

Workshop 1. Launch of The Fortnight: Canada-Tunisia Municipal Exchanges

THE FORTNIGHT
Tunisia-Canada
Municipal Exchanges
May 17-28, 2021



"The COVID-19 crisis has brought to light additional challenges that women from all walks of life face... That is why it is important that women have a role at the municipal level to promote policies that respond to these challenges."

- Patrice Cousineau, Ambassador of Canada to the Republic of Tunisia

Objectives

The Fortnight: Tunisia-Canada Municipal Exchanges is a series of seven virtual workshops organized through the Inclusive Municipal Leadership Program (IMLP) to facilitate peer learning and foster increased collaboration in a time of restricted in-person meetings.

The objective of the Launch of The Fortnight is to strengthen Tunisian-Canadian municipal cooperation and to discuss the municipal systems of the two countries and their associated challenges.

Opening Remarks

Several important messages around inclusion, cooperation, and local governance emerged from the opening presentations that set the stage for The Fortnight.

- ⇒ In Tunisia, the 2018 municipal elections resulted in 47% of municipal seats being held by women. This increase is not due to chance; it is thanks to the adoption of an electoral law that guarantees horizontal and vertical gender parity. This is a very inspiring result, but it masks the difficulties experienced by female elected officials, such as the lack of access to positions with responsibility.
- ⇒ The civic engagement of women is the key to an egalitarian society.
- ⇒ If we want elected women to have real influence, they must not be relegated to secondary files; they must have access to the levers of power.

Launch of The Fortnight

- ⇒ The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a disproportionate burden on women.
- ⇒ Municipalities have a key role to play in promoting gender parity and access to inclusive public spaces. Women experience the city in a different way than men.
- ⇒ Local development is the basis for consolidating the democratic edifice. The role of women and their empowerment are major contributors to economic and social development.
- ⇒ The Inclusive Municipal Leadership Program (IMLP) is a flagship program for the Canadian Embassy. The IMLP has already produced concrete results in terms of inclusion. The Network of Elected Women created through the program with national and international partners is an important support for Tunisian elected women.
- ⇒ The Chief Executive Officer of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) affirms that having support and solidarity from networks of women leaders makes all the difference in enabling women to succeed.

Additional Resources

[Workshop Recording](#)

Canada

[Presentation on the Canadian municipal system \(French\)](#)



Tunisia

[Presentation on the Tunisian municipal system \(French\)](#)



Municipal Systems

The municipal systems in the two countries are quite different. The difference is especially marked in relation to decentralization. In Canada, the system is highly decentralized. By contrast, the process of decentralization in Tunisia is more recent. That said, the two countries share common challenges.

Following the revolution in 2011, Tunisia began a decentralization process. In 2014, the new constitution was instituted. In 2018, the first democratic local elections were carried out under the new decentralized system.

Differences

- ⇒ **Areas of responsibility:** In Canada, more power and resources are given to municipalities. In Tunisia, the areas of responsibility are more limited. Decentralization is new, so the challenge is to include all the new principles and codes (e.g., transparency, parity) in municipal operations and to ensure they are applied.
- ⇒ **Parity law:** In Tunisia, there is a parity law. Each municipality also has a Municipal Equality Commission. In Canada, there are very few political parties at the local level, so there is no law requiring gender parity among candidates.

Common Challenges

- ⇒ **Limited powers:** In Canada, municipalities are limited by the structure and powers given to them by the provinces through the Municipalities Act. In Tunisia, even though municipalities are no longer under the direction of the State and Governorates, in practice local authorities have difficulty asserting power, especially in times of crisis.
- ⇒ **Limited resources:** Municipalities face many challenges and responsibilities, but the financial resources allocated or generated are not sufficient.
- ⇒ **Full participation of women:** Despite the progress made, the number of women mayors is low in both countries. Even once elected, women are not assigned important mandates that contribute to development. It is difficult to retain women in politics, due to factors like intimidation and violence, and the balance between family and political life.