

Glossary of terms

A. Local government organization

- **Local Government:** one of the sub-national spheres of government and a result of decentralization. A process of transferring *political, fiscal, and administrative powers* from the central government to sub-national units of government distributed across the territory of a country to regulate and/or run certain government functions or public services on their own. The definition of local government follows the 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA) distinction between central, state, and local government (para 4.129). Local government consists of local government units, defined in the SNA as “institutional units whose fiscal, legislative and executive authority extends over the smallest geographical areas distinguished for administrative and political purposes” (para 4.145). What constitutes local government of a given country, including its organization by tiers (levels), is defined by that country’s national legal framework, including national constitutions and local government acts or equivalent legislation.
- **Deliberative bodies of local government:** formal entities with decision-making power, including the ability to issue by-laws, on a range of local aspects of public affairs. Examples of deliberative bodies are local councils or assemblies. They are composed of a prescribed number of members as per national or state legislation, usually elected by universal suffrage.
- **Executive bodies of local government:** formal entities tasked with preparing and executing decisions made by the deliberative bodies. They consist of an executive committee or a mayor and may be, in most cases, elected or appointed.
- **Elected positions/seats in local government:** refer to positions in either deliberative or executive bodies that are filled through a system in which voters cast ballots for a person, multiple persons, or a political party/coalition they desire to see elected. The category of elected positions includes both elected persons who competed for openly contested seats and persons selected through legislated electoral quotas such as candidate quotas or reserved seats. Elected positions are most common for deliberative bodies of local government. Appointed positions are typically nominated by government officials from higher-ranking tiers of government. and they are more frequent among certain positions, such as the heads of the executive body, representatives of specific groups (e.g., disadvantaged groups, youth); and, temporary committees/delegations/caretakers appointed by government officials when a local government body has been dissolved.

B. Electoral systems and quotas

- **Electoral system:** rules on the number of seats to be elected per electoral district (single- or multi-member districts), ballot structure (how the candidates appear on the ballot and how voters can express their choice across candidates), and electoral formula (how the seats are allocated based on the number of votes obtained). In *plurality or majority systems*, voters choose individual candidates, most often in single-member districts, and the winner is the candidate who received the most votes in a single round (*first-past-the post*) or the majority of votes in the first or more rounds of elections (*two-round or run-off*). Other variations of this system include *alternative voting* in single-member districts, in which voters choose a first preference and a second (alternative) preference, and the winner is the candidate who received a majority of first-preferences, or, if not obtained, a majority of first and second preferences; and *block vote* in multi-member districts, in which voters can express as many preferences as the number of district members to be selected, and the winners are the candidates with most votes received. *Proportional representation systems* are used in multi-members districts and the seat

allocation is roughly proportionate to the votes won. In this type of electoral system, the voters may express their preferences for a party list (*list system*, which may be based either on open or closed list), a party list in combination with plurality/majority methods (*mixed member proportional*), or rank-order a small number of individual candidates across party lists towards surpassing a calculate quota/threshold of preference votes and re-allocation on remaining of the votes within each party (*single transferable vote*). *Semi-proportional or mixed systems* may be *parallel*, combining a proportional representation system (in multiple-member districts) and plurality/majority system (in single-member districts), or *single non-transferable vote*, where voters can choose one candidate only in multi-member districts, and winners are the candidates with most votes obtained.

- **Temporary Special Measures (TSMs)**: originally described as measures of “accelerating the de facto equality between men and women” (article 4 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women). Their purpose is to accelerate the improvement of the position of women to achieve their *de facto* or substantive equality with men, and to effect the structural, social and cultural changes necessary to correct past and current forms and effects of discrimination against women, as well as to provide them with compensation. These measures are of a temporary nature.
- **Legislated gender quotas**: a type of Temporary Special Measures, provided for in the legal framework of a country, including constitutions, electoral laws, parity laws or additional legislation, which sets a minimum representation of women or, most typically, a minimum of each gender/sex, to be included in elected bodies that may include local government level. By comparison, voluntary party quotas, or simply party quotas, may also prescribe the nomination of a certain minimum of women candidates or a minimum-maximum of both genders/sex by parties themselves.
- **Legislated candidate quotas**: electoral quotas that regulate the gender/sex composition of the candidate lists by requiring a minimum proportion or number of women (or each gender/sex) to be included in a candidate list. Candidate quotas do not assure the election of a specific number or share of women. In some countries, candidate quotas are combined with ranking/ placement rules. These rules establish a pattern of distribution of candidates of each gender/sex throughout candidate lists or winning candidates. Thus, they prevent quota rules from becoming merely symbolic, such as in cases where only a few women get elected because political parties have placed most of the female candidates at the bottom of the lists or in unwinnable constituencies. Examples of ranking/ placement rules include for example alternating male and female candidates; two out of five consecutive candidates must be of another gender/sex.
- **Reserved seats**: legislated electoral quotas that allocate a minimum proportion or number of seats for women (or other underrepresented groups), thus guaranteeing a specific minimum result in terms of gender (or other groups) representation.

Additional resources on key terms and definitions on local government organization, electoral systems and quotas:

- Metadata of SDG indicator 5.5.1b
- Handbook on Governance Statistics, Praia Group on Governance Statistics, 2020
- General recommendation No. 25 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on temporary special measures, CEDAW Committee, 2004
- Atlas of electoral gender quotas, International IDEA, 2014
- Electoral system design handbook, International IDEA, 2002
- Dahlerup, Drude, Temporary Special Measures, Including Gender Quotas - types, usage, and effect, CSW 65 Expert Group Meeting, 2020