

The under-representation of women in politics

Across Europe, women represent only 28 % of members of national parliaments (2014). However, there are considerable country differences: while women in Sweden, Finland and Spain make up around 40 % of national parliamentarians, their representation is only 15 % or lower in the national parliaments of Ireland, Romania, Cyprus, Malta and Hungary.



Source: European Commission, DG JUST.
Database on women and men in decision-making

Political tools and advocacy

To address gender balance in politics, countries have introduced a range of political tools, such as gender quotas and dedicated gender equality committees. Civil society's continued advocacy for women's equal participation is also important in promoting gender equality in political decision-making.

Gender quotas (mandatory or voluntary) aim to create gender balance in politics. They principally concern the introduction of targets for gender balance in candidate selection and, in some cases, ensure equal representation of the numbers of elected women and men.

In BE, IE, EL, ES, FR, HR, IT, PL, PT and SI, legislation for gender quotas has been introduced (at national or regional level) for the selection of candidates on political party lists. Where already implemented, this is beginning to have an impact on the improvement of women's political representation. A large number of political parties have also introduced voluntary quotas to enhance the representation of women in their political lists.

Some countries have established formal or informal **gender equality committees** within political assemblies and political parties with the aim to promote women's empowerment, increase women's representation in politics and monitor laws and policies on gender equality.

Early front runners include BE, DE, FR, AT, FI, SE and NO, where relevant parliamentary committees have existed since the 80s and 90s, while most of the other Member States established them over the course of the last decade.

Advocacy by women's organisations and NGOs has also influenced gender representation in politics and helped change male-dominated attitudes and culture. Determined advocacy can have very concrete results in addressing equal treatment.

EXAMPLES OF POLITICAL TOOLS AND ADVOCACY ON GENDER BALANCE

Example 1: Mandatory women's quotas – Spain

Mandatory quotas legislation was introduced in Spain in 2007. The quotas aim to promote a balanced participation of women and men (40 % minimum for each gender) in all areas of economic, social and political decision-making. Two features are crucial to its effectiveness: firstly, the measure incorporates effective sanctions — non-compliant lists are disallowed; secondly, it is structured to prevent women from being systematically allocated unwinnable places at the bottom of the list, since the 40 % quota applies not only to the list as a whole but also to each group of five candidates. The strong points of the measure include:

- an effective system for achieving gender balance in practice, as it ensures that women will enter electoral bodies;
- a well thought through implementation mechanism, including sanctions for non-compliance;
- the introduction of the quota legislation did not require constitutional reform;
- strong support from civil society and public opinion;
- a steady increase in women's presence among elected politicians.

**Example 2:
Delegations for women's
rights and equal
opportunities between
women and men – France**

Both houses of the French parliament — the National Assembly and the Senate — have had a 'Delegation for women's rights and equal opportunities for women and men' since 1999. Their function is to mainstream gender throughout the legislative process. The delegations can scrutinise proposed legislation and monitor implementation, as well as conduct consultation and research to produce proactive reports aiming to influence future legislation. Both delegations have played a crucial role in safeguarding and extending gender parity in politics, and their strength lies in the fact that they:

- provide an innovative example of combining gender equality policy developments with the monitoring of gender parity legislation;
- help to put certain issues on the agenda and to stop others from falling off the agenda (such as gender parity);
- monitor the implementation of policies and highlight negative outcomes for women (e.g. in reports);
- provide a formal arena within parliament devoted to promoting women's rights;
- establish a network linked to powerful actors and empower members in their parliamentary work.

**Example 3:
Changing discriminatory
party practice – Netherlands**

Until 2013, the Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij (SGP), or Reformed Political Party, was unique among Dutch political parties in that it prohibited women from standing for political office. The Dutch government was indecisive in taking action as it was qualifying the situation as a clash of fundamental rights: non-discrimination versus religious freedom and freedom of association. This prompted a number of women's organisations (including Clara Wichmann Fonds and the Dutch Women Council) to take action and to contest this in court. The multistep court procedure, involving several appeals including one to the European Court of Human Rights, led to the final decision in 2012, which ruled that the SGP cannot exclude women. The SGP changed its rules in 2013 and, in March 2014, its first woman councillor was elected in Vlissingen. This example:

- proves that advocacy action against discriminatory rules and practices can lead to change;
- demonstrates that the determination and commitment of women's associations is essential for change;
- highlights the need to remove obstacles that still exist within political parties and prevent women from political participation.

ABOUT THE STUDY

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) commissioned the study 'Women in power and decision-making' in order to review and analyse the implementation of strategic objectives of the Beijing platform for action in the area 'Women in power and decision-making in political, economic and social fields' in the EU Member States and to collect good practices in the area of women's political participation. The study was carried out by ÖSB Consulting GmbH in cooperation with Queen's University Belfast and supported by a network of country experts in all 28 Member States.

Further information related to the study is available at <http://eige.europa.eu/good-practices>

ABOUT EIGE

The European Institute for Gender Equality 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 and beyond, by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable information on gender equality in Europe.

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