

Statistical brief: gender balance in politics 2021

The composition of political assemblies and executives at all territorial levels too often fails to reflect the gender diversity of the populations they represent, with women significantly

underrepresented in many cases. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) regularly monitors this situation in the European Union (EU) and its 27 Member States (EU-27).

Women well-represented in politics at EU level

In November 2021, the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) comprised 39.1 % women and 60.9 % men. In 10 Member States, however, at least two thirds of the MEPs were men, with highs of 84.8 % in Romania and 100 % in Cyprus.

The current European Commission demonstrates full gender parity, allowing for the odd number of members (13 women,

14 men). In December 2019, Ursula Von der Leyen was elected the first woman President of the Commission.

Roberta Metsola became President of the European Parliament in January 2022 and is the third woman to have been elected as leader of this key European institution. Note, however, that this change is not taken into account in EIGE's latest data, which refer to November 2021.

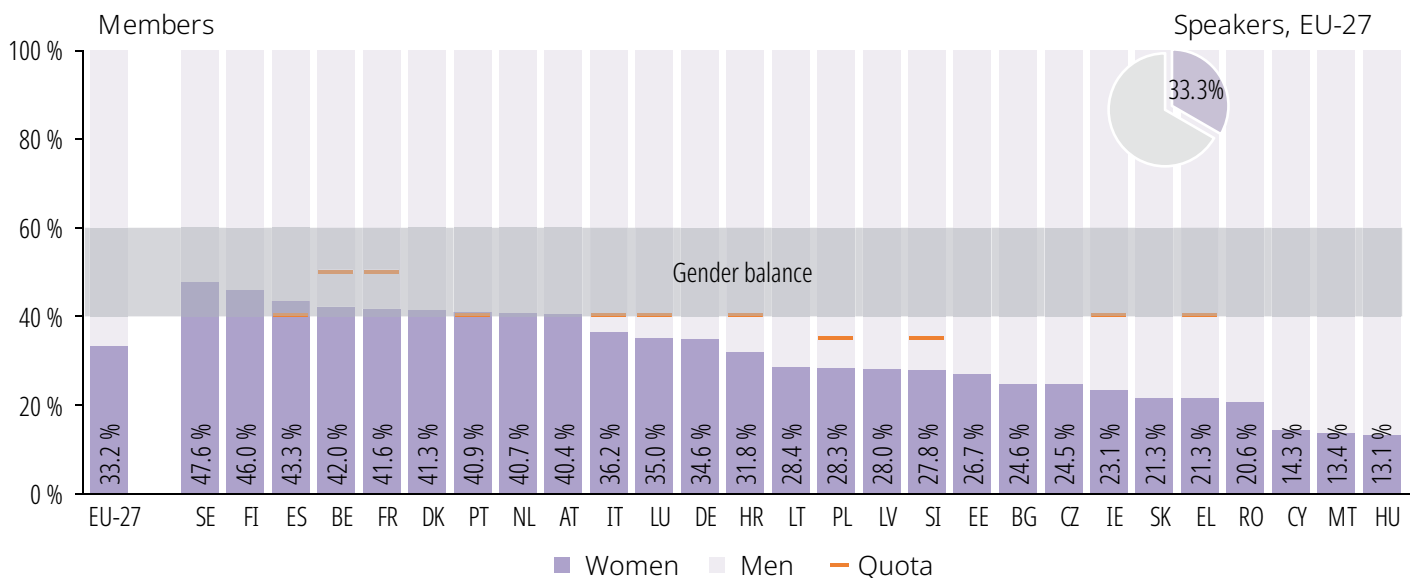
Women account for one third of national parliament members and speakers

In November 2021, the combined members of the single/lower houses of national parliaments in the Member States comprised 66.8 % men and 33.2 % women. Parliaments in Sweden, Finland, Spain, Belgium, France, Denmark, Portugal, Netherlands, and Austria have at least 40 % of each gender. In Cy-

prus, Malta, and Hungary, however, women account for 1 in 7 members, at best (Figure 1).

A third (9 of 27) ⁽¹⁾ of these parliaments were led by a woman, with the parliament in Cyprus appointing its first woman speaker in May 2021.

Figure 1. Share of women members and speakers in single/lower houses of national parliaments (% , EU-27, November 2021)



Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database: national parliaments.

NB: Quotas: BE and FR (50 %); IE, EL, ES, HR, IT and PT (40 %); PL and SI (35 %). LU 40 % to be implemented in next election (expected in 2023).

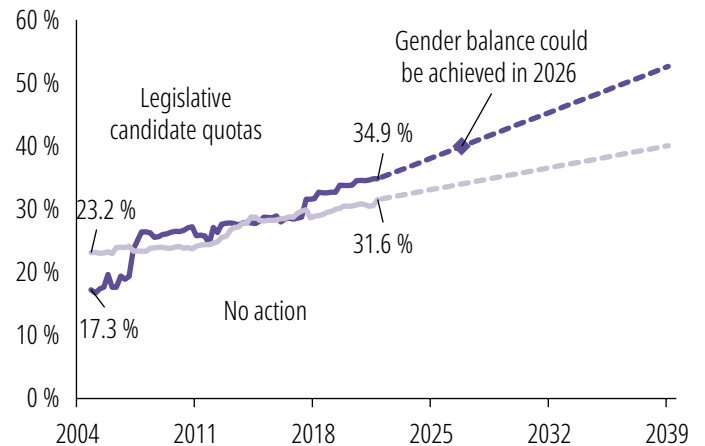
(¹) BE, BG, ES, CY, LV, LT, NL, PL and FI.

Legislative action generally stimulates progress

Over the last 20 years, a number of countries have taken steps to improve the gender balance (at least 40 % of each gender) in their parliaments. The application of legislative quotas aims to ensure a minimum proportion of each gender among candidates. However, without additional rules that ensure equal visibility of women and men candidates within the relevant electoral system (e.g. zippered lists), quotas alone may not be sufficient to translate compliant candidate lists into electoral results. Legislative quotas are in place in 11 Member States ⁽²⁾. To date, Portugal and Spain are the only Member States in which the proportion of elected women members has matched (or exceeded) the quota target (40.9 % and 43.3 %, respectively).

The evidence suggests that the application of legislative quotas has had a positive impact. Since 2004 (the first year with complete data ⁽³⁾), the proportion of women members of parliament in countries with legislative candidate quotas doubled, from 17.3 % to 34.9 %, while countries without quotas started from a higher base (23.2 %) but ended lower (31.6 %) (Figure 2) ⁽⁴⁾. If both groups continue at their respective rates of change, countries with legislated quotas will achieve gender balance in 5 years (2026), while the 'no action' group will take closer to two decades (2038).

Figure 2. Share of women in single/lower houses of national parliaments, by type of action (% , EU-27, 2004–2039)



Source: Calculations based on data from EIGE Gender Statistics Database: national parliaments.

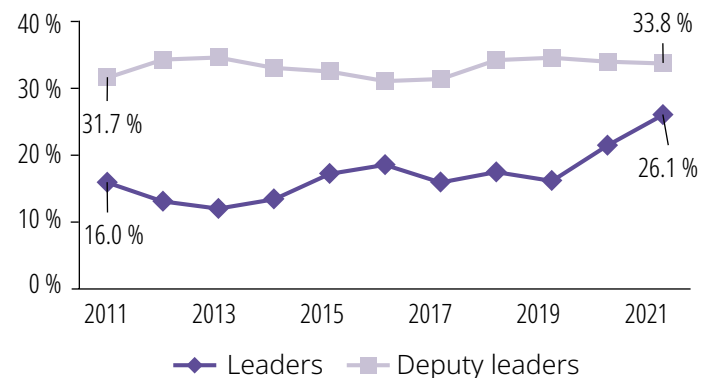
Top positions in major political parties across the EU primarily occupied by men

Political parties are the gatekeepers of gender balance in parliaments, setting party policy and selecting candidates for election. Although many political parties have adopted voluntary gender quotas to promote gender equality in candidate selection, their internal power structures often fail to represent women adequately.

Across the EU, in May 2021, women accounted for only 1 in 4 (26.1 %) leaders of major political parties ⁽⁵⁾ and 1 in 3 deputy leaders (33.8 %, Figure 3). Although low, this figure for party leaders is an all-time high and represents an improvement of 10.1 percentage points (pp) compared to 2011 (16.0 % women). The share of women in deputy leader positions has hardly changed over the same period, however.

In Czechia and Malta, none of the major political parties covered by the EIGE sample has had a woman leader since data was first collected in 2011.

Figure 3. Share of women leaders and deputy leaders of major political parties (% , EU-27, 2011–2021)



Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database: major political parties.

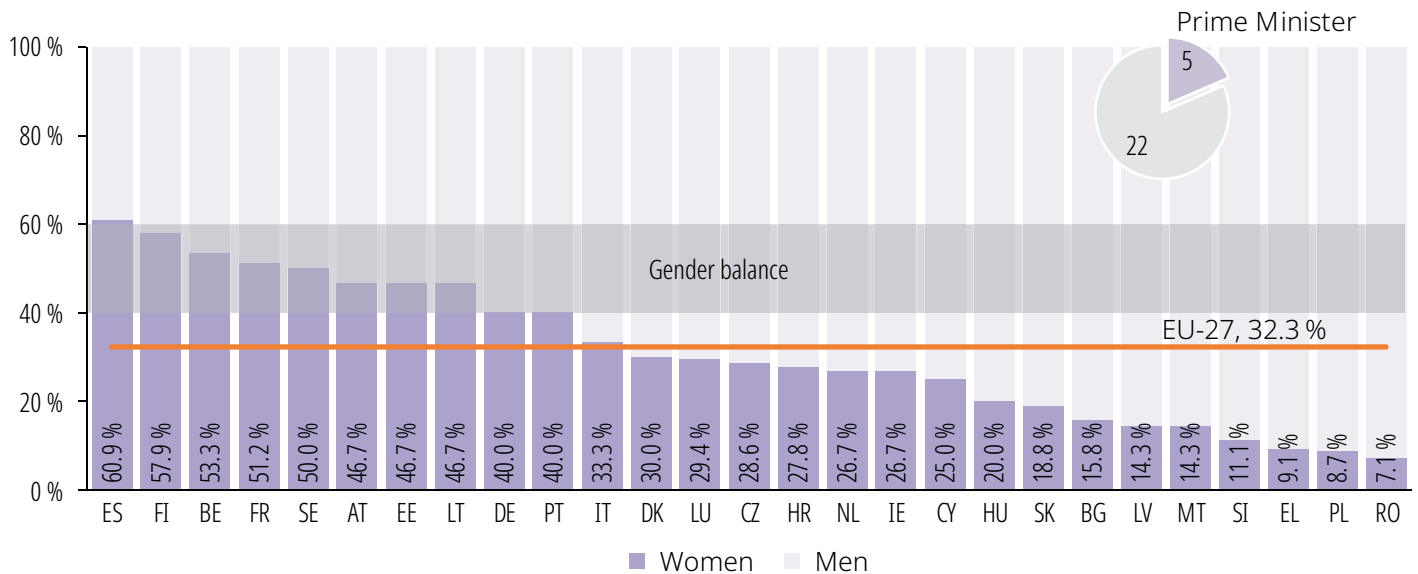
⁽²⁾ FR: 50 % (2000); BE: 50 % (2002); PT: 33 % (2006); SI: 35 % (2006); ES: 40 % (2007); EL: 33 % (2008); HR: 40 % (2008); PL: 35 % (2011); IE: 30 % (2012); IT: 40 % (2017). LU: 40 % introduced in 2016 to be fully implemented in expected 2023 election.
⁽³⁾ Excluding HR, included from 2007.
⁽⁴⁾ LU included in the 'no action' group.
⁽⁵⁾ Major political parties are those with at least 5 % of seats in parliament. Data collected in May 2021 covered 152 major political parties across the EU-27.

Men account for more than two thirds of government ministers

In November 2021, 22 of the EU-27 had a male leader, the exceptions being Finland, Lithuania, Germany, Denmark and Estonia (which elected its first woman prime minister in January 2021) ⁽⁶⁾. Men also accounted for more than two thirds of senior ministers (i.e. those with a seat in the cabinet) (67.7 % men,

32.3 % women). Governments were gender balanced in Spain, Finland, Belgium, France, Sweden, Austria, Estonia, Lithuania, Germany and Portugal, but remained predominantly male in Greece (9.1 % women), Poland (8.7 %) and Romania (7.1 %) (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Share of women in national governments (senior ministers and prime ministers, %, EU-27, November 2021)



Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database: national governments – ministers and prime ministers.

Gender imbalances in political representation persist at lower levels

Across the EU, women account for just over one third of the members of both regional ⁽⁷⁾ and local/municipal assemblies, at 34.6 % and 34.4 %, respectively (Figure 4). The situation at local level is heavily influenced by France, which accounts for over 40 % of the councillors recorded, with women accounting for only 28.0 % of councillors across the other 26 Member States.

France, Sweden, Spain and Finland have gender-balanced representation in both regional and local/municipal assemblies, with Belgium close behind (42.8 % women at regional level, 38.6 % local). In contrast, women account for 20 % or fewer members at both regional and local level in Greece and Romania.

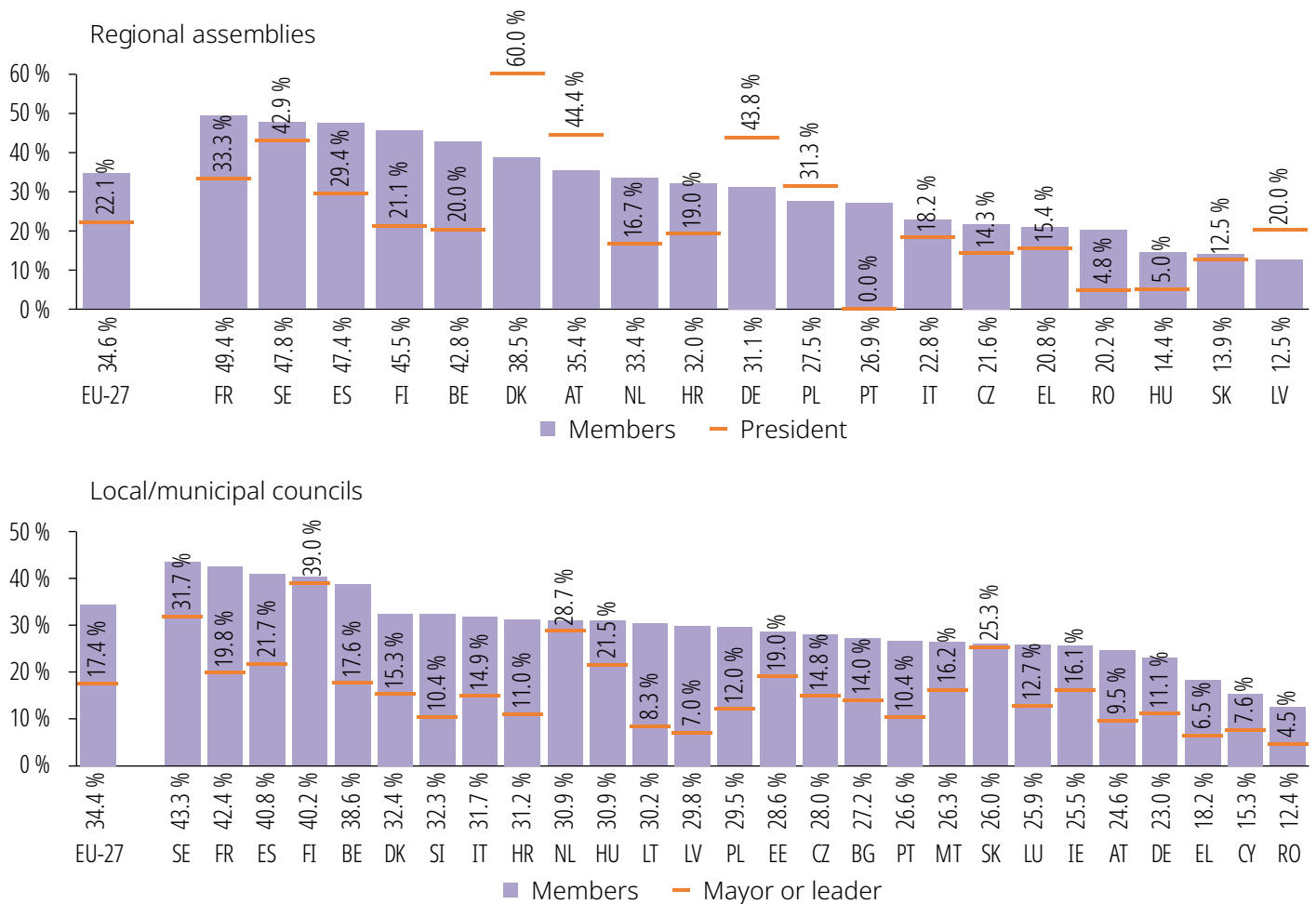
Across the EU, women lead around 1 in 5 assemblies at regional (22.1 %) and local/municipal (17.4 %) levels. In many cases, however, the number of women leaders is 1 in 10 or fewer: Portugal and Romania (both regional and local); Greece, Latvia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Austria and Slovenia (local); and Hungary (regional) ⁽⁸⁾. The data used in Figure 4 was collected in May 2021, but it is worth noting that the mayors elected in October 2021 in the regional capitals of Italy were exclusively men.

⁽⁶⁾ Sweden elected its first woman prime minister in November 2021 (appointed and resigned on 24 November, then returned to office on 30 November). The newly appointed 23-member cabinet also has gender parity (12 women, 11 men). Both the prime minister and the cabinet were appointed after data collection closed (18 November) and are not included in the November update.

⁽⁷⁾ EIGE data covers the elected assemblies of regions endowed with powers of self-government and acting between the central government and local authorities (although not necessarily within any formal hierarchy). The following countries do not have any regions conforming to this definition: BG, EE, IE, CY, LT, LU, MT, SI.

⁽⁸⁾ <https://dait.interno.gov.it/documenti/dossier-amministrative-ottobre2021.pdf>

Figure 5. Share of women in regional assemblies and local/municipal councils (% , EU-27, 2021)



Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database: regional assemblies and local/municipal councils.

NB: Countries sorted by descending share of women members.

All data based on data by country published in the EIGE Gender Statistics Database and accessible [here](#). Comprehensive information about the basis for the sample and data specifications can be found on the metadata tab of each indicator (e.g. [here](#)).

European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policymakers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe.

© European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.



European Institute for Gender Equality
Gedimino pr. 16
LT-01103 Vilnius
LITHUANIA

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

Contact details

<http://eige.europa.eu/>
[facebook.com/eige.europa.eu](https://www.facebook.com/eige.europa.eu)
twitter.com/eurogender
[youtube.com/user/eurogender](https://www.youtube.com/user/eurogender)
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/eige>
eige.sec@eige.europa.eu
 +370 52157444
<https://eurogender.eige.europa.eu/>



Publications Office
of the European Union