the contribution of women is critical both to the long-term success of peace processes and to post-conflict stability. Women in national politics Promoting the interests of children and women Research on the priorities of women parliamentarians comes mostly from industrialized countries, where there has been greater scrutiny of legislative behaviour than in developing countries. Case studies examining lawmakers’ patterns of bill sponsorship and legislative outcomes across a range of industrialized countries confirm a strong commitment by women legislators to issues related to children, women and families. This commitment translates into both active sponsorship of legislation in these areas and to ensuring that the bills become law. A number of studies have expanded this area of enquiry to developing countries, with similar findings.4 It would be a mistake to assume on the basis of these results that every woman legislator actively advocates on behalf of women and children; some certainly do not. What the following studies indicate, however, is that many of the issues of particular relevance and importance to women and children might not reach parliamentary agendas without the strong backing of women legislators. A pioneering study of women legislators in Latin America found that in the 1993–1994 parliament, women deputies in Argentina were 9.5 per cent more likely to sponsor children and family bills than their male counterparts.5 Furthermore, despite representing only 14 per cent of deputies, Argentina’s women parliamentarians introduced fewer than 78 per cent of the bills related to women’s rights.6 Recent evidence suggests that this pattern of behaviour held true over the subsequent decade. In 1999, women legislators in Argentina played a critical role in ensuring the passage of a law that modified the country’s penal code to explicitly define sexual crimes.7 Other Latin American countries display similar tendencies. In 1999, women deputies in Costa Rica initiated and helped pass the Law against Sexual Exploitation of Minors, together with reforms of the national penal code that toughened penalties for those convicted of sexual assault against children and the disabled. In 2003, women senators in Colombia helped promote groundbreaking equal opportunity legislation. The laws carry wide-ranging provisions to promote and guarantee the rights of girls and women, remove obstacles to the exercise of their rights, and incorporate gender equitable policies at all levels of the State.8 This pattern of advocacy by women legislators on behalf of women and children is also found in industrialized countries. A recent examination of New Zealand’s parliamentary debates on childcare and parental leave over a 25-year period (1975–1999) revealed similar tendencies on the part of women legislators (see Figure 4.1, page 71).9 In the United Kingdom, a forthcoming analysis of more than 3 million words of text from the plenary debates of the National Assembly of Wales also finds important differences between the willingness of female and male legislators to engage in debate about childcare.10 Parliamentary advocacy on behalf of children and families can also follow parallel and ideological lines. Countries where cross-party alliances of women parliamentarians have successfully advanced the cause of women and children include Egypt, France, the Netherlands, South Africa, Sweden, the Russian Federation and Rwanda.11 In the case of the Russian Federation, an examination of the role of women legislators in the 1993–1999 Duma shows that they were able to set aside ideological and party differences to promote legislation benefiting children and families. The proposed measures favoured childcare and child support; benefits to citizens with children; pregnancy benefits and leave; reduced taxes for families with many children; penalties for domestic violence; and equal rights for men and women with families.12 Initiatives to promote children’s rights often accompany efforts to advance the rights of women. One such example occurred in Rwanda, where in 1999 women parliamentarians played a critical role in the passage of a law strengthening women’s rights. The new legislation established women’s right to inherit land for the first time. In the wake of the Rwandan genocide, which destroyed and scattered families, the exclusion of women from land ownership became a critical issue. In addition to being a violation of their rights, not allowing women to own land had a negative impact on such issues as food production and security, the environment, settlement patterns and the livelihood of families and children left behind. Women legislators in Rwanda also actively advocated for increased spending on health and education, and for special support for children with disabilities. In 2006, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, a cross-party caucus formed in 2003, worked on and supported a bill to combat gender-based violence. The proposed legislation will define gender-based violence and address crimes committed during the genocide as well as ongoing violations.13 This activism on the part of women legislators in Rwanda is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a trend that has been apparent in other countries in the region for several years. In South Africa, women parliamentarians provided significant support for the 1998 Domestic Violence Act. The act makes specific references to children, defines the different forms of domestic violence and explains how children can get a protection order against their abusers.14 In neighbouring Namibia, women lawmakers supported groundbreaking legislation dealing with domestic and sexual violence, such as the Combating of Rape Act of 2000, which provides protection against rape to young girls and boys, and the Domestic Violence Act of 2003.15 Changing the face of politics Women in parliament are not only having an impact on legislation. Their influence extends beyond their immediate actions and is encour-