

3.3 Promoting Women's Voices and Leadership

Promoting women's voices and leadership is essential to removing constraints to their agency (see Textbox 3). When women have the freedom to exercise their agency, they are able to assert their needs, aspirations, priorities, capacities, and constraints. They make informed choices, transform their choices into desired outcomes, participate in decision-making, and influence policies and programs that affect their lives.

To ensure women's voices are heard, women must be able to be meaningfully involved in leadership, decision-making, and policy creation at all levels. The equal participation of women with men in households and communities, in public life and politics as policymakers and legislators, and in a broad range of influential leadership positions is linked to the economic empowerment for women, gender equality and rights, and broader Sustainable Development Goals. Women's meaningful participation in the political sphere can promote gender balance in the workforce⁸⁷ and could trigger a 12–25% increase in global GDP by 2025.⁸⁸

However, women lack role models and mentors, to inspire and support their political and economic empowerment.⁸⁹ At the start of 2017, women held only 19 ministerial finance/budget portfolios and 19 ministerial economy/development portfolios in 186 countries. In 30 countries, women hold more than 30% of ministerial positions in parliaments.⁹⁰ Women are also under-represented in many leadership categories. A 2014 OECD report noted that women made up only 30% of legislators, senior officials and managers in OECD countries and China. In the private sector, only 24% of senior managers in mid-market businesses globally were women, and fewer than 7% of executive directors were women.⁹¹

Strategies to improve women's voices, leadership, and agency in economic activities require investments in women's political participation at all levels of government and efforts to advance women's leadership within public-sector institutions. Support for civil society groups engaged in gender-equality efforts, particularly local women's groups that promote the rights of women and girls, are also important to increase women's social, economic, and political power. Locally-based associations and groups, including women's associations, are well placed to raise concerns and negotiate new opportunities, such as collective loans, and to serve as interlocutors between communities and government or private sector organizations to achieve greater institutional support for women's economic participation. They can advocate for the adoption of laws that protect the equal rights of all workers, including women to unionize, to strike, and to lobby for the reform or repeal of unjust laws, in the context of national, state and local legislation. The groups can also support women's collective-enterprises and cooperatives by providing training and by supporting their fair integration into supply chains.⁹²

The G7 is committed to promoting policies that enhance women's participation and leadership in all aspects of social, economic and political life⁹³ and is working with governments, intergovernmental agencies and civil society to support and recognize women's organizations such as unions, cooperatives and voluntary associations, in the context of national, state and local legislation.