

The Evolution of Women's Involvement in Policy-Making throughout the years

From ancient years women were excluded from political decision-making processes. In ancient civilizations, governance was mostly patriarchal, with women relegated to domestic roles. Even in early democracies like ancient Athens, participation in politics was restricted to men, leaving women voiceless in policy-making.

The tide began to shift in the 19th century with the emergence of women's movements. Women demanded the right to vote and influence the policies that affected their lives. By the early 20th century, countries like New Zealand (1893), Australia (1902), and Finland (1906) granted women the right to vote, setting the stage for broader political participation.

Women's Role in Policy During World Wars

The world wars of the 20th century further highlighted women's potential in governance. With men conscripted into military service, women took on roles traditionally reserved for men, including administrative and leadership positions. This period challenged traditional gender roles and demonstrated women's capability in managing societal structures during crises.

In the aftermath of World War II, the establishment of international organizations like the United Nations paved the way for a more inclusive approach to policy-making. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 emphasized equality and set the groundwork for women's participation in global governance.

Second-Wave Feminism and Policy Representation

The second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s brought renewed focus to women's rights, particularly in employment, education, and reproductive rights. This era saw women advocating for greater representation in political institutions and policy-making processes.

During this period, countries began implementing strategies and legislations to ensure women's representation in political bodies. For instance, Norway introduced a gender quota system in the 1980s, mandating a minimum percentage of women in political parties and corporate boards. These measures were instrumental in breaking systemic barriers and normalizing women's participation in governance.

The Rise of Women Leaders

The late 20th and early 21st centuries witnessed a significant increase in the number of women assuming leadership roles in politics. Figures like Margaret Thatcher, the first female Prime Minister of the UK (1979), and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first elected female head of state in Africa (Liberia, 2006), exemplified women's growing influence in shaping national and international policies.

Organizations like UN Women, established in 2010, have further championed women's rights in policy-making. Initiatives such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015) have underscored the importance of gender equality in governance.

Migrant Women and Intersectionality in Policy

In recent years, the focus has expanded to include the unique challenges faced by migrant women and other marginalized groups. The concept of intersectionality highlights how overlapping identities, such as gender, race, and immigration status, create distinct experiences of discrimination and privilege.

Programs like the European Consultative Body for Migrant Girls Civic Engagement aim to amplify the voices of young women from migration backgrounds. By fostering their involvement in policy-making, these initiatives address systemic inequalities and promote inclusive governance. The participation of migrant women in shaping women's policies not only enhances diversity but also ensures that policies reflect the needs of all women.

Looking Ahead: Toward Gender-Equal Governance

The journey toward equal representation in policy-making is ongoing. While significant progress has been made, challenges persist, including gender-based violence, pay gaps, and underrepresentation in leadership roles. Efforts to address these issues require collective action and sustained advocacy. VOC project is working towards this goal, to ensure equal representation and for all voices to be heard through its activities.