

# Statistical brief: gender balance in politics 2020

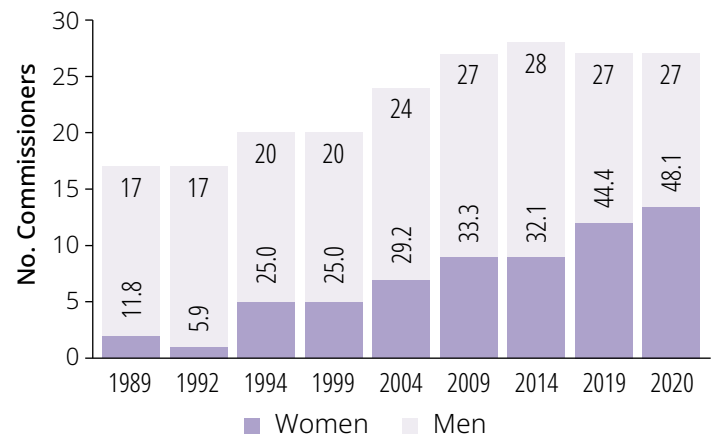
Political assemblies and executives often fail to reflect the gender diversity of the populations they represent, with women significantly under-represented in many cases. The European Institute for Gender Equality regularly monitors the situation in parliaments and governments across the EU, with a particular focus on gender balance in decision-making at EU, national and territorial levels, as well as in legislative actions and political parties.

**The European Commission reflects its best gender balance, with the first woman to be elected as president in 2019, while the European Parliament's 40 % threshold decreases following Brexit.**

The 2019 European elections saw the proportion of women Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) break through the 40 % threshold for the first time, with women occupying 304 of the 747 seats (40.7 %) in the constitutive session of the new Parliament in July 2019. However, Brexit saw MEPs from the United Kingdom leave the European Parliament, reducing the proportion of women from 40.7 % to 39.3 %. Currently, around half (13) of the EU Member States (¹) have a gender-balanced representation (i.e. at least 40 % of each gender) among their MEPs. However, Cyprus has no women MEPs and nine Member States' MEPs are at least two-thirds men.

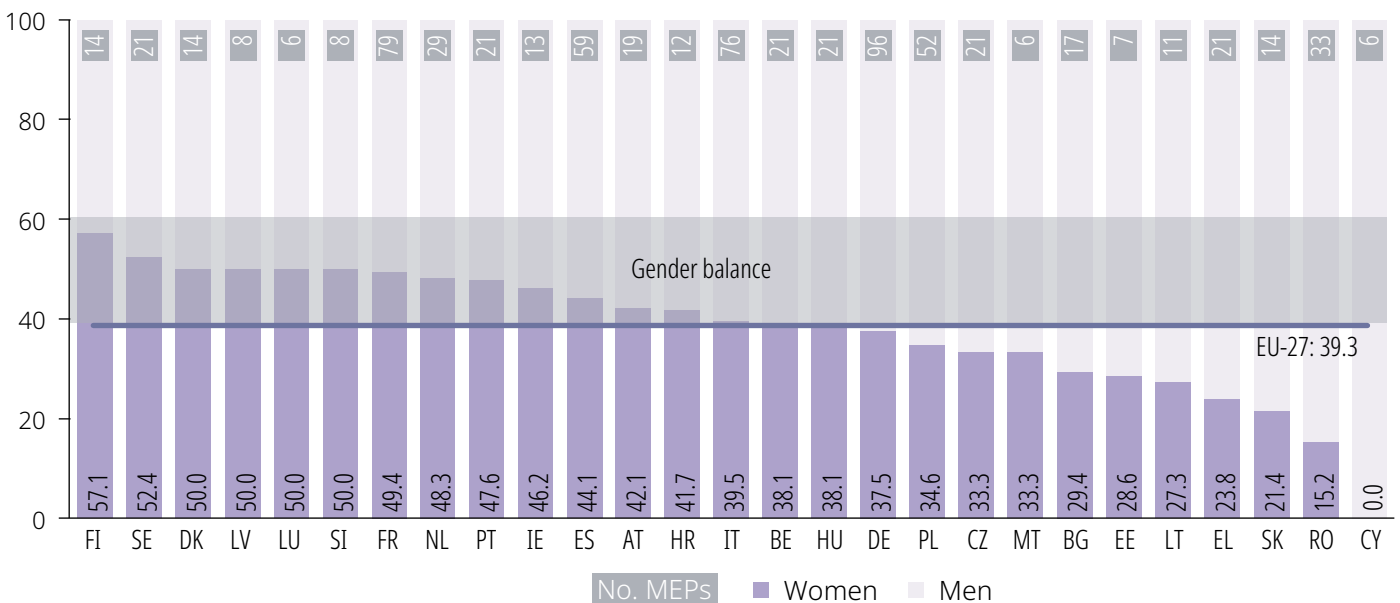
The current European Commission boasts the first-ever woman president and the best gender balance recorded to date: 13 women and 14 men (48.1 % and 51.9 %, respectively). The European Parliament has only twice been led by a woman (Simone Veil, 1979–1982, and Nicole Fontaine, 1999–2002), with the last appointment dating more than two decades ago.

**Figure 2. Women and men Members of the European Commission, %**



Source: EIGE's Gender Statistics Database

**Figure 1. Share of women and men MEPs, %**



Source: EIGE's Gender Statistics Database

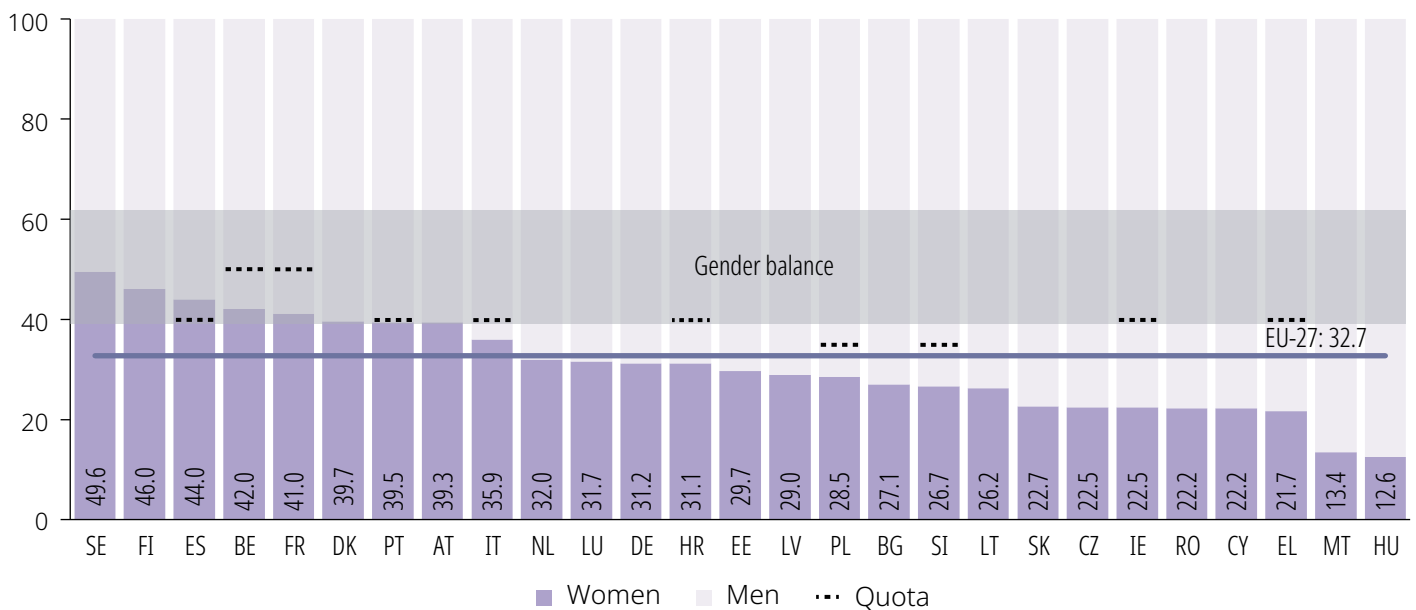
(¹) Denmark, Ireland, Spain, France, Croatia, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden.

## National parliaments: slow progress towards gender balance

In November 2020, the combined members of the single/lower houses of national parliaments in the EU were two-thirds men (67.3 %) and one-third women (32.7 %). The proportion of women in national parliaments covers a wide spectrum, from 49.6 % (Sweden) to 12.6 % (Hungary). Five Member States have at least 40 % of seats held by women: Belgium, Spain, France,

Finland and Sweden. The representation of women in national parliaments in Member States has improved very slowly, at just 0.7 percentage points (pp) per year since 2004 <sup>(2)</sup>. At that rate, it will take more than 12 years to achieve gender balance and will not reach parity (50 % of each gender) until 2050.

**Figure 3. Share of women and men in Member States' single/lower houses of parliament, %, November 2020**



Source: EIGE's Gender Statistics Database

## Legislative initiatives as a tool to achieve gender-balanced representation

Over the past 20 years, 11 Member States <sup>(3)</sup> have introduced legislation establishing minimum gender quotas in the lists of candidates put forward by political parties for election to their national parliament. Countries with such quotas experienced a slight change in the average annual rate of change in the level of women's representation after the adoption of the quotas (from 0.8 pp/year to 0.9 pp/year post-quota). However, that post-quota rate of change is nearly three times faster than the

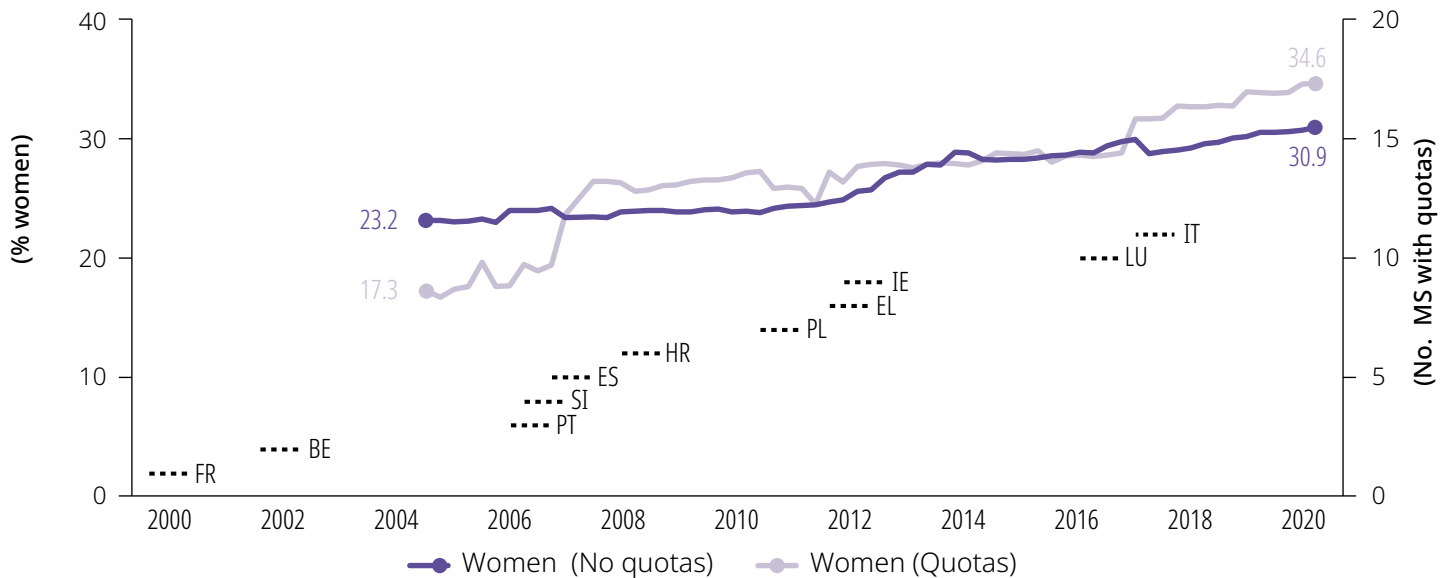
rate of change in Member States without quotas (0.3 pp/year).

The lack of any significant difference in the average pre- and post-quota rates of change should not be taken to mean that quotas have had little impact. Rather, countries differ in their average annual rate of change after the adoption of quotas. Evidence of accelerated progress is clear in Ireland, Spain, Luxembourg, Poland and Slovenia, while the adoption of quotas in Greece resulted in little significant change.

<sup>(2)</sup> The first year in which data is available for all Member States on the proportion of women in national parliaments.

<sup>(3)</sup> In chronological order: France (50 % in 2000); Belgium (50 % in 2002); Portugal (33 % in 2006, 40 % in 2019); Slovenia (35 % in 2006); Spain (40 % in 2007); Greece (33 % in 2008, 40 % in 2019); Croatia (40 % in 2008); Poland (35 % in 2011); Ireland (40 % in 2012); Luxembourg (40 % in 2016); and Italy (40 % in 2017).

**Figure 4. Share of women in single/lower houses of parliament in the EU-27, %, by action (2004–2020)**



Source: EIGE’s Gender Statistics Database

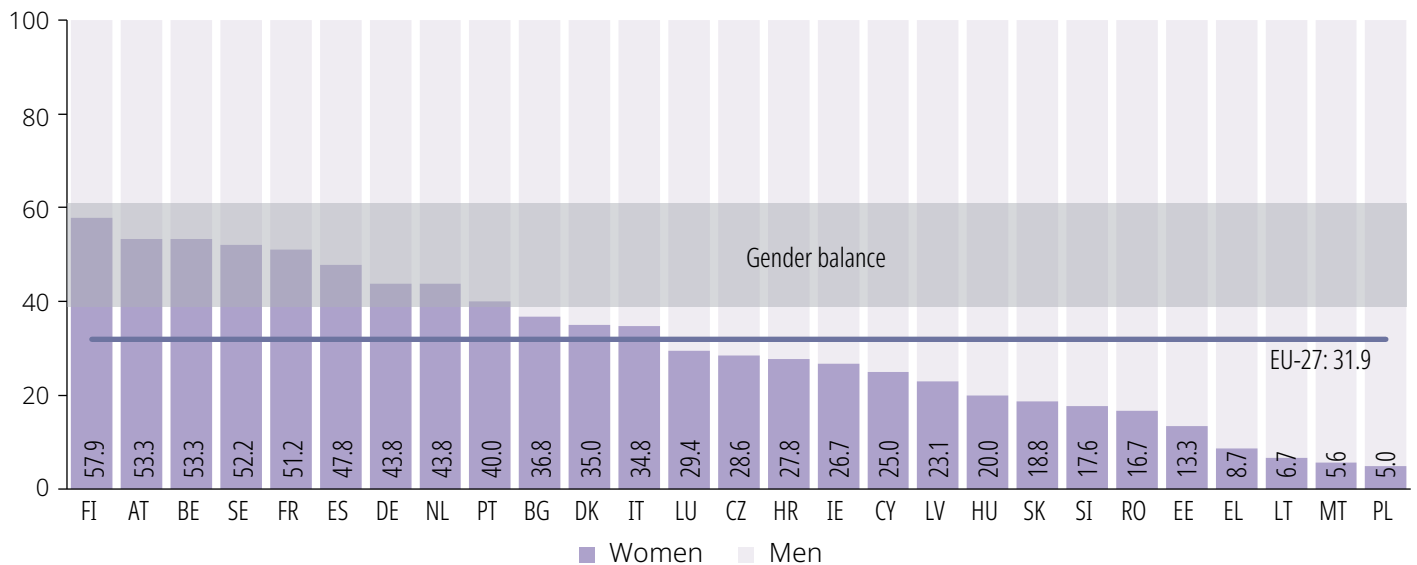
### Top positions in major political parties still largely held by men

Political parties are seen as the gatekeepers of gender equality in political representation as they determine the selection and presentation of candidates to the electorate. While many political parties have put in place voluntary gender quotas for candidates (independently of any legislation that may apply), a significant gender imbalance remains in their internal structures. In November 2020, only three Member States (Denmark,

Germany and Finland) had a woman prime minister, and only eight others had had a woman prime minister since 2004. In most Member States, therefore, the position of prime minister continues to be held by men.

Governments were gender balanced in nine Member States<sup>(4)</sup>, but were predominantly male in Greece (8.7 %), Lithuania (6.7 %), Malta (5.6 %) and Poland (5.0 %).

**Figure 5. Share of women and men in government (senior ministers), %, November 2020**



Source: EIGE’s Gender Statistics Database

<sup>(4)</sup> Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Finland and Sweden.

## Allocation of ministerial portfolios

The continued under-representation of women in government is a fundamental concern, exacerbated by the evidence that suggests that women reaching cabinet are given fewer opportunities to influence the political landscape, often being allocated portfolios with lower political priority. Data from November 2020 shows that although women held 31.9 % of senior-ministerial po-

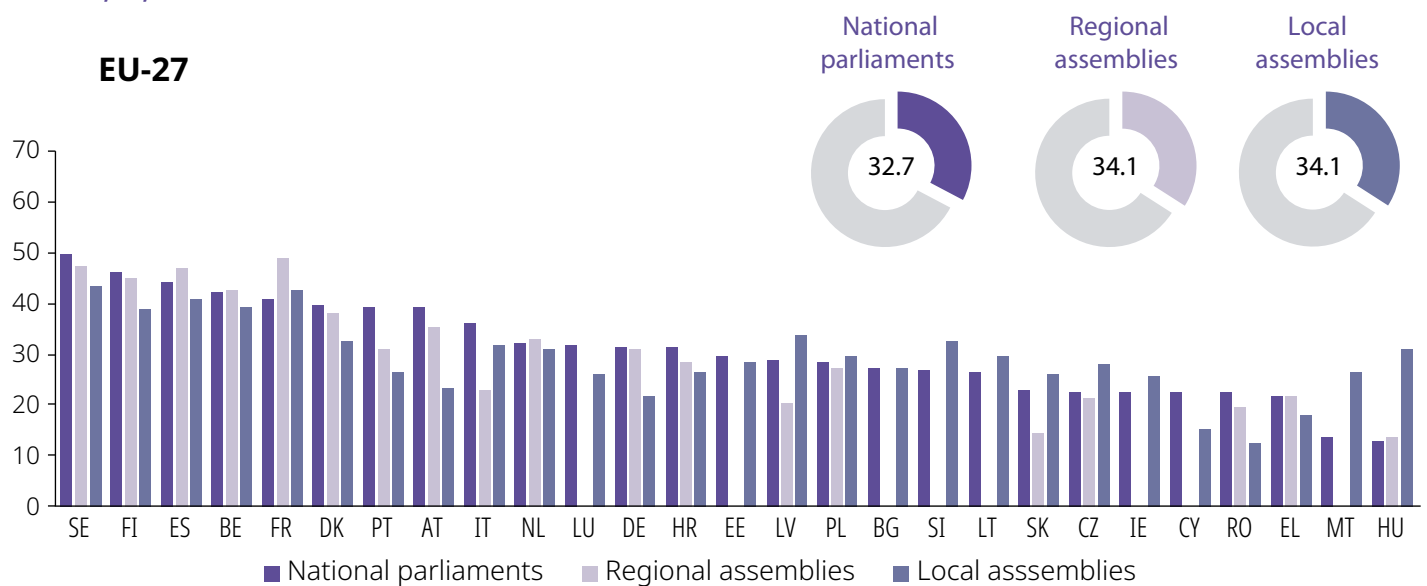
sitions overall, they accounted for a smaller share of ministers with basic and infrastructure portfolios (26.9 % and 25.2 %, respectively), but a significantly higher share of ministers with sociocultural portfolios (45.6 %). This suggests that the allocation of ministerial portfolios is not gender neutral and that women are not allocated an equivalent share of higher profile portfolios.

## Regional and local assemblies

In November 2020, women accounted for 34.1 % of the members of regional assemblies across the EU, a marginal increase from 33.5 % in 2019. Regional assemblies included at least 40 % of each gender in five of the 19 Member States with regional-level powers of self-government (Belgium, Spain, France, Finland and Sweden). In Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, however, men occupied more

than four out of every five seats. Regional executives comprised 34.7 % women (a slight decrease from 35.5 % in 2019), with an even lower share of women among their presidents (14.6 %). The latest data from November 2020 shows that women accounted for 34.1 % of members of local assemblies across the EU and 17.2 % of mayors or council leaders.

**Figure 6. Share of women in national parliaments (single/lower house), regional assemblies and local assemblies, %, 2020**



Source: EIGE's Gender Statistics Database

### 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.

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