

Gender Equality Index 2019. Work-life balance

Democracy undermined by absence of gender parity in politics

The proportion of women in national parliaments (single/lower house) across the 28 EU Member States has gradually increased: from 21 % in 2005 to an all-time high of 30 % in 2018. Parliaments in Sweden, Finland, Belgium and Spain are gender balanced (i.e. at least 40 % of each gender), whereas women account for less than 20 % of parliamentarians in Greece, Cyprus, Malta and Hungary.

Two elections in 2018 in particular saw significant changes to women's representation in national parliaments (Latvia and Luxembourg). While the percentage of women parliamentarians in Latvia jumped from 18 % to 31 %, in Luxembourg it dropped from 32 % to 22 %. Since 2015 progress has been made in France (+ 11 p.p.), Romania (+ 7 p.p.) and Bulgaria (+ 6 p.p.). Lower gains were achieved in Austria, Cyprus and Estonia (+ 5 p.p.), Ireland, Italy and Portugal (+ 4 p.p.), and Poland and the United Kingdom (+ 3 p.p.). Besides Luxembourg, the share of women in parliament declined in Croatia and Germany (– 5 p.p.), Greece (– 4 p.p.) and Lithuania (– 3 p.p.).

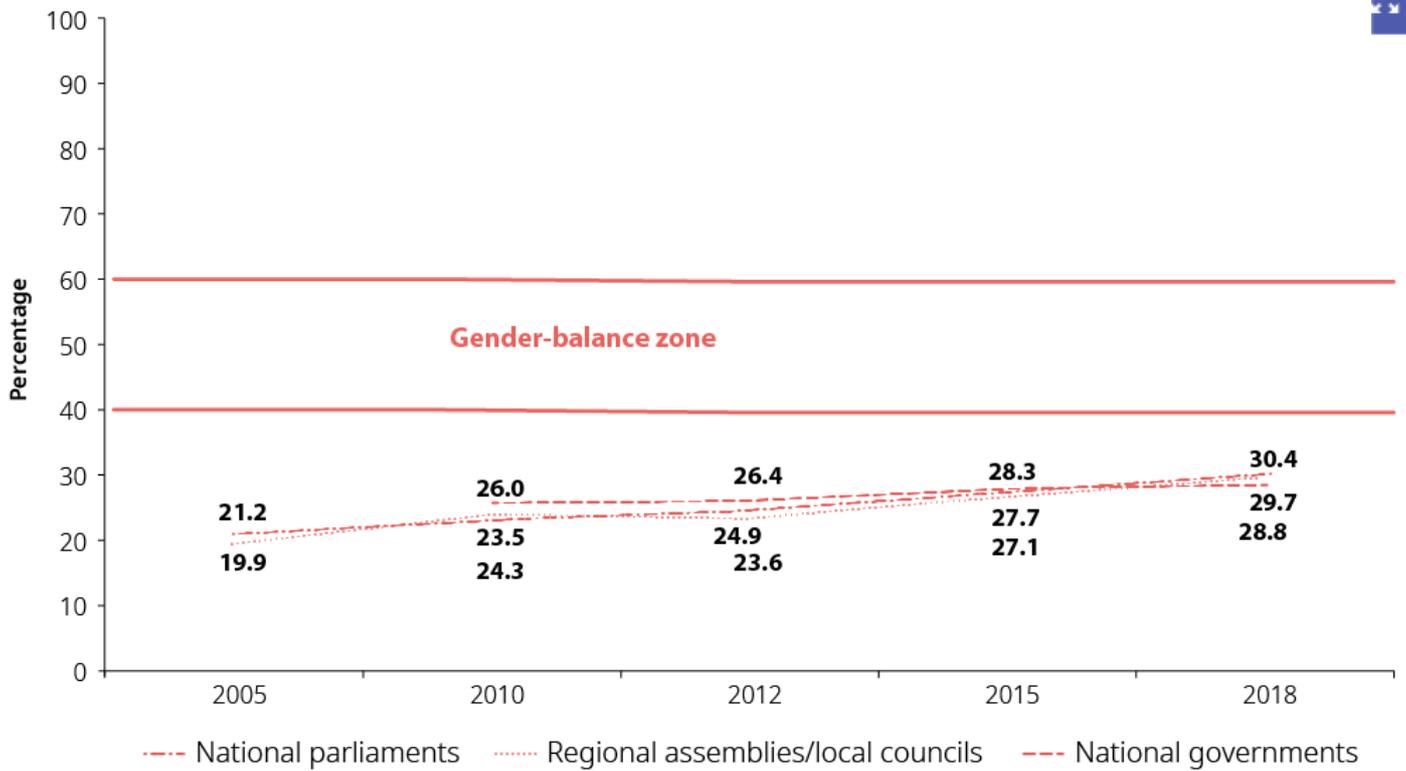


Figure 26: Percentage share of women in political power, EU, 2005-2018
 Source: EIGE's calculation, EIGE's Gender statistics database, WMID.

Note: Data for regional assemblies/local councils is available from 2010 only. The indicator is calculated considering the yearly data of regional councils for 20 Member States and the yearly data of local councils for the remaining eight Member States (BG, EE, IE, CY, LV, LT, MT, SI) (data collected on June, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017).
 National parliaments and national governments: yearly average of quarterly data.

A number of Member States have taken initiatives to improve the gender balance in their parliaments. Quotas on parliamentary candidates are currently in place in 10 Member States: Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. With the exception of Croatia, women's representation has improved since the application of a quota^[1]. However, only Portugal and Spain saw quota targets translating into an equivalent (or almost) proportion of elected members of parliament. In all other cases, disparities between the quota target and women in parliament remain substantial: 8 p.p. in Ireland and Poland; 11 p.p. in Belgium and Slovenia; 13 p.p. in France and Greece; 15 p.p. in Italy^[2]; and more than 20 p.p. in Croatia.

Political parties often act as gatekeepers against gender equality since they set party policy and select candidates for election. In 2018, women accounted for fewer than one in five (18 %) leaders of major political parties (those with more than 5 % of seats in parliament) across the EU, and one in three deputy leaders (34 %)^[3]. In Czechia, Hungary, Malta and Slovakia, none of the major parties has had a woman leader since data was first collected in 2011.

The gender balance among cabinet ministers in national governments has been moving in the right direction since 2005, with the share of women ministers growing from 21 % at the end of 2005 to 31 % in November 2018. There are, however, considerable variations between Member States. Although governments in Spain, Sweden, France, Germany and Denmark are gender balanced (with at least 40 % of senior ministers of each gender), in all the other national governments men account for more than 60 % of cabinet ministers. In 2019, Lithuania became the only EU Member State with an all-male government, with Hungary close behind. In 2018, after appointing its first woman minister since 2014, men accounted for 93 % of Hungary's cabinet ministers. Slovenia also saw its share of women ministers plunge from 47 % to just 24 % in the same year.

Nevertheless, in the past year, there were significant increases in the share of women among cabinet ministers in Czechia (12 % to 27 %), Spain (36 % to 61 %), Cyprus (8 % to 17 %), Austria (21 % to 36 %), Portugal (17 % to 29 %), Romania (21 % to 33 %) and Slovakia (20 % to 33 %)^[4].

While the continued under-representation of women in government remains a fundamental concern, the political sidelining of women at cabinet level is just as worrying when allocating the portfolios usually considered to have lower political priority or seen as 'soft'. In November 2018, two thirds (66 %) of all male cabinet ministers in the EU held a portfolio with a high profile (so-called basic or economic functions) compared to just over half (51 %) of female ministers. Moreover, 40 % of all women ministers had a sociocultural portfolio compared to just 19 % of men.

The rate of change at regional and local levels is extremely slow. In 2018 women held a third (33 %) of the seats in regional assemblies in the 20 Member States with regional councils, marginally higher (3 p.p.) than in 2010. Regional assemblies included at least 40 % of each gender in five Member States (BE, ES, FR, FI, SE).

However, in Italy, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary men occupied more than four out of every five seats.

The latest local/municipal council data from June 2017 in all Member States showed that women accounted for 32 % of all members. Only councils in Sweden comprised at least 40 % of each gender, while those in Croatia, Greece, Cyprus and Romania comprised more than 80 % men. Local government leadership clearly remains elusive for women, who held only 15 % of local leadership positions (mayor or other leader of the municipal council) across the EU.

Footnotes

[1] Refers to EIGE's Gender statistics database, WMID data from the first quarterly update following the election date.

[2] Considering the 50-50 quota applied to two thirds of candidates in the proportional part. The remaining one third of MPs are elected in constituencies with majoritarian systems, and the quota is 40-60.

[3] Data collection in May-June 2018 identified 152 parties across the 28 EU Member States.

[4] EIGE's Gender statistics database, WMID, November 2018.