside the Legislature, leading to better-informed committees, Members, and civil society stakeholders.
- **Balancing Privacy and Security:** While transparency is key, parliaments must also define procedures for exempting sensitive or classified information, ensuring openness does not compromise national interests or personal privacy.



## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Freedom of Information

- **Clear FOI Legislation:** Legally specifying the scope of accessible parliamentary records, the timeline for responses, and any exemptions (e.g., security-sensitive material or personal data).
- **Dedicated FOI Portal:** An online system for submitting, tracking, and responding to FOI requests, promoting efficiency and transparency.
- **Proactive Publication Schemes:** Regularly disclosing key documents—committee agendas, Hansard transcripts, Members' expense reports—thus reducing the need for ad hoc requests.
- **Internal FOI Guidelines:** Under Additional Benchmark 29.2, an Information Commissioner (or equivalent formal role) might train staff on best practices, oversee redactions for exempt materials, and manage appeals if requests are partially or fully denied.

## Practical Considerations

- **Exemptions and Classification:** Well-defined legal exemptions ensure that personal data, ongoing investigations, or high-level security matters are shielded while preserving the broader principle of openness.
- **Resource Allocation:** Processing FOI requests promptly can be labour-intensive, especially if the Legislature faces high public interest or complex document retrieval. Sufficient staffing and digital record-keeping mitigate delays.
- **Appeals and Review:** An independent administrative or judicial body should review refusals or exemptions, preserving trust that decisions to withhold information are fair and lawful.
- **Data Protection Harmonisation:** FOI compliance must coordinate with privacy laws to prevent public release of sensitive personal information about employees, third parties, or constituents.

These Benchmarks assert that parliaments must submit to or align with FOI frameworks that ensure accessible legislative documents for the public. The Minimum Benchmark (29.1) underlines an effective FOI regime's critical role in sustaining transparency, while the Additional Benchmark (29.2) encourages parliaments to appoint a Chief Information Officer to coordinate responses, training, and data management. Together, these measures—consistent with SDG 16.6 and human rights norms—reinforce public confidence in legislative openness, fostering a more informed and participatory democracy.

### 30. Parliamentary Governance and Management

#### Minimum Benchmarks

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30.1 The Legislature shall, either by legislation or resolution, establish a corporate body responsible for providing services and funding entitlements for parliamentary purposes and providing for independent governance of the Parliamentary Service.

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30.2 Only the Legislature shall be empowered to determine and approve its own budget.

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30.3 The Head of the Parliamentary service shall have a form of protected status defined in legislation or in the jurisdiction's Constitution to prevent undue political pressure.

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30.4 The remuneration of the Head of the Parliamentary Service shall be set by an independent body or mechanism.

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30.5 The Clerk of the Legislature shall be an Accounting Officer for the Legislature.

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#### Additional Benchmarks

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30.6 The funding of the Legislature should be through a separate appropriations bill.

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30.7 The Legislature should have an agreed Strategic Plan with related objectives developed and updated at regular intervals and a mechanism of monitoring and evaluation to measure achievement against the Strategic Plan or other goals.

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30.8 The Legislature should have sole control of the Legislative Precinct.

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30.9 The Legislature should have strategies and policies around the use of IT and the application of artificial intelligence with a focus on the protection of personal data.

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30.10 The Legislature should have targeted policies and measures in place to prioritise environmental and sustainable practices such as Paperless Parliaments.

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30.11 The Legislature should undertake regular Gender Assessments/Audits to ensure it is a gender sensitive institution aligned with evolving international best practice.

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30.12 The Legislature should have risk strategies and implementation procedures in place around security, resilience and continuity planning which shall include the provision of physical and cyber security for the Legislature's infrastructure, as well as for Members, parliamentary staff (regardless of their location) and visitors to the Legislative Precinct.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Effective governance and management within the Parliament ensure that Members and staff can carry out their responsibilities independently and efficiently. Section 30 sets standards for establishing a corporate body or board that oversees parliamentary operations, securing autonomy in budgetary matters, and ensuring the legislative precinct is solely controlled by the Legislature. These measures, combined with strategic planning around technology and sustainability, support parliaments in serving as credible, resilient institutions dedicated to the public interest.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **Commonwealth Latimer House Principles:** Emphasise the separation of powers and the importance of legislative independence, including financial control and governance structures

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Safeguarding Legislative Independence:** Establishing a parliamentary corporate body to oversee budgeting and administration (30.1) prevents undue executive or partisan influence, ensuring the Legislature can plan and allocate resources autonomously.
- **Transparent Budget Process:** By controlling and approving its own budget (30.2), the Parliament demonstrates accountability and ensures it has adequate means to fulfil its constitutional functions without financial coercion.
- **Protected Parliamentary Service Leadership:** The Head of the Parliamentary Service (30.3–30.4) must enjoy security of tenure and fair remuneration, defending them from political pressure that might compromise impartial advice and administrative decisions.
- **Strategic and Sustainable Planning:** Additional Benchmarks (30.6–30.12) encourage parliaments to adopt clear strategic plans, robust IT policies, sustainability measures, and effective risk and resilience strategies. These factors modernise legislative operations, providing agility and continuity.
- **Ownership and Control of the Precinct:** Authority over the Parliamentary Precinct (30.8) is critical for the safety of Members, staff, and visitors, and affirms the Legislature's constitutional position as a separate branch of government.



## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Parliamentary Governance and Management

- **Parliamentary Commission or Board:** Composed of senior Members (Government and Opposition) plus Presiding Officers (as the Chair and Deputy Chair), this body oversees administration, hires and fires, sets policies, and manages the House budget in line with 30.1–30.2.
- **Protected Clerk/Secretary-General:** Legislation specifying appointment procedures, dismissal safeguards, and remuneration frameworks ensures the principal parliamentary official can act independently (30.3–30.4).
- **Dedicated Appropriations Bill:** Aligning with Additional Benchmark 30.6, parliaments present separate budget lines for legislative functions, or separate appropriations bills preventing them from being folded into executive appropriations. Likewise having the ability to move monies between budget lines to enable more reactive and responsive institutions.
- **Strategic Planning and Reporting:** Under Additional Benchmark 30.7, parliaments create and publish multi-year strategic roadmaps, complemented by annual progress reports or performance scorecards.
- **Environment and Sustainability Audits:** Implementing paperless solutions, energy-efficient infrastructure, and recycling programmes fosters compliance with 30.10, balancing legislative operations with responsible resource use.

## Practical Considerations

- **Balance of Political Representation:** The corporate body (30.1) should include representation from government, opposition, and possibly Independent parties, ensuring decisions reflect the entire House.
- **Capacity and Budget:** Ambitious strategic or sustainability goals (30.7, 30.10) may demand specialised expertise. Smaller Legislatures might be required to partner with external consultants or parliamentary strengthening organisations.
- **Information Security:** Additional Benchmark 30.9 addresses modern data protection, including artificial intelligence, requiring consistent IT upgrades and staff training to mitigate cybersecurity risks.
- **Cultural and Legal Framework:** Constitutional traditions vary widely. Some jurisdictions have centuries-old Parliamentary commissions; others may need new legislation to formalise governance structures.

These Benchmarks ensure that a Legislature's internal administration, financial independence, and strategic direction remain squarely under its control. Minimum Benchmarks (30.1–30.5) focus on establishing a corporate body, budget autonomy, and secure tenure for key parliamentary officers. Additional Benchmarks (30.6–30.12) promote distinct appropriations, strategic planning, IT and sustainability measures, and resilience strategies. In line with SDG 16.6 and the principle of legislative independence, these standards cultivate an efficient, transparent, and future-ready parliamentary institution that effectively serves the public. For further information, stakeholders should refer to the [CPA's Model Law for Independent Parliaments: Establishing Parliamentary Service Commissions for Commonwealth Legislatures](#). This resource is designed to empower parliaments to take control away from the Executive to ensure it has the administrative, operational and financial resources it needs to function effectively.





## 31. Parliamentary Staff

### Minimum Benchmarks

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31.1 The Legislature shall have adequate non-partisan professional staff to support all elements of its operations.

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31.2 The Legislature, rather than the Executive, shall control the Parliamentary Service and determine the terms of employment. There should be adequate safeguards in place to ensure non-interference from the Executive.

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31.3 The Legislature shall draw and maintain a clear distinction between partisan and non-partisan staff.

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31.4 The Legislature shall take measures to ensure that women are represented at all levels of the parliamentary administration.

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31.5 The Legislature shall have adequate resources to recruit the staff needed to effectively fulfil its responsibilities. The rates of pay shall be broadly comparable to those in the wider public service.

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31.6 The Legislature shall have transparent and objective recruitment procedures that should not discriminate in its recruitment of staff on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, sexuality, or, in the case of non-partisan staff, party affiliation.

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31.7 The recruitment and promotion of non-partisan staff shall be on the basis of merit and equal opportunity and with a focus on sustainability and succession planning to ensure the retention of expertise within the Parliamentary Service.

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31.8 The Legislature shall provide regular opportunities for parliamentary staff to engage in professional development activities that help improve their facilitation of the Legislature's business. These opportunities should cover internal activities within the parliamentary administration and external activities with third party organisations.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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31.9 The Legislature should establish a formal Work Experience/Placement scheme for young people considering a future career in the Parliament providing them with first-hand experience of working directly inside the Legislature.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

A Legislature's ability to conduct its lawmaking, oversight, and representational functions hinges on the quality and professionalism of its staff. Section 31 ensures that parliaments employ non-partisan, skilled personnel capable of supporting the legislative process in an impartial manner. These Benchmarks also emphasise transparent recruitment, gender inclusivity, and ongoing professional development, thereby safeguarding the institution's reputation and operational effectiveness.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 5.5:** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership
- **SDG 8.5:** Promote decent work for all, including fair and equitable labour conditions
- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **ILO Conventions:** Provide frameworks on equal opportunity, non-discrimination, and fair recruitment practices

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Maintaining Legislative Neutrality:** By separating partisan and non-partisan staff (31.3), parliaments prevent political interference from hindering objective procedural and administrative guidance.
- **Ensuring Organisational Stability:** Parliaments benefit from robust staffing resources (31.1, 31.5), facilitating continuous, expert support to Members even as political leadership changes from one election cycle to another.
- **Championing Meritocracy and Equality:** Transparent recruitment (31.6) and the requirement that women be represented at all levels (31.4) foster an equitable work culture, reinforcing public confidence in the institution's commitment to fairness.
- **Building Professional Expertise:** Regular professional development opportunities (31.8) keep staff knowledgeable about legislative evolutions and best practices, empowering them to offer high-quality support to Members.
- **Pathways for Future Talent:** Additional Benchmarks (31.9) emphasise structured work experience or placement schemes, drawing new talent into the legislative sphere and nurturing the next generation of parliamentary experts.

### Examples of Measures to Strengthen Parliamentary Staffing

- **Legislative Service Commission:** An internal body or board may be responsible for recruiting, promoting, and overseeing staff, ensuring compliance with 31.2 and 31.6 on independence and open hiring.
- **Gender and Diversity Targets:** Under 31.4, HR policies might include numerical or proportional goals for women's representation across clerical, managerial, and senior executive roles.
- **Professional Development Programmes:** Implementing structured seminars, certificate courses, and cross-parliamentary exchange visits (31.8) encourages continuous learning and cross-cultural insights.
- **Internship or Apprenticeship Schemes:** In line with 31.9, parliaments could partner with universities or vocational institutions to offer rotating placements, familiarising students or early-career professionals with parliamentary procedures and culture.

### Practical Considerations

- **Remuneration and Career Path:** Salaries that are competitive with the wider public sector (31.5) help parliaments attract top talent, whereas transparent promotion pathways can increase retention and improve morale.
- **HR Tools and Capacity:** Implementing standardised job descriptions, performance evaluations, and e-recruitment platforms improves consistency and fairness, especially in large parliamentary administrations.

- **Balancing Partisan vs Non-Partisan Roles:** While political parties may have their own staff, legislative staff must remain impartial, providing the same quality of support to all Members regardless of party affiliation (31.3).
- **Succession Planning:** Senior staff retirement or unexpected departures can create knowledge gaps. Ongoing mentoring and archiving of institutional memory help mitigate these disruptions (31.7), though care should be taken not to have too inward-facing an approach to recruitment.

These Benchmarks underscore that a parliament's success depends on professional, impartial, and well-supported staff. Minimum Benchmarks (31.1–31.8) ensure adequate human resources, independent oversight of hiring, commitment to diversity, and continuous staff development. The Additional Benchmark (31.9) promotes formal schemes for work experience or placement to build a future workforce. By aligning these practices with SDGs 5.5, 8.5, and 16.6—and relevant ILO standards—parliaments foster a talent pool capable of supporting legislative functions with expertise, neutrality, and public accountability.





For further related information and guidance, stakeholders should consider looking at the [CWP Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines: Standards and a Checklist for Parliamentary Change](#). These guidelines help parliaments to become gender sensitive institutions. In addition, stakeholders should refer to the [CPA's Model Law for Independent Parliaments: Establishing Parliamentary Service Commissions for Commonwealth Legislatures](#).



## 32. Parliamentary Assistance, Networking and Diplomacy

### Minimum Benchmarks

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32.1 The Legislature shall have the right to seek and receive external development assistance to strengthen the institution of Parliament.

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32.2 The type of assistance, budget and use of development assistance received by the Legislature shall be determined by the Legislature in a transparent and accountable manner.

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32.3 Members and staff of the Legislature shall have the right to receive technical and advisory assistance, as well as to network and exchange experience with individuals from other legislatures.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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32.4 The Legislature should establish a formal Exchange Programme that enables staff of both legislatures to benefit from exchanging knowledge, experience, and best practice.

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32.5 The Legislature should have mechanisms in place to ensure that both Government and Opposition Members have equal and proportionate access to networking and opportunities to attend international gatherings of Members.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Modern legislatures do not, and should not, operate in isolation. They often collaborate with external organisations, other parliaments, and international bodies to enhance capacity, share expertise, and address common governance challenges. Section 32 sets out key Benchmarks for parliaments seeking technical or advisory assistance, establishing networking frameworks, and engaging in parliamentary diplomacy. Through these measures, parliaments expand their resources, knowledge, and global relationships, ultimately improving legislative performance and deepening democratic practices.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 17:** Revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, highlighting cooperation and knowledge exchange among public institutions



## Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Capacity Building:** External development assistance (32.1–32.2) allows parliaments—particularly those with limited resources—to access specialised knowledge, training, and infrastructure support, raising the overall quality of legislative work.
- **Global Best Practices:** By connecting with other legislatures, parliaments can learn about innovative solutions to common challenges, from e-Parliament initiatives to anti-corruption strategies.
- **Professional Exchange:** Encouraging staff and Member visits or secondments (32.3) broadens perspectives, fosters cross-cultural understanding, and strengthens personal networks that can expedite problem-solving.
- **Autonomy and Transparency:** Parliament’s right to determine the type and utilisation of external assistance (32.2) ensures that capacity-building aligns with legislative priorities and is managed in a transparent, accountable manner.
- **Strengthening Diplomatic Ties:** Parliamentary diplomacy opens channels for dialogue and negotiation beyond executive-led foreign relations, potentially defusing conflicts or strengthening alliances on legislative issues.

## Examples of Measures to Promote Assistance, Networking and Diplomacy

- **Formal Partnership Agreements:** Concluding Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with donors, international agencies, or other parliaments, clarifying objectives, responsibilities, and expected outcomes.
- **International Inter-Parliamentary Conferences:** Hosting or actively participating in annual forums (such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and the IPU General Assembly) where legislators from various countries share policy insights, digital innovations, or oversight strategies, aligned with 32.3.
- **Structured Exchange Programmes:** Under Additional Benchmark 32.4, Parliaments could develop bilateral placements—e.g., sending committee clerks or librarians to a counterpart parliament for a defined period.
- **Transparent Reporting:** Publishing data on all external assistance received—amounts, sources, projects—to assure stakeholders that no covert arrangements compromise the legislature’s independence.

## Practical Considerations

- **Coordination with Executive:** Although parliaments have independent authority to accept assistance, government ministries (e.g., foreign affairs) may provide logistical support or broader diplomatic context.
- **Language and Cultural Barriers:** Effective exchange or assistance might require translation services, cultural briefings, or orientation to ensure meaningful engagement.
- **Sustainability of Assistance:** Parliaments should plan for post-assistance scenarios, such as staff training so local teams can learn to maintain new technologies and methods of working, to avoid continued dependence on external expertise aid.
- **Equal Access:** Additional Benchmark 32.5 stresses that opportunities to attend international conferences or partake in exchange programmes should be distributed fairly among majority and minority Members, though this will be partially dependent on the composition of the Legislature and whether there are sufficient opposition members to attend such programmes and opportunities.

These Benchmarks underscore the value of open engagement with international partners, donors, and other legislatures. Minimum Benchmarks (32.1–32.3) ensure that Parliaments retain autonomy over incoming assistance, define its terms transparently, and foster an environment where both Members and staff can learn from global practices. The Additional Benchmarks (32.4–32.5) enhance collaboration through structured exchange programmes and equitable opportunities for all parliamentary actors, echoing SDG 17’s call for global partnership and capacity-building. These measures collectively promote a more informed, resourceful, and resilient parliamentary institution.

### 33. Remuneration, Benefits and Training

#### Minimum Benchmarks

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33.1 Fair remuneration and reimbursement of parliamentary expenses shall be provided to Members for their service, to ensure that they give priority to parliamentary duties. All forms of compensation shall be allocated on a non-partisan basis.

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33.2 An independent body or mechanism shall determine the remuneration, benefits, and other statutory entitlements of Members with adequate mechanisms for monitoring and disclosing these publicly.

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33.3 The Legislature shall take proactive measures to ensure that newly elected Members are assisted in understanding how the Legislature works and the importance of its Rules of Procedure.

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33.4 The Legislature shall take ongoing steps to assist Members in increasing their knowledge and skills in the effective performance of their parliamentary duties.

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#### Additional Benchmarks

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33.5 The Legislature, in conjunction with an independent remuneration authority, should conduct periodic reviews of its remuneration/reimbursement framework to ensure that it is equitable, commensurate, and fit for purpose.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Members must be appropriately compensated and supported to discharge their legislative, oversight, and representational responsibilities effectively. Section 33 sets out how remuneration, benefits, and training should be regulated and provided, ensuring that parliamentarians can serve without undue financial concerns or gaps in knowledge. By mandating independent bodies to set pay, prohibiting partisan influence, and requiring continuous capacity-building, these Benchmarks bolster the legislature's credibility, inclusiveness, and responsiveness.



## Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Securing Legislative Independence:** Fair pay (33.1) helps prevent undue influence or corruption. Parliamentarians who face financial strain or rely on external benefactors may compromise their impartiality.
- **Transparency in Compensation:** An independent body (33.2) determining remuneration ensures that wages, allowances, and benefits are shielded from partisan manipulation, boosting public trust.
- **Reducing Barriers to Entry:** When parliaments guarantee decent pay and sufficient benefits, more citizens—regardless of socioeconomic status—can consider running for office, enriching legislative diversity.
- **Continuous Professional Growth:** Structured induction for newly elected Members and ongoing training (33.3, 33.4) keep legislators informed about procedural rules, best practices, and policy trends, enhancing legislative and oversight quality.

## Examples of Measures to Protect Remuneration, Benefits and Training

- **Independent Pay Review Board:** Establishing a neutral commission (e.g., a Salaries and Remuneration Board) that periodically reviews legislative pay scales, ensuring they remain equitable relative to inflation and economic conditions.
- **Transparent Pay Disclosure:** Publishing salary structures, expense entitlements, and any authorised benefits on the Parliament’s website, ensuring citizens can see how public funds support their representatives.
- **Mandatory Induction Programmes:** Hosting multi-day induction seminars for newly elected legislators, covering rules of procedure, codes of conduct, committee operations, and available services (33.3).
- **Continuous Learning Courses:** Offering year-round workshops, e-learning modules, or Parliamentary exchanges to enhance policy-specific knowledge, debating skills, or digital literacy (33.4).

## Practical Considerations

- **Local Economic Context:** Remuneration should reflect a Member’s responsibility but be mindful of national wage averages and budget constraints. Excessive pay can erode public trust, whereas inadequate pay can undermine independence and limit the viability of running for office to those with sufficient financial independence.
- **Transparency and Public Perception:** Since Parliamentary salaries come from taxpayer money, clarity on salary structures, increments, and benefits is crucial to sustain credibility and public faith.
- **Diversity in Training Needs:** Newly elected young Members may require foundational legislative training, while returning or senior Members might benefit from leadership or advanced policy courses, requiring flexible program design.
- **Linguistic and Accessibility Requirements:** Induction and training must accommodate linguistic diversity and persons with disabilities, aligning with broader accessibility Benchmarks (see Section 28).

These Benchmarks assert that fair pay, independent salary determination, and well-planned professional development are central to a high-functioning legislature. Minimum Benchmarks (33.1–33.4) provide for equitable, transparent remuneration processes and robust induction plus ongoing training programmes. By aligning these standards with SDGs 8.5 and 16.6, and ensuring compliance with basic human rights norms, parliaments can attract and retain competent, ethical Members, enhancing both legislative quality and public trust in democratic governance.



## 34. Services and Resources

### Minimum Benchmarks

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34.1 The Legislature shall have adequate physical infrastructure in place that enables Members and staff to effectively fulfil their responsibilities.

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34.2 Members and staff of the Legislature shall have equal access to sufficient research, library, and ICT facilities.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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34.3 The Legislature should have physical and mental health advisory services and facilities to provide support to Members, their staff, and legislative officials.

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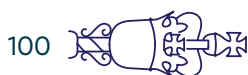
## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

A fully functioning legislature requires adequate facilities, robust research capacities, and supportive services that empower Members and staff to carry out their constitutional roles. Section 34 ensures that parliaments offer modern, accessible infrastructure, including reliable library, ICT, and advisory services, and provide well-being and mental health support. These combined resources maintain a conducive work environment that fosters legislative innovation, informed debate, and overall institutional resilience.

### Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Fostering Informed Debate:** Adequate research, library, and ICT facilities (34.2) help legislators and staff gather evidence, analyse policy proposals, and present reasoned arguments. This ensures that the legislative process is knowledge-driven.
- **Promoting Efficiency:** Modern infrastructure (34.1)—including committee rooms, offices, and accessible public galleries—helps parliaments manage daily business smoothly, with minimal disruption.
- **Supporting Well-being and Retention:** The Additional Benchmark (34.3) covering mental and physical health advisory services recognises that a healthy, supported workforce is key to stable legislative operations, reducing absenteeism and burnout.
- **Enabling Transparency and Accessibility:** Digital connectivity and user-friendly research tools encourage better oversight, facilitate public engagement, and align with broader legislative openness frameworks.
- **Improving Work Culture:** An environment that fosters collaborative, cross-party inquiry and professional development not only enhances output quality but also promotes a cohesive, respectful workplace.



## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Services and Resources

- **Modern Library Services:** Transitioning to digital catalogues and e-resources, while retaining a comprehensive physical collection, so Members can easily conduct policy research or find legal precedents.
- **ICT Upgrades:** Providing secure Wi-Fi throughout the Parliamentary Precinct, equipping offices with video-conferencing tools, and training staff in the use of IT equipment and systems for effective legislative collaboration.
- **Member Support Offices:** Introducing dedicated staff (e.g., research analysts, policy advisors) who can assist with drafting speeches, analysing budgets, and briefing Members on key policy developments, fulfilling Benchmark 34.2.
- **Well-being Programmes:** Under Additional Benchmark 34.3, offering confidential counselling, stress management workshops, or health screenings, thus acknowledging the intense pressures of parliamentary work.

## Practical Considerations

- **Resource Allocation:** Smaller parliaments may need external partners or phased upgrades for advanced ICT tools or specialised research staff, balancing ambition with budget constraints.
- **Staff Training and Retention:** Specialised training ensures that staff can maintain library collections, manage digital resources, or provide mental health support. Clear career pathways encourage retention.
- **Cybersecurity:** With expanded digital infrastructure (34.2), robust security protocols and staff vigilance become crucial to protect sensitive parliamentary data from breaches.
- **Long-term Planning:** Infrastructure improvements and expansions often require a multi-year outlook. Strategic planning ensures that facility enhancements align with anticipated parliamentary growth or evolving responsibilities.

Section 34: Services and Resources underlines that a parliament's effectiveness is inseparable from the quality of its environment, the availability of cutting-edge research tools, and the well-being of its Members and staff. Minimum Benchmarks (34.1–34.2) require adequate physical infrastructure and robust research/ICT facilities. The Additional Benchmark (34.3) expands this to essential physical and mental health support. In keeping with SDGs 3.8 and 16.6, these provisions cultivate a legislative body well-positioned to manage complex policy challenges while maintaining the health, professionalism, and morale of everyone within the parliamentary precinct.

For further information around mental health support, stakeholders should review the [CPA's Mental Health Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliaments](#). This toolkit provides guidance, advice and education on how to protect and promote the mental health and well-being of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff.

### 35. Transparency and Integrity

#### Minimum Benchmarks

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35.1 Members shall maintain high standards of accountability, transparency, responsibility, and propriety in the conduct of all public and parliamentary matters including strict adherence to Codes of Conduct, and interest disclosure rules.

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35.2 The Legislature shall approve and enforce Codes of Conduct for Members and for parliamentary staff, including rules on behaviour, conflicts of interest and the acceptance of gifts.

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35.3 Legislatures shall require Members to periodically, fully, and publicly disclose relevant financial and other personal interests.

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35.4 There shall be mechanisms to prevent, detect, and bring to justice Members and parliamentary staff engaged in corrupt practices.

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35.5 The Legislature shall have a published anti-harassment policy, encompassing clear definitions, preventative actions, reporting mechanisms, and disciplinary measures, to ensure a safe and respectful environment for all Members, staff, and the general public.

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### EXPLANATORY NOTES

#### Purpose and Scope

Ensuring high standards of openness, responsibility, and ethical conduct is vital to upholding public confidence in the Parliament. Section 35 sets out obligations for Members to adhere to codes of conduct, publicly disclose their financial interests, and prevent unethical or corrupt practices. It also mandates anti-harassment policies to safeguard a respectful, inclusive environment for Members, staff, and the public. By clarifying the rules on conflicts of interest, gifts, and harassment reporting, these Benchmarks reinforce the Parliament's role as a model of integrity.



## Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 16.5:** Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms
- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC):** Encourages strong legislative frameworks to combat corruption and promote integrity among public officials
- **OECD Principles for Transparency and Integrity in Lobbying:** Provide guidelines for regulating conflicts of interest and disclosures that may apply to parliamentary contexts

## Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Public Trust and Legitimacy:** When legislators adhere to clear ethical standards (35.2) and publicly disclose financial interests (35.3), citizens gain confidence that decisions are free from hidden agendas or conflicts of interest.
- **Preventing Corruption:** Mechanisms to detect and penalise illicit activities (35.4) reduce the likelihood of corrupt practices taking root, underscoring the Parliament’s commitment to a culture of honesty and accountability.
- **Safe and Respectful Environment:** A published anti-harassment policy (35.5) ensures everyone—Members, staff, and visitors—can engage in parliamentary activities free from intimidation or discrimination.
- **Responsibility and Accountability:** Codes of conduct that specify rules on behaviour, acceptance of gifts, and potential sanctions (35.1, 35.2) promote a shared understanding of ethical norms and consequences for violations.
- **Alignment with Global Norms:** Conforming with UNCAC and other international guidelines elevates the Parliament’s reputation both domestically and internationally, reinforcing it as a beacon of integrity and fairness.

## Examples of Measures to Promote Transparency and Integrity

- **Comprehensive Codes of Conduct:** Detailing expected behaviours, conflict-of-interest guidelines, and receiving gifts thresholds, with explicit reference to potential sanctions for breaches (35.1, 35.2).
- **Mandatory Financial Disclosures:** Requiring Members to declare assets, liabilities, and any corporate positions on a predefined schedule; publishing registers of interests on the parliamentary website for public scrutiny (35.3).
- **Dedicated Ethics Commission:** A permanent or ad hoc body empowered to investigate allegations of corruption (35.4), conduct routine compliance checks, and recommend sanctions where warranted.
- **Anti-Harassment Training:** In line with 35.5, offering workshops for Members and staff to clarify harassment definitions, reporting channels, and the supportive measures available.

## Practical Considerations

- **Consistency of Enforcement:** Enforcement agencies or committees must treat all alleged violations impartially, irrespective of political affiliation or seniority, to sustain public confidence.
- **Coordination with Other Laws:** Existing national legislation on ethics and/or anti-corruption might inform the design of codes of conduct or financial disclosure regimes, preventing overlap or conflicts.
- **Cultural and Political Sensitivities:** In some jurisdictions, gift-giving traditions may be deeply rooted. Balancing cultural norms with rigorous ethical standards requires clear guidelines and well-communicated rules.
- **Privacy vs. Transparency:** Disclosure requirements should protect private details unrelated to possible conflicts of interest while still ensuring the public can detect and assess potential biases.

Section 35: Transparency and Integrity codifies the foundational ethical principles that Legislatures must uphold to maintain legitimacy. Through the Minimum Benchmarks (35.1–35.5), parliaments establish and enforce codes of conduct, financial disclosure requirements, anti-corruption measures, and anti-harassment policies. These robust frameworks align with SDGs 16.5 and 16.6 and fulfil global expectations for honest, open, and respectful governance.

For further information, stakeholders should review the [CPA Standards for Codes of Conduct for MPs and the Parliamentary Workplace](#) and its accompanying [Research Report](#). Likewise, stakeholders may also find it beneficial to review the [CWP Anti-Harassment Policy Guidelines: A Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliaments](#).

## 36. Natural Justice

### Minimum Benchmarks

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36.1 The Legislature shall incorporate principles of natural justice into its Rules and Procedure, and these shall be applied rigorously to all situations where serious allegations are made against named or identifiable persons during the course of proceedings, either in the Chamber or one of its Committees.

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36.2 Members, or others, who are subject to serious charges of contempt of, and offences against, the Legislature shall be accorded due natural justice principles during the whole process of consideration, and any charges are decided on the basis of all properly admissible evidence.

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36.3 Sanctions imposed by the Legislature on Members or other people (for example, fines, or suspensions from attending or participating in further sittings of the Legislature and its Committees) shall be proportionate, fair, and equally applied.

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### Additional Benchmarks

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36.4 The Legislature should establish the position of Ethics Adviser within its parliamentary administration to provide impartial expert advice to the Presiding Officer, Members, and staff on matters relating to natural justice provisions.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Purpose and Scope

Natural justice, also known as procedural fairness, ensures that individuals are treated justly when facing serious charges or allegations in parliamentary contexts. Section 36 codifies the requirement that parliaments incorporate these foundational legal principles, guaranteeing that any accused persons enjoy fair hearings, balanced evidence, and proportionate punishments. By establishing transparent rules and an impartial framework for considering severe charges, these Benchmarks protect both the rights of the accused and the integrity of the legislative institution.

### Relevant SDGs and International Standards

- **SDG 16.3:** Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
- **Commonwealth Latimer House Principles:** Emphasise that legislative processes must respect the rule of law and fundamental rights





## Why These Benchmarks “Matter”

- **Maintaining Legislative Integrity:** Thorough, rule-based procedures for handling allegations reinforce the Parliament’s credibility. Public perception improves when severe charges are handled openly and equitably.
- **Deterring Misuse of Power:** If parliaments can impose substantial sanctions, such as suspensions, transparent and impartial processes protect against partisan attempts to silence or expel dissenting voices.
- **Ensuring Proportionality:** Additional Benchmarks promote the principle that punishments correspond to the gravity of the offense, safeguarding parliamentary discipline without stifling legitimate debate.

## Examples of Measures to Strengthen Natural Justice

- **Formal Investigatory Committees:** Appointing multi-party committees or panels with clear mandates and written procedures to gather evidence, hold hearings, and recommend sanctions.
- **Ethics Advisers:** Under Additional Benchmark 36.4, an Ethics Adviser may offer confidential counsel regarding conflicts of interest or procedural fairness, aiding committees in complex or unprecedented cases.

## Practical Considerations

- **Consistency with Constitutional and Legal Norms:** Parliamentary rules on disciplinary actions must align with national constitutions and relevant court decisions, ensuring no contradiction between legislative and judicial standards.
- **Protecting Minority Voices:** In highly partisan environments, safeguarding the rights of accused Members helps prevent spurious charges aimed at weakening political opponents. Multi-party oversight bodies mitigate such risks.
- **Confidentiality vs. Transparency:** Some proceedings, especially those involving sensitive allegations, may initially require confidentiality. However, final decisions should be made public to sustain accountability.
- **Implementation and Training:** Ensuring all Members and relevant staff are trained on procedural fairness, including understanding the role of the Ethics Adviser (36.4), fosters a respectful, law-abiding parliamentary culture.

Section 36: Natural Justice underscores that a legislature’s disciplinary processes must conform to the highest standards of fairness, proportionality, and transparency. Minimum Benchmarks (36.1–36.3) require due process for all serious allegations, ensuring that any sanctions—like suspensions or fines—are both justified and uniformly applied. The Additional Benchmark (36.4) advocates creating an Ethics Adviser role to maintain consistency and support committees in complex disciplinary cases. These commitments align with SDGs 16.3 and 16.6, reinforcing the rule of law within parliament and enhancing public faith in legislative independence and integrity.

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