

Indicator 4.1: Valuing public concerns

About this indicator

This indicator concerns parliament's openness and responsiveness to public concerns, which is key to building trust in the institution. Parliaments are expected to be receptive to concerns raised by the public and to address these issues in a timely and effective manner.

The challenge for parliament and MPs is that people are not a homogeneous block: they have multiple and often conflicting interests and diverse perspectives. Parliament therefore needs to apply nuanced approaches, and to understand and take into account diverse audiences, including both groups that raise their voices and those that often remain silent.

Fast-paced technological and social developments also require all political institutions, including parliament, to constantly evolve, adapt their approaches, acquire the ability to change, and respond to the public's changing needs. This implies a suitably flexible institutional framework and often changing working methods and processes.

This indicator also covers how parliament responds to policy issues that emerge outside of medium- or long-term planning.

This indicator comprises the following dimensions:

- Dimension 4.1.1: Responding to public concerns
- Dimension 4.1.2: Responding to emerging policy issues
- Dimension 4.1.3: Leaving no one behind and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The Indicators for Democratic Parliaments are a multi-partner initiative coordinated by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in partnership with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Directorio Legislativo Foundation, Inter Pares / International IDEA, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD).

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Dimension 4.1.1: Responding to public concerns

This dimension is part of:

- Indicator 4.1: Valuing public concerns
- Target 4: Responsive parliament

About this dimension

This dimension is about the ways in which parliament and MPs listen to and respond to concerns raised by members of the public. The public – whether individually or as groups of citizens – should be able to bring matters of concern to parliament and feel confident that their input will be given appropriate consideration. Being responsive to public concerns is a key element of the representative function.

It is difficult to establish a clear distinction between when a member of the public raises an issue with their MP, and when a member of public raises an issue directly with parliament as an institution or with a parliamentary committee. Part of the role of MPs is to make the connection between issues that are brought directly to them and the parliamentary processes where they can be addressed.

It is important that parliament has a range of mechanisms that the public can use to raise issues of concern. One of the most widely used mechanisms is petitions. Many parliaments have processes for submitting and signing petitions, and committees that receive them and determine what action should be taken. Increasingly, parliament's rules of procedure require certain actions, such as a debate to be held, once the petition has been signed by a certain number of people.

Parliamentary staff play a key role in collecting, organizing and analysing questions and requests received from the public, and in communicating this information to MPs in appropriate formats. MPs themselves have to determine what action should be taken. MPs may, for example, assist citizens in bringing their concern to the relevant part of the administration, or raise the issue in parliament themselves. Members of the public who bring issues to parliament should receive feedback on how that input has been handled. This feedback loop helps to build trust in parliament.

While fully respecting laws concerning data privacy, parliament should consider gathering data on the profile of who is bringing issues to the attention of parliament. Such data can help parliament to understand, for example, whether men and women are using these mechanisms equally, or whether some groups in society are not being heard adequately, and to take appropriate action to make mechanisms available to the whole of society.

See also *Dimension 1.9.1: Interaction with the electorate* and *Indicator 6.1: Parliamentary environment for public participation*.

Based on a global comparative analysis, an aspiring goal for parliaments in the area of "responding to public concerns" is as follows:

Parliament's rules of procedure establish a range of mechanisms for the public to bring issues of concern to the attention of parliament, such as petitions.

The parliamentary administration processes input received from the public in a timely manner and makes it available in appropriate formats for MPs' consideration.

Issues brought to the attention of parliament are given due consideration. The members of the public who raised the issue receive feedback on how their input was handled.

Assessment

This dimension is assessed against several criteria, each of which should be evaluated separately. For each criterion, select one of the six descriptive grades (Non-existent, Rudimentary,

Basic, Good, Very good and Excellent) that best reflects the situation in your parliament, and provide details of the evidence on which this assessment is based.

The evidence for assessment of this dimension could include the following:

- Provisions of parliament's rules of procedure, as well as practices, processes and mechanisms, supporting responsive decision-making
- Evidence of public concerns being raised and responded to by parliament
- Evidence of information collected and analysed by parliamentary staff
- Records of timely and meaningful communication with members of the public

Where relevant, provide additional comments or examples that support the assessment.

Assessment criterion 1: Mechanisms for the public to raise issues

Parliament's rules of procedure establish mechanisms for the public to raise issues of concern with parliament, and set out how issues raised through these mechanisms will be dealt with.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Assessment criterion 2: Processing issues raised by the public

The parliamentary administration processes issues raised by the public in a timely manner and makes information about this public input available to MPs in appropriate formats.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Assessment criterion 3: Feedback to the public

Issues brought to the attention of parliament are given due consideration and the person(s) who raised the issue receive(s) feedback on how it was handled.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Recommendations for change

Use this space to note down recommendations and ideas for strengthening rules and practice in this area.

Dimension 4.1.2: Responding to emerging policy issues

This dimension is part of:

- Indicator 4.1: Valuing public concerns
- Target 4: Responsive parliament

About this dimension

This dimension concerns the manner in which parliament responds to policy issues emerging outside of medium- or long-term planning. These are typically unforeseen issues or developments that can attract massive public attention and become matters of common concern. An emerging policy issue can be a critical event or situation, such as a natural disaster, a threat to democracy or a communicable disease outbreak. It can also be an issue that is less critical but still emerges in an unforeseen way and requires an urgent parliamentary response.

Parliament's procedures and agenda are usually pre-defined and planned well in advance. Yet when new policy issues emerge, parliament's rules of procedure should allow for flexibility for the issue to be taken up within the appropriate parliamentary body.

Parliament, through the plenary, parliamentary committees, political groups and other parliamentary bodies, typically exercises oversight by calling urgent debates or summoning relevant officials, by requesting information, by determining how the executive as a whole, or individual ministries or public bodies, are dealing with the issue, and by determining whether adjustments are needed.

The public needs to be able to see how parliament is acting on the emerging policy issue and to understand the decisions that are being taken.

See also *Dimension 1.3.2: Emergency or crisis procedures*.

Aspiring goal

Based on a global comparative analysis, an aspiring goal for parliaments in the area of "responding to emerging policy issues" is as follows:

Parliament's rules of procedure allow for flexibility when new policy issues emerge, enabling issues to be raised with the appropriate parliamentary body at short notice.

Parliament uses its oversight powers to hold the executive to account for the response to emerging policy issues.

Parliament effectively communicates with the public about the actions taken in response to emerging policy issues.

Assessment

This dimension is assessed against several criteria, each of which should be evaluated separately. For each criterion, select one of the six descriptive grades (Non-existent, Rudimentary, Basic, Good, Very good and Excellent) that best reflects the situation in your parliament, and provide details of the evidence on which this assessment is based.

The evidence for assessment of this dimension could include the following:

- Provisions of parliament's rules of procedure concerning ways in which emerging policy issues can be taken up in parliament
- Examples of parliamentary engagement in responding to emerging policy issues, including meetings held by parliamentary committees, and other parliamentary bodies, with relevant bodies and organizations

Where relevant, provide additional comments or examples that support the assessment.

Assessment criterion 1: Rules of procedure

Parliament's rules of procedure establish mechanisms that allow for emerging policy issues to be addressed in parliament, such as through urgent debates or questions.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Assessment criterion 2: Oversight of the executive's response

Parliament uses its oversight powers to oversee the executive's response to emerging policy issues and holds the executive to account.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Assessment criterion 3: Communication with the public

Parliament communicates effectively with the public about emerging policy issues, including by providing regular updates on actions and decisions taken.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Recommendations for change

Use this space to note down recommendations and ideas for strengthening rules and practice in this area.

Sources and further reading

- Alex Brazier, "[Parliamentary Response to Crisis: Committees and Coronavirus](#)", Global Partners Governance (GPG) (2020).

Dimension 4.1.3: Leaving no one behind and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

This dimension is part of:

- Indicator 4.1: Valuing public concerns
- Target 4: Responsive parliament

About this dimension

This dimension concerns parliament's role in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By engaging with the SDGs, parliaments help to respond to the needs of their country's citizens and of the planet as a whole.

This ground-breaking global commitment to end poverty and set the world on a sustainable path to inclusive development was endorsed by government leaders at a United Nations summit in September 2015. A set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 actionable targets lie at the core of this ambitious agenda, along with the key idea of "leaving no one behind". United Nations General Assembly resolution 77/159 recognizes the essential role of parliaments in bringing the SDGs to life through their law-making, budgeting and oversight powers.

Some parliaments have established dedicated mechanisms and structures, such as a sustainable development committee or subcommittee and/or a dedicated unit of the parliamentary secretariat, to support SDG mainstreaming across parliamentary work. Such bodies can act as a focal point for the type of partnership-building across society that is necessary to implement the SDGs, including with civil society, the media, the private sector, independent oversight bodies and academia.

Parliaments also engage with the SDGs by participating in the preparation of voluntary national reviews, a UN process through which countries assess and present progress towards the attainment of the SDGs.

Aspiring goal

Based on a global comparative analysis, an aspiring goal for parliaments in the area of "leaving no one behind and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" is as follows:

Parliament debates and scrutinizes national development plans and government reports to ensure alignment with, and localization of, the SDGs.

Parliament incorporates an SDG lens into its legislative work and at all stages of the budget cycle. Mechanisms exist to oversee SDG progress and support SDG mainstreaming in parliament.

Parliament is represented in national SDG coordination mechanisms and participates in the preparation of, and follow-up to, the voluntary national reviews.

Assessment

This dimension is assessed against several criteria, each of which should be evaluated separately. For each criterion, select one of the six descriptive grades (Non-existent, Rudimentary, Basic, Good, Very good and Excellent) that best reflects the situation in your parliament, and provide details of the evidence on which this assessment is based.

The evidence for assessment of this dimension could include the following:

- Resolutions or motions in Hansard or other parliamentary records indicating actions related to the attainment of the SDGs
- Sections of parliament's strategic plan relating to the SDGs, or a parliamentary action plan on the SDGs

- Explanatory memorandums, introductory statements and/or impact assessments relating to proposals for laws and enacted legislation, outlining how they address the SDGs
- Committee reports incorporating evidence from a range of bodies and organizations, including those representing hard-to-reach groups, on the attainment of the SDGs
- Training or capacity-building materials for MPs on the SDGs
- Briefings and analysis on the SDGs from the parliamentary library

Where relevant, provide additional comments or examples that support the assessment.

Assessment criterion 1: Oversight of executive action

Parliament debates and scrutinizes national development plans and government reports to ensure alignment with, and localization of, the SDGs.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Assessment criterion 2: Mainstreaming the SDGs in parliament

Mechanisms exist to support SDG mainstreaming in parliament. Parliamentary committees assess policy and legislation in their respective area of responsibility against SDG objectives.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Assessment criterion 3: Participation in national SDG coordination mechanisms

Parliament participates in national SDG coordination mechanisms and is involved in the preparation of, and follow-up to, national reports on SDG progress to international bodies.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Recommendations for change

Use this space to note down recommendations and ideas for strengthening rules and practice in this area.

Sources and further reading

- Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Islamic Development Bank (IDB), [*Parliament's Role in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals; A Parliamentary Handbook*](#) (2017).
- Inter-Parliamentary Union, [*Parliaments and the Sustainable Development Goals: A self-assessment toolkit*](#) (2016).
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), [*Compendium of National Institutional Arrangements for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*](#) (2019).
- United Nations General Assembly resolution 77/159, "[Enhancing the role of parliaments in accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals](#)" (2022).