EIGE

European Institute
for Gender Equality

Gender Equality in Power and Decision-Making

Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for

Action in the EU Member States

Main findings

Gender Equality in Power and Decision-Making

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Foreword

This publication summarises the report *Gender Equality in Power and Decision-making: Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States* prepared by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) in support of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2015. The report looks at how Member States fared in terms of gender equality in power and decision-making positions within bodies of public, economic and social power between 2003 and 2014. In addition, the report presents new data on decision-making in sports organisations.

Despite political commitment and ongoing efforts to redress inequalities, women and men across the EU still face unfair challenges in many areas of life. While women make up more than half of university graduates and their share in employment is steadily increasing, their highly skilled human capital is under-represented in leadership positions in political, economic and social areas across the EU.

In recent years (2010-2014) the economic sphere, where the percentage of women on corporate boards has increased in 23 Member States, demonstrated the most discernible progress. Also, in the European Parliament and European Commission, the percentage of women surpassed 30 %.

To reinforce positive trends and encourage further advancement, successful initiatives such as gender quotas, campaigns or strategies to enhance the work–life balance and eradicate stereotypes are essential. Only via continued political commitment, quality data collection and regular monitoring will gender equality become a reality for those living in the EU.

On behalf of the institute, I would like to thank all of the institutions and experts who contributed to this publication and extend particular gratitude to the Government of Luxembourg, the experts of the national gender equality bodies and the EIGE's staff. We firmly believe that the current report and its findings and recommendations provide useful evidence for addressing the remaining challenges for equality between women and men in the EU.

Virginija Langbakk
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(EIGE)

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) was set up to strengthen and promote equality between women and men in the European Union. With sound expertise and knowledge, as well as an extensive online library and wide collection of publications and resources, EIGE is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. By providing evidence-based research, comparable and reliable gender statistics, tools and expertise, EIGE supports policymakers to integrate a gender equality perspective in their work and make equality a reality.

Further information can be found on the EIGE website (http://eige.europa.eu).

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Introduction

The issue of women's participation in public life has evolved from early struggles for women's suffrage to important political commitments to ensure women's full engagement in all areas of public life. Despite increasing efforts to boost gender equality in decision-making in the last decades, the under-representation of women in positions of power remains a reality across the EU. In response, the European Commission expressed its commitment to eliminate the gender gap in decision-making in the strategy for equality between women and men (2010-2015) ([1]) as well as in its new strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019 ([2]). At international level, the EU is firmly committed to the implementation of the Beijing platform for action (BPfA), which seeks to enhance women's capacity to participate in and have equal access to power structures and decision-making processes.

The imbalance in the distribution of power and decision-making positions between women and men is a consequence of complex processes and of the interplay between multiple factors that are deeply embedded in culture and social structures. Gender roles and stereotypes, gendered perceptions of leadership and the phenomena of the 'glass ceiling' and the 'glass cliff' are some of the underlying factors. In addition, institutional factors such as the design of electoral systems, internal policies and practices of political parties or nomination and appointment procedures to corporate boards may either hinder or facilitate women's representation in decision-making positions.

The current publication summarises the main findings of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) report *Gender Equality in Power and Decision-making* developed in cooperation with the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2015. It includes a brief explanation of core concepts and current debates in the area of gender equality in decision-making as well as the relevant EU policy framework. The analysis of data is based on 18 indicators on political and economic decision-making endorsed by the Council in 1999, 2003 and 2008 in the context of the follow-up of the BPfA in the EU. The analysis is then extended to consider certain general trends in decision-making in other areas, such as academia and research institutions, media and sports organisations, where comparable data are available. It also presents examples of initiatives taken by the Member States to promote women's participation in leadership positions. The report concludes with concrete policy recommendations, including extending the debate on gender balance in decision-making to other spheres, tackling work–life balance and institutional change.

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Addressing gender inequalities in decision-making

Understanding representation and equality

The idea that a government can only effectively represent a society if all groups and their interests are reflected in the decision-making process is a commonly accepted principle (Diaz, 2005). Generally, a distinction is made between descriptive and substantive representation. Equal representation in numbers (descriptive representation), however, does not necessarily lead to the actual representation (substantive representation) of different interests. Various institutional barriers usually hinder the ability of women leaders to effectively advocate for the interests of women. Therefore, understanding not only when but how women influence decision-making is crucial (Childs, 2006).

Equality itself is a concept that is constantly debated. While 'equality of opportunity' is a given once women have equal rights — for instance, the right to work or stand for election — 'equality of outcome' goes beyond this by accounting for other factors leading to unequal outcomes, such as direct or structural discrimination (Dahlerup, 2005). In the context of political representation, the idea of measuring equality in terms of outcomes rather than opportunities is commonly accepted (Phillips, 2004; Diaz, 2005).

Representation and social structures

Social structures have a significant effect on women's access to positions of power. In societies where women and men have equal or similar access to education and employment, women might have better chances of being equally represented in decision-making. Education and employment provide individuals with important resources, both financial and interpersonal, which can be crucial for reaching top-level positions.

The distribution of tasks between women and men within societies considerably affects women's ability to participate in formal employment and to take up leadership positions across spheres. The fact that women are predominantly responsible for caring and for domestic tasks perpetuates stereotypes about women's abilities as workers. It is often assumed that mothers will be less dedicated to their duties at work, and therefore women with children might be less likely to be promoted to decision-making positions (Sigle-Rushton and Waldfogel, 2007). One more consequence of the unequal distribution of tasks is the over-representation of women in both part-time work and precarious employment, which usually provide fewer opportunities for career progression.

Findings on the EIGE's work on good practices

Women can do it! (Na política, as mulheres são capazes!), Portugal 2007-2010

In 2008 the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG) republished a tried and tested training toolkit, *Na política, as mulheres são capazes!*, organised a series of 11 training sessions around the country which reached 242 women and drew up agreements with the regional governments of the Azores and of Madeira to enable actions on the islands. In 2009 CIG followed up with the nationwide 'Women make democracy better' campaign, which used television, radio, posters and cards to encourage women to be politically active. In 2010 CIG undertook action in education by publishing a handbook for teachers, *Education guide: gender and citizenship — 3rd cycle*, which suggests practical activities to tackle gender stereotypes.

Gendered perception of leadership is an additional consequence of gender stereotypes. The characteristics and skills expected of leaders — such as assertiveness, dominance or rational thinking — are derived from what are normatively understood as masculine characteristics and thus commonly associated with men. Consequently, we expect political leaders not only to be men, but also to exhibit these characteristics (Padamasee, 2008). If women take on these traits they can be negatively perceived for crossing gendered lines. The prevalence of male-dominated political culture and type of leadership creates barriers for women to run for political office.

Social structures, prejudices and stereotypes are part of the invisible barriers commonly understood as the **glass ceiling**. It describes the phenomenon whereby women can progress in their careers up to a certain point, without reaching higher positions. The structural and consistent under-representation of women in positions of power across societies shows the presence and effectiveness of these barriers (EC, 2013a).

Another influential factor contributing to gender imbalances in decision-making is the **glass cliff** phenomenon whereby women are more likely than men to be placed in precarious leadership positions, for instance in companies that are already performing poorly, or in the running for unwinnable seats in a political party (Ryan, Hasalm and Kulich, 2010).

Findings on the EIGE's work on good practices

Domination techniques and how to combat them, Sweden 1970s-2015

One prominent example in the field of political decision-making is the *Power handbook* by Sweden's National Federation of Social Democratic Women (S-kvinnor), which promotes ways to resist men's use of domination techniques. Domination techniques are strategies of social manipulation and domination by which a dominant group maintains its power and privilege. They are often used by men to assert themselves over women, for instance by treating them as invisible, ridiculing them, withholding information, putting them in a double bind and shaming them. The *Power handbook* articulates ways for women to obtain, keep and utilise power. The handbook explores how power can be achieved and be accessible not only at the level of institutions, but also through everyday interactions and personal relationships. The book is published in eight languages.

Institutional factors

Institutional factors have a major impact on women's representation and can contribute to gender imbalances. In the political sphere, one example is the type of **electoral system** in place. While plurality-majority (majoritarian) systems have been found to be less

favourable to women's access to power, proportional representation (PR) systems tend to facilitate the implementation of quotas. Hence, countries with a PR or mixed electoral system also tend to have higher numbers of women in the upper echelons of government (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005; Caul, 2001).

Women's opportunities to enter leadership positions often strongly depend on those controlling the selection and admission processes, frequently referred to as **gate-keepers.** In the political sphere, these are political parties and party elites, whereas selection committees provide this function in social and economic spheres. For example, an implementation of optional quotas may depend on the willingness of gate-keepers to put them in place, which can facilitate or obstruct women's entry to leadership positions (Caul, 2001; Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes, 2007).

Findings on the EIGE's work on good practices

Political party culture often overlooks gender equality issues, perpetuating gender stereotypes and presenting obstacles for women in politics. A valuable approach to redressing gender imbalances and supporting democratic decision-making would be to motivate political parties to support women more effectively.

Increasing women's political representation through capacity development by the labour party, Partit Laburista, Malta 1990s-2015

Malta has one of the lowest levels of women's political representation in the EU. The labour party has traditionally been the first to adopt measures for the advancement of women. Nevertheless, formal and informal practices are blocking further progress. Accordingly, the party has adopted a fourfold approach to promote gender equality through quotas, party structures, capacity development and awareness raising. It has introduced a voluntary 20 % women's quota on electoral lists and a one-third quota within its national executive, opened up its women's section to men, ran a training programme in Brussels, drafted press releases and articles and organised courtesy visits and seminars.

From woman to woman — Lisbon and Oporto, Portugal 2008-2010

Faced with the very slow trend towards balanced political representation for Portuguese women, the Network of Young People for Gender Equality in Portugal (REDE) carried out a project called 'From woman to woman' to help young women, including from ethnic minorities, to participate in politics. Run during 2008-2010, it was developed from a similar project operated in 2005-2006 and was supported by the European Social Fund. It had four components:

- the mentoring of 30 young women from the Lisbon and Porto areas by women active in politics;
- competence development through a course of six weekend sessions using non-formal techniques, covering human rights, intercultural dialogue, media and press, politics and gender equality concepts and priorities;
- a batch of nine social transformation projects for gender equality (with a focus also on young men);
- the publication of useful handbooks.

Based on joint efforts of politicians and major stakeholders, the initiative had a cross-party dimension.

Binding regulation

Electoral gender quotas have been identified as one of the most effective tools to increase women's representation in political decision-making. While the degree of their success depends on many factors — such as the type of quota (legislated vs voluntary), the presence and enforcement of sanctions, the willingness of political actors to implement quotas and the set-up of the system — they help disrupt the practices maintaining gender imbalances by transforming selection processes and making biases visible (Krook, 2009).

Outside of the political sphere, however, quotas are less common. Surrounding the proposed directive setting a quantitative objective of at least 40 % representation of each gender among non-executive directors (supervisory board members in a dual board system) by 2020 [3], there has been some recent attention to quotas for women on corporate boards, but little else. While quotas thus far remain linked to political decision-making, there is a need to extend the debates to other spheres as well.

Findings on the EIGE's work on good practices

Mandatory women's quota of 40 %, Spain 2007-2015

In 2007, Spain adopted a law that obliges political parties to include at least 40 % of women on every list for every election. 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 law has led to a steady increase in the number of women elected, and not only in the case of the socialist party (PSOE) but also of the conservative people's party (PP), which had previously opposed quotas.

Grassroots campaigning for the equal representation of women in politics

Grassroots campaign empowers women, Ireland 2013-2015

In response to a historically low level of women's political representation in Ireland, the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI), the umbrella body for women's organisations, led a campaign to change policy, raise awareness and empower women to play an active role in politics. Elements of the campaign were the introduction of electoral quotas, constitutional reform and a women-friendly parliament. These were supported by consciousness-raising and networking activities, especially at local level, where involvement in politics starts. A model that is being rolled out across the country is that of the Longford women's manifesto group, which held a national workshop for women candidates, helped first-time candidates to network (all of them were subsequently elected) and organised a post-election debrief on what worked in helping women to get elected and the barriers they came up against. The first of the NWCI's goals was achieved in 2012 with the introduction of a 30 % quota of women candidates for parliamentary elections; this will rise to 40 % 7 years after it is first applied. There will also be a sanction of a 50 % cut in government funding for parties that do not comply. However, the voting system and the male-dominated political culture mean that a lot remains to be done before equal political representation for women is achieved. The NWCI's local empowerment strategy is transferable to other countries, particularly those with few women politicians.

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European Union commitment to equality in decision-making

The EU commitment to gender equality in decision-making is prominent at policy level and expressed in a number of strategic documents and actions. The EC expressed its commitment to address and eliminate the gender gap in decision-making in the strategy for equality between women and men (2010-2015) and its recent strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019. The European pact for gender equality 2011-2020 reaffirmed the EU commitment to gender equality and specifically sought to 'promote women's empowerment in political and economic life'. In practice, these over-arching policy aims have served as a foundation for more concrete actions, for example binding quotas for political decision-making positions in some Member States.

In November 2012, the Commission adopted a proposal for a directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive board directors (EC, 2012b). Its main features included a minimum objective of a 40 % presence of the under-represented sex among non-executive directors, to be reached by 2020 for companies listed on stock exchanges and by 2018 for listed public undertakings. The proposal for a directive was accompanied by the communication 'Gender balance in business leadership: a contribution to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' (COM(2012) 615 final), which complements the proposed legislation with policy measures to address the root causes of gender imbalance in management (EC, 2012a).

Table 1. Examples of EU policy and legal documents promoting equality in decision-making

Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015 (European Commission)
Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019 (European Commission)
Council conclusions on the European pact for equality between women and men 2011-2020, March 2011
Council conclusions on women in political decision-making, October 1999, May 2008
Council conclusions on representation of women and men in economic decision-making, 2003
Council conclusions on equality between women and men in the field of decision-making, 2015
Women on the board pledge for Europe, 2011 (European Commission)
Proposal for a directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and related measures, 2012 (European Commission)
Communication on gender balance in business leadership: a contribution to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, 2012 (European Commission),
Council conclusions on advancing women's roles as decision-makers in the media, June 2013
Gender equality in sport: proposal for strategic actions 2014-2020 (European Commission)
Council conclusions on gender equality in sport, May 2014

However, the approach to redressing gender inequalities in decision-making is hardly uniform. As bodies of political power (such as European or national parliaments) are quite visible in the public sphere, gender imbalances tend to be more salient in other decision-making spheres. Decision-making in the economic and social spheres (academia, media and sports) is not as strongly linked with notions of democracy and civil rights, and participation in these spaces are often regarded as individual choice. Hence these issues have had less coverage in public discourse and are only more recently appearing on political agendas.

In the area of **women and the media**, the Council emphasised that 'an increased presence of women in decision-making roles in the media is likely to lead to more gender-sensitive media content and programming, presenting a more balanced picture of women's and men's lives and women's contribution to society, which would have a positive impact on public policies, private attitudes and behaviour' (Council of the European Union, 2013).

There is a growing concern at the EU level about the issue of **women and science**, and more specifically the under-representation of women in scientific careers. One of the main problems is the 'leaky pipeline', whereby women drop out of scientific careers in disproportionate numbers at every level. Currently, a number of measures in the EU research and innovation programme support gender mainstreaming. First, all Horizon 2020 advisory groups have a target of 50 % for the under-represented sex in expert groups and evaluation panels. Second, applicants for EU funding are encouraged to promote gender balance at all levels in their teams and in management structures. Moreover, in signing a grant agreement, beneficiaries must commit to promoting equal opportunities between women and men in the implementation of the project as well as to ensuring gender balance at all levels of personnel, including at supervisory and managerial level.

In the field of **women and sports** the Council, in its conclusions on gender equality in sport,

encouraged sports organisations to increase gender balance on executive boards and committees and in management and coaching as well as to try to remove non-legislative obstacles preventing women from taking up such functions (Council of the European Union, 2014). In the context of the EU work plan for sport (2014-2017), one of five expert groups deals with good governance in sport, including gender equality. Gender equality in sport is also a priority in the funding programme Erasmus+: sport.

The EU political framework summarised above has given some support to redressing gender inequalities, but more efforts are necessary in order to achieve an overall gender balance in decision-making. In addition to this foundation, targeted and contextualised strategies to redress gender inequalities in decision-making have also proven useful. In political decision-making, some Member States have implemented and seen results from three main activities: (1) measures aiming at empowering women and increasing their skills; (2) measures to increase awareness and combat gender stereotypes; (3) legislative measures and quotas. In the economic sphere, the most significant increase in women at the top during recent years (comparing 2010 and 2013) was noted in a small number of Member States where binding legislation has already been adopted or where there has been an extensive public debate (EC, 2013b). In social decision-making there is a range of strategies to tackle gender imbalances, including providing financial incentives for gender-balanced research, while in the area of sports more attention is focused on increasing women's participation in sport rather than decision-making power. Additionally, media organisations that adopted policies or implemented measures to facilitate the access of women to decision-making were found to have twice as many women in strategic decision-making positions and almost 30 % more women on their boards (EIGE, 2013). Generally, measures such as binding legislation and awareness raising are some of the most successful thus far — resulting in increased numbers of women at the top.

Gender balance in bodies of public power

Gender balance in political participation is a fundamental aspect of stable and transparent democracies. Both women and men should have equal opportunities to participate fully in political decision-making processes. However, accessing these processes is more challenging for women, leading to relative marginalisation in political decision-making.

Slow but steady progress in political decision-making

Since 2003, data show a positive trend with an increase of women in political power across the board. Women's average representation increased in national and regional parliaments, local assemblies and national governments.

Figure 1: Improvements in gender balance in political power in the EU-28, 2003-2014
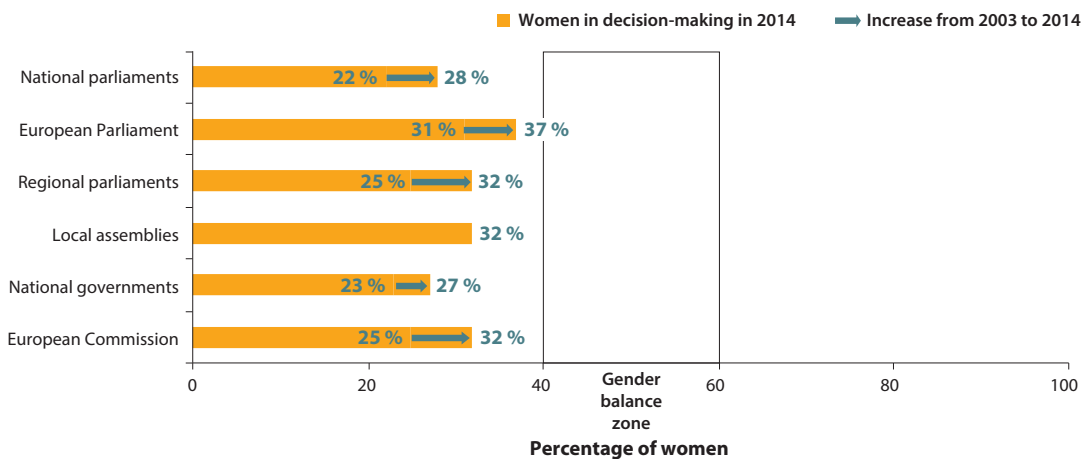
Source: European Commission, database on women and men in decision-making.

Note: For quarterly data, the fourth quarter was used; data for local assemblies for 2003 are not available.

Women exceeded 30 % of decision-making posts in both the European Parliament and the European Commission and a positive trend is visible from 2003 to 2014 in both institutions. However, while the European Parliament is close to gender balance, only 13 Member States have at least 40 % women members in the current parliament.

Political and regulatory pressure accelerates progress

The majority of Member States have expressed strong commitments and adopted positive

actions, such as legislative and/or voluntary quotas or targets, as well as supplementary measures to promote women in the area of political representation. Member States that implemented binding and voluntary quotas had more women in their national parliaments and the increase over time was more rapid. In the countries without quotas, the average representation of women stood at 27 % in 2014, with minimal progress on average.

Figure 2: Average increase and percentage of women in national parliaments, 2003-2014
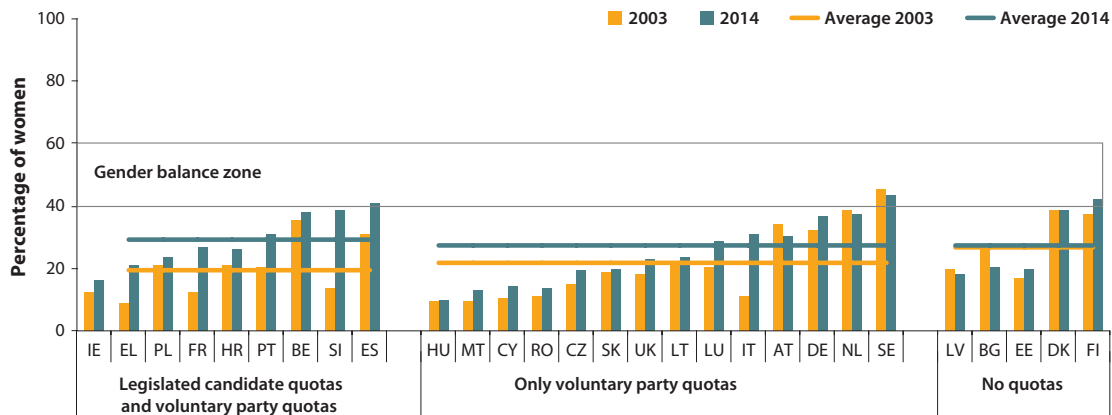
Source: European Commission, database on women and men in decision-making; QuotaProject available at http://www.quotaproject.org/; Krook, 2009; Thames and Williams, 2013.

Note: IE is not counted in the average of the group 'Legislated candidate quotas and voluntary party quotas' but is included under the group 'No quotas', as legislative quotas were introduced in 2012 and did not apply at the last elections in 2011 (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), 2014).

The implementation of quotas must be interpreted with caution, as contextual and institutional factors also impact the gender ratios and the progress needs to be reinforced by supporting measures.

Over-representation of men in political party leadership

Political parties play an important role as they can either facilitate or hinder women's opportunities and they hold the power to recruit, select and nominate candidates. Gender balance in political party leadership is important to monitor as changes in leadership indicate available

Figure 3: Proportion of women among leaders and deputy leaders of major political parties in the EU-28, 2011-2014
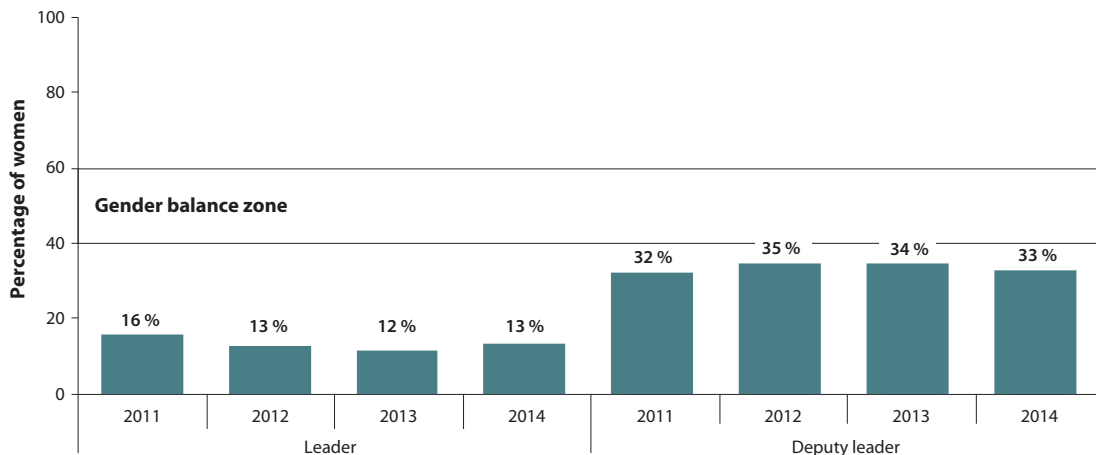
Source: European Commission, database on women and men in decision-making.
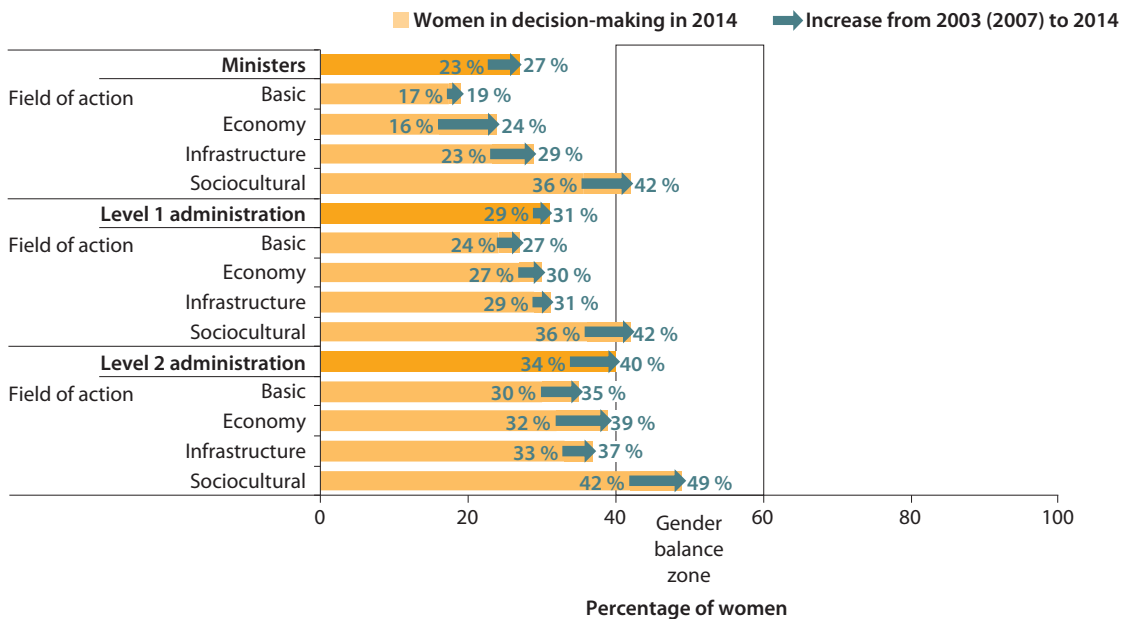
opportunities to change institutional culture, impacting the ways in which women are involved and participate in political processes.

Between 2011 and 2014, as an EU average, around a quarter of deputy leaders of major national political parties were women and they accounted for only 13 % of leaders of major political parties across the EU, which indicates the existence of a glass ceiling in political party leadership.

Men dominate highest decision-making positions in economy, infrastructure, defence, justice and foreign policy

The impact of stereotypes is apparent in the distribution of cabinet portfolios and senior administrative positions and there are signs of both vertical and horizontal segregation. The representation of women is higher in sociocultural functions — and lower positions — than in any other field of action.

Figure 4: Gender balance in public power by levels and field of action, 2003 (2007) to 2014

Legend: ■ Women in decision-making in 2014 ➡ Increase from 2003 (2007) to 2014

Field of action	2014 %	Increase to
Ministers	23 %	27 %
Basic	17 %	19 %
Economy	16 %	24 %
Infrastructure	23 %	29 %
Sociocultural	36 %	42 %
Level 1 administration	29 %	31 %
Basic	24 %	27 %
Economy	27 %	30 %
Infrastructure	29 %	31 %
Sociocultural	36 %	42 %
Level 2 administration	34 %	40 %
Basic	30 %	35 %
Economy	32 %	39 %
Infrastructure	33 %	37 %
Sociocultural	42 %	49 %

Gender balance zone

Percentage of women

Source: European Commission, database on women and men in decision-making.

Note: Due to changes in methodology and a break in the series, data for public administration are only comparable from 2007 onwards.

These trends are deepening over time. The progress towards gender balance is slower in the fields of action where men are over-represented, particularly in the posts related to infrastructure and basic state functions, while much more rapid progress can be seen in areas of sociocultural functions where women are already well represented. Also, the higher the decision-making position, the lower the proportion of women in these positions and the slower the progress towards gender balance. The proportion of women among ministers in the EU-28 is much lower than the proportion among level 1 and level 2 administrators.

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While the representation of women in the national top judicial positions is approaching gender balance, progress at the EU level has stalled

Decisions taken by the judiciary influence public and legal discourse, which impacts on society at all levels, therefore it is crucial that women are equally represented. In the EU, women were on average better represented among the members of the supreme courts of the Member States than in European courts.

Figure 5: Improvements in the gender balance of the judiciary in the EU-28, 2003-2014
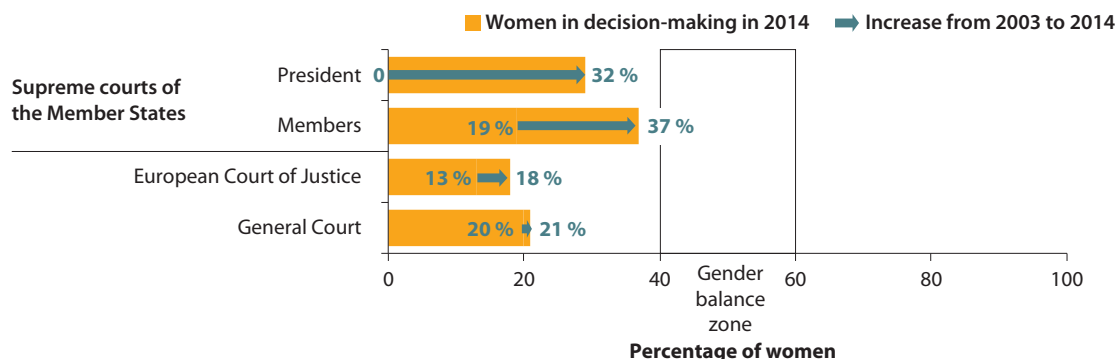
Source: European Commission, database on women and men in decision-making.

From 2003-2014, only a fractional increase in the number of women was noted in the European General Court and in the Court of Justice of the European Union. An increase of women members and presidents of supreme courts at Member State level has been more substantial since 2003.

# Gender balance in economic decision-making

Macroeconomic decision-making has far-reaching societal implications on the allocation of resources as well as on fiscal and monetary policies. Macroeconomic institutions influence overall economic development, monetary stability, employment and growth. From a microeconomic perspective, higher gender diversity in organisations contributes to the enhanced quality of decision-making and overall company performance, both in terms of financial gains and better risk management (EC, 2012c).

Progress in women's representation is most pronounced in corporate boards

Since 2003, there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of women on executive boards of publicly listed companies in EU Member States, with a sharper increase since 2010. Only 9 % of members of management boards in Member States were women in 2003; this number had increased to 12 % by 2010 and to 20 % by 2014. In the 4 years from 2010 to 2014, the share of women on boards increased in 23 out of 28 Member States.

Figure 6: Proportion of women members of the highest decision-making body of the largest companies, 2010-2014
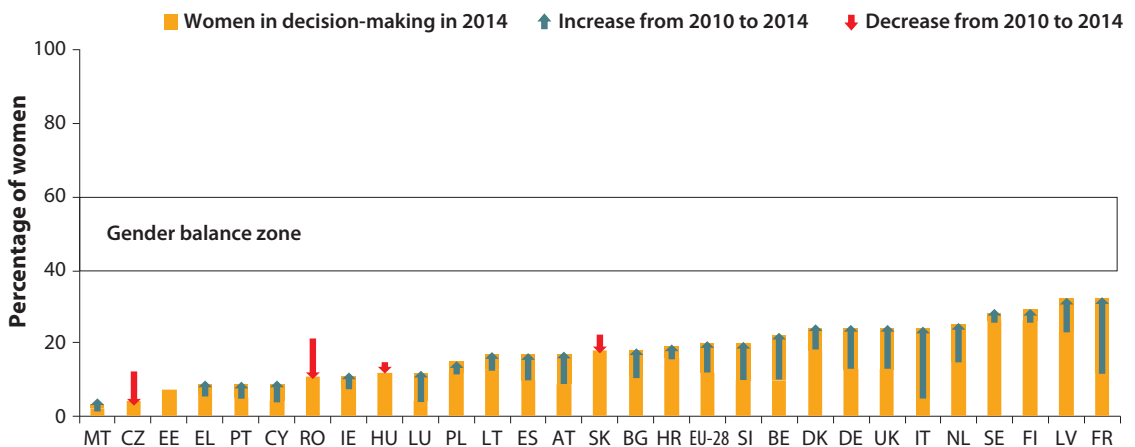
Source: European Commission, database on women and men in decision-making.

Progress is most tangible where binding legislation has been adopted. For example, a sharp increase followed the implementation of a legislated target of 33 % of women on boards in Italy in 2011. France is another example where legislation has had a substantial impact on women's representation.

Furthermore, the European Commission's efforts to redress this gender imbalance with campaigns, media attention and the proposed directive (COM(2012) 614) to set targets for women business leaders may have also pushed the recent improvements. Therefore, it is important to

monitor the following legislative regulation and other measures implemented by Member States:

(1) state policies and legislation:

    (a) gender balance in economic decision-making is included in national/regional strategies and actions plans,

    (b) legislation (general statements without targets, binding targets without sanctions and binding targets accompanied by non-compliance sanctions),

    (c) regular monitoring and evaluation systems;

(2) other initiatives at national/regional level:

    (a) common codes of practice or other common agreements adopted by the business community,

    (b) initiatives to acknowledge or award companies;

(3) awareness-raising campaigns/initiatives promoting gender balance in economic decision-making (launched regularly at national/regional level and lasting at least a week).

Despite the positive trend towards gender balance in corporate boards, women were almost absent at the top of the largest companies: as an EU average in 2014, only 3 % of chief executive officers (CEOs) and 7 % of presidents of the highest decision-making bodies were women, with only a slight increase since 2003.

Men dominate the governance of the European and national central banks

The overall trend from 2003-2014 shows that, during this period, the proportion of women in decision-making positions at national and EU levels in central banks was low. Progress is marginal and mainly visible in the increase in the number of women governors and deputy/vice-governors in central banks at Member State level.

Figure 7: Improvements in the gender balance in finance in the EU-28, 2003-2014
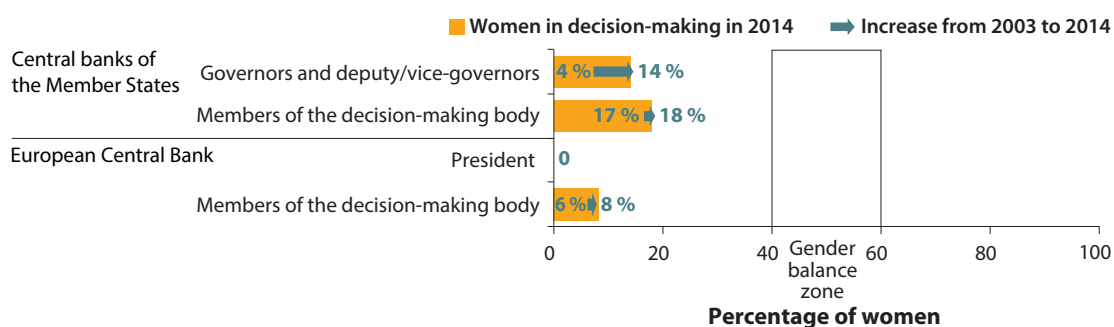
Source: European Commission, database on women and men in decision-making.
Note: for deputy/vice governors and governors of the central banks, 2007 data are used due to data availability.

Women largely under-represented in social partner organisations

Social partner organisations have a large impact on macroeconomic policy formulation via their bargaining role with the government authorities. In 2014, women were largely under-represented in both national and European social partner organisations. Data also point to vertical segregation whereby the percentage of women in top decision-making positions (president and vice-president) is smaller than women's membership of decision-making bodies overall.

Figure 8: Improvements in the gender balance in social partner organisations, 2003-2014
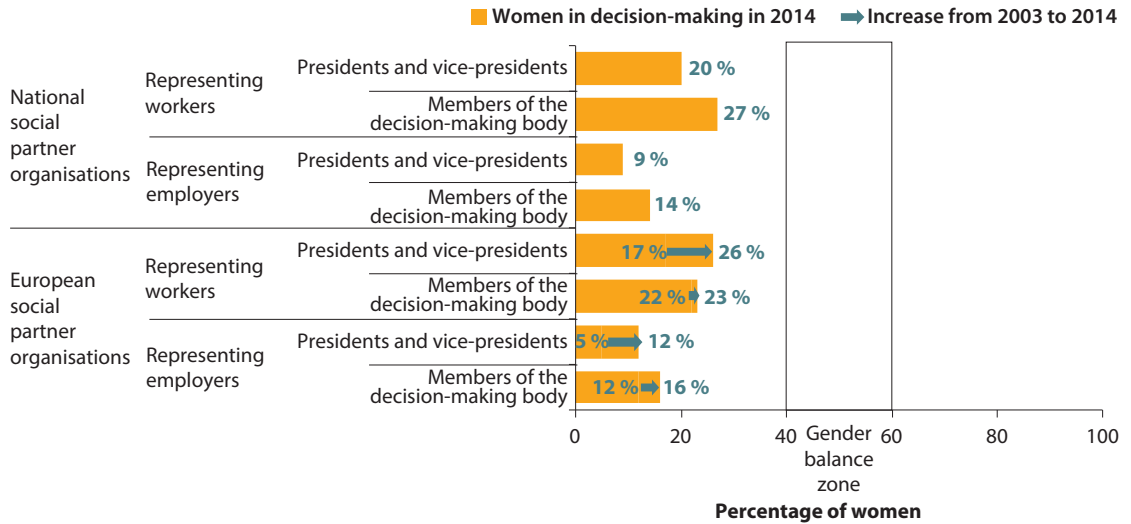
Source: European Commission, database on women and men in decision-making.
Note: data at national level are available only for 2014.

While there has been an increase in the share of women in decision-making in European social partner organisations, the situation is still far from being gender balanced.

Gender balance in social decision-making

The under-representation of women in decision-making positions in the social sphere like academia, media and sports prevents women from having a significant impact on the decisions of many key institutions. The lack of attention to imbalances in the social sphere makes it difficult to redress them.

Women are mostly absent in senior positions in academia

Although women constitute more than half of university graduates, they are relatively invisible at the very top of the academic hierarchy (grade A). The number of women decreases as the seniority of positions increases.

Figure 9: Improvements in the gender balance in academia, 2002-2010
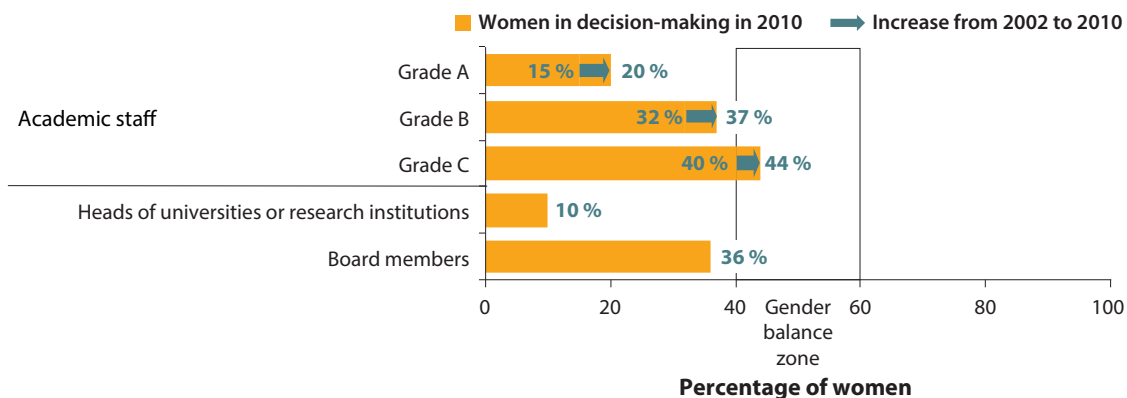
Source: She Figures 2012.
Note: Data are not available for heads and board members before 2010.

Under-representation at the highest levels of academia is also obvious from the data on women heading universities or research institutions and women on the boards of universities and research institutions.

Women not only face a glass ceiling when advancing to higher positions; they are also less likely to obtain research grants. In addition, they need to produce more high-quality papers in order to be successful (Gannon, Quirk and Guest, 2001; European Commission, 2000; Research Councils UK, 2013).

Women are concentrated in lower positions of decision-making in the media

Over the course of two decades, women's employment in the media sector has increased, reaching 44 % in 2012. By then, women on average represented almost two thirds (67 %) of graduates in journalism and information courses across the EU-28. Nevertheless, women in media institutions are challenged by invisible barriers preventing them from reaching the highest positions in the sector. According to the latest data at EU level (2014), women made up as little as 13 % of CEOs or equivalent positions of media organisations, while the proportion more than doubled for lower positions. Women represented 30 % of

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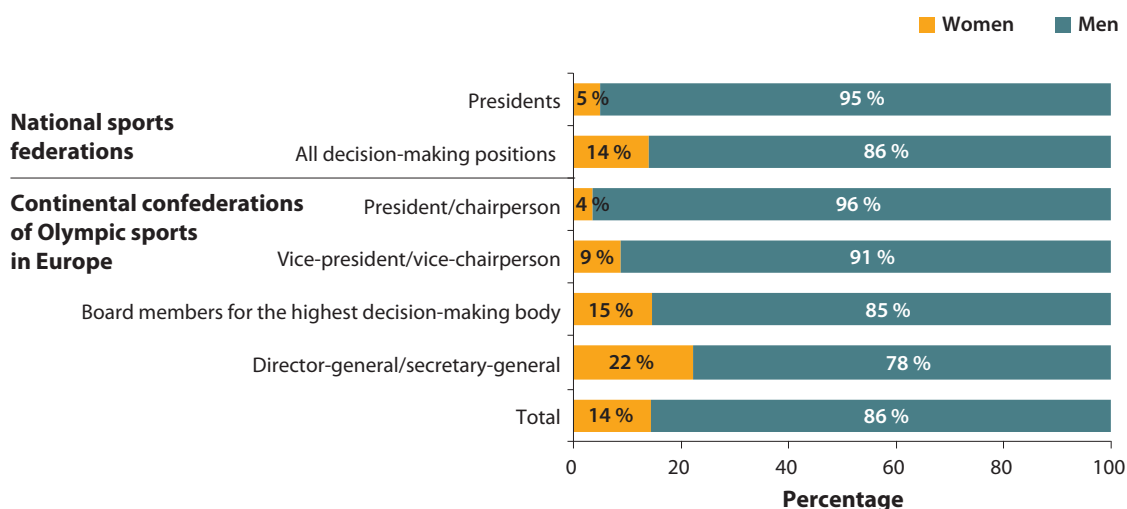
all executive members of the highest-level board and 32 % of non-executive directors in the two highest decision-making bodies. In addition, on average across the EU in 2014, 18 % of the chairpersons of the highest decision-making bodies and 31 % of the members of the boards in media organisations were women.

Monitoring change in social decision-making calls for higher-quality data at EU level

In 2015, harmonised and comparable data on decision-making in sport (national sports federations and continental confederations representing summer and winter Olympic sports) have for the first time been collected by the EIGE. The data show that the representation of women among the top decision-making positions in sports organisations in Member States is very low. Similarly to other areas of decision-making, vertical segregation is a prominent feature of sports: the gender gap widens as the seniority of the position increases. While overall women made up 14 % of decision-making positions in national sports federations, women represented only 5 % of the total number of presidents.

Figure 10: Proportion of women and men in decision-making positions in sports organisations, 2015

	Women	Men
National sports federations — Presidents	5 %	95 %
All decision-making positions	14 %	86 %
Continental confederations of Olympic sports in Europe — President/chairperson	4 %	96 %
Vice-president/vice-chairperson	9 %	91 %
Board members for the highest decision-making body	15 %	85 %
Director-general/secretary-general	22 %	78 %
Total	14 %	86 %

Source: Data were collected from sports organisations in May-June 2015.

Not only is vertical segregation apparent at Member State level but it is also apparent at European level, as only 4 % of the presidents or chairpersons (i.e. only 1 out of 28) and 9 % of vice-presidents (i.e. 8 out of 91) of continental Olympic sports confederations were women. The share of women among board members was 15 %. The highest proportion of women was found among directors-general and secretaries-general (22 % or six women out of a total of 27).

When data were collected, nine of the 28 European confederations (32 %) had a gender quota for the highest decision-making body (executive committee, presidium, board of directors, etc.) and only one failed to meet this quota, i.e. had no women in top decision-making posts. In four of the remaining 19 European confederations without a gender quota, women were absent from the highest decision-making body.

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Conclusions

The BPfA seeks to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. Despite high political visibility and EU commitment to gender equality in decision-making, extensive debates and numerous targeted actions since 2010, the rate of progress is slow. Women make up nearly half of the workforce and account for more than half of tertiary-level graduates, yet decision-making perpetuates the old pattern of unequal power relations.

Progress in women's representation is most pronounced in corporate boards.

Nevertheless, women's representation is still very low and leadership is commonly associated with men and masculinity. The political pressure to resolve gender inequalities in this area is relatively recent and the gender-based stereotypes in corporate culture still create barriers limiting women's access to leadership positions. These perceptions are reflected within organisational and institutional culture, with formal and informal practices acting to the advantage of men.

Women's representation in political decision-making is steadily moving towards gender balance.

Despite a gradual progress since 2003, men continue to dominate political decision-making in the EU, holding on average more than two thirds of all parliamentary seats and government positions. The main hindering factors are Member States' electoral systems, the culture of political parties, gate-keeping and attitudes to gender equality. On the other hand, there is a political commitment to increase women's political representation, which explains the increase and relatively higher representation of women in political versus economic decision-making.

Men dominate portfolios and senior administrative positions in economy, infrastructure, defence, justice and foreign policy.

Women are concentrated in ministries working on sociocultural issues (such as social affairs, labour, health, children, family, youth, the elderly, education and culture). The smallest increase within political decision-making is seen in the percentage of women ministers who carry out basic state functions. The distribution of cabinet portfolios and senior administrative positions shows that women's full participation in power structures and decision-making is stalled by the persistence of gender-based stereotypes, reinforcing horizontal and vertical segregation and the glass ceiling effect.

Women exceeded 30 % of decision-making posts in the European Parliament and the European Commission.

While there is a steady progress towards a gender-equal European Parliament and European Commission, there was a slow increase in women's average representation in national parliaments. Women's opportunities to be elected to national parliaments and/or the European Parliament strongly depend on national electoral systems, on the existence of legislated or voluntary party quotas and on their implementation. Political parties can either facilitate or hinder women's opportunities by determining the order of electoral lists, short lists for constituencies, party structures and codes of conduct.

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While the representation of women in the national top judicial positions is approaching gender balance, progress at the EU level has stalled.

Remarkable progress has been made in women's representation in top-level judicial posts in the EU Member States, but there are significant individual variations among Member States. There are countries where women are nearly absent in top-level positions, which may hinder fair and well-informed judgement.

Men dominate the governance of the European and national central banks.

Only three women held the position of governor and the proportion of women as vice-governors has not exceeded 20 %. Women's overall representation in financial decision-making at European level is even lower. The highest position, the President of the European Central Bank (ECB), has consistently been occupied by men, and women's membership of the decision-making body has remained below 10 %. The European Parliament has called, in a number of resolutions, for more women in governing positions in the central banks and financial institutions in Member States, while also noting its concern about the absence of women on the ECB's executive board ([4]).

The higher the decision-making position is, the lower the proportion of women is in these positions across all areas.

In public administration, women are less likely to be in the highest positions rather than in second-tier ones. In politics, women are more often deputy leaders than leaders of political parties. In economic decision-making, women are very seldom CEOs, presidents, governors or deputy/vice-governors of the highest decision-making bodies of the largest registered companies and central banks, but generally feature among the members of boards. The same pattern is also visible in social decision-making.

Invisible barriers, or the glass ceiling, usually allow women to progress to a certain point in their careers, yet the highest positions are seemingly out of reach for many.

Political and regulatory pressure accelerates progress in gender-balanced representation.

Measures applied by Member States and tailored EU-level initiatives have contributed to a marked improvement in women's access to leadership positions in the corporate sector in the EU. The most significant improvements took place in countries that have launched or considered legislative action. The presence of legislated and voluntary quotas signals a commitment by both the government and party elites to minimise the democratic deficit and promote gender equality. Extensive public debate on gender balance in corporate boards also seems to have positive outcomes.

Monitoring change in social decision-making calls for higher-quality data at EU level.

Measuring the extent of change in decision-making in research, media or sports is hampered by the absence of suitable indicators at EU level and the availability of harmonised and comparable sex-disaggregated data. The strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015 emphasises the potential benefits of increasing women's participation in science and research and the need for women to occupy at least a quarter of leading positions in the public research sector. In the area of gender equality in sport, the European Commission's proposal for strategic actions 2014-2020 calls for women and men to occupy, respectively, a minimum of 40 % of positions on the executive boards and committees of national sport-governing bodies by 2020 and 30 % of positions in international sports organisations located in Europe ([5]).

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Recommendations

Promote legislative initiatives and targeted measures

Binding legal or voluntary measures implemented by political parties, and more recently by corporate boards, are found to increase women's inclusion in decision-making. Progress would be consolidated by a wider array of targeted incentives, such as public debate, training, mentoring schemes and more transparent recruitment and promotion practices. Progress can be further aided by monitoring the situation and exchanging good practices among Member States.

Strengthen public debate and policy initiatives on gender equality in decision-making in other domains

The topic of gender balance in the political and economic sectors is regularly present on the policy agenda. The over-representation of men in decision-making in areas such as sports, media or research requires more visibility and action, not least because of the symbolic and educational importance of these fields and their powerful role in shaping public opinion and perceptions.

Call for institutional change in the corporate sector

Companies must engage in activities to create more opportunities for women's advancement in decision-making. The reluctance to appoint women candidates to board positions needs to be addressed. Corporate culture — characterised by long hours and physical presence, prevailing leadership styles and a lack of transparency in recruitment and promotion practices — represents issues requiring transformative solutions. Improving the gender balance on company boards can lead to more effective corporate governance and better financial performance.

Accelerate progress in work–life balance for women and men

Family-friendly policies and transformative measures supporting a more equal distribution of caring and domestic responsibilities between women and men are prerequisites for future improvement. Adequate provision of employment that supports a work–life balance and the establishment of childcare structures in line with the Barcelona targets might accelerate progress and enable more women to enter top-level decision-making.

Fight gender stereotypes in all policy areas

The effect of legislative and targeted measures could be further reinforced by efforts to increase public awareness and combat gender stereotypes and prescriptive gender roles. Eradicating gender stereotypes will help eliminate barriers that limit women's access to leadership positions. A gender-sensitive perspective and attention to gender stereotypes should therefore be integrated into all policies and organisational practices.

Sharing experience, knowledge, strategies and good practices across Member States can provide inspiration and stimulate change

Experiences across the EU-28 show that active citizenship is a prerequisite for advancing gender balance in political decision-making. This includes encouraging younger generations to get involved in politics as well as making sure men are part of the ongoing activities towards gender balance. Successful mobilisation will also take rural populations and local communities into consideration.

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(2)   http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/
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(3)   A directive on improving the gender balance
        among non-executive board directors was
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