

# Workshop 2. A Tea in the Medina: The Joys and Challenges of Women Elected Officials

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



## Objectives

This session allowed women elected officials from different backgrounds to exchange experiences and to share the strategies and the alliances to defend their values and have influence.

## Common challenges for women elected officials

In Tunisia, the new electoral law on parity has resulted in 47% of municipal seats being held by women. In Canada, without a parity law, women currently hold 31% of municipal council positions. The contexts are different, but the challenges are similar.

- ⇒ The reality of the job is different from what they had imagined.
- ⇒ In many cases, this is the first time a woman has been elected to the position or she is the only woman on council.

- ⇒ The opinions expressed by elected women tend to be less valued. Being a woman on council is not the same thing as being a man.
- ⇒ Women are not given roles and files according to their skills; they are given more traditionally female roles.
- ⇒ Women face more criticism from the public and are subject to more harassment.
- ⇒ Elected women experience ups and downs, which often result in demotivation or depression.
- ⇒ The mental load of women and the stress that comes with it are higher, as they must manage both the family and political life.
- ⇒ Once elected, they become a public figure without a clear division between political and private life.
- ⇒ The challenges are greater and more complex in big cities, but in smaller municipalities there are more administrative challenges.

# Women Elected Officials

## Strategies and Alliances

The participants learned about the Municipal Sector Framework for Achieving Gender Parity in Local Government developed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities as part of the Towards Parity in Municipal Politics program. They were polled to identify the strategies that would be most relevant in their context. The two strategies that came out on top were **mentorship and encouragement** and **access to tools, training, and manuals**.

1. **Support from networks of women elected officials.** The network is a space for exchange between women elected officials. The networks can organize committees as needed, such as: communication, training, advocacy, and violence prevention.
2. **Carry out a campaign.** Networks can help to carry out awareness-raising campaigns to encourage women to run for politics. They can also organize campaigns to combat violence against women in politics, by mobilizing men as well.
3. **Childcare:** Ensure that childcare services are available or reimburse childcare costs so that women can participate fully.
4. **Mentorship:** Providing mentoring services to help women cope with stress and recognize their abilities is a way to contribute to the retention of women in politics.

Strategies to increase the participation of women in politics



5. **Action plan:** If the ideal role is not available, identify other roles or projects where you can have an impact. Make an action plan outlining what you want to achieve.
6. **Presentation of issues:** Present an issue as a community problem, not as a woman's problem or a man's problem. Show that inclusive public spaces benefit everyone.
7. **Encourage other women to run:** Invite women to activities, so that they understand the realities of local politics. Reach out to women and foster mentorship. Prepare them to become a public figure and to devote a lot of time to it.

## Additional Resources



[Promotional video of Nabeul, Tunisia](#)

[Municipal Sector Framework for Achieving Gender Parity in Local Government , FCM](#)

[Overcoming Online Harrassment, Municipal World](#)