

Gender-sensitive Parliaments

Domain 1 – Parliamentarians’ presence and capacity in parliament

This domain addresses gender balance in leading roles and internal working groups.

Despite gradual advance, women’s presence in the EU Member States’ parliaments is still low. Furthermore, when entering the parliament, women are often relegated into less influential positions, and most speakers or presidents in EU MS parliaments are men.

Committees are the “backbone” of parliamentary work and are governed by a set of both formal and “unwritten” rules. Besides the low proportion of women chairing committees, the policy area and the effective influence of these committees in the overall parliamentary work is an issue. Women traditionally preside within committees/commissions responsible for “soft” portfolios – welfare and family policies, employment, health, culture and education – while men generally lead committees/commissions dealing with “hard” economic and internal policy areas – budgetary and financial policies, economic development and trade, home affairs, defence and security, and foreign affairs. This division and hierarchy of portfolios is in itself very gendered, assuming a less powerful status to areas related to “care” topics. Gender-sensitive parliaments support the notion that all policy areas are important for everyone and act as to avoid that specific policy areas are dominated by one gender only.

The basic – though not sufficient – element assuring women and men an equal influence on the parliament’s work is their numeric balance. In order to have an acceptable degree of influence on the parliament’s work, it is important that a sufficient number of women is assigned to leading roles. A balanced participation of women and men MPs in every parliamentary commission or working group is fruitful for gender equality because women and men may have different perspectives on diverse policy areas.

Data sources: The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) regularly collects data on the [numbers of women in parliaments worldwide](#). In the EU, data are available in EIGE’s [Gender Statistics Database](#).

[women in parliaments worldwide](#). In the EU, data are available in EIGE'S [Gender Statistics Database on women and men in decision-making](#). Data on women's distribution in parliamentary committees and working groups, as well as numbers of women leading commissions and topics of commissions led by women, can be collected from the parliaments' official websites. Parliamentary rules or working documents can provide further information about procedures that are followed when assigning members to committees.