

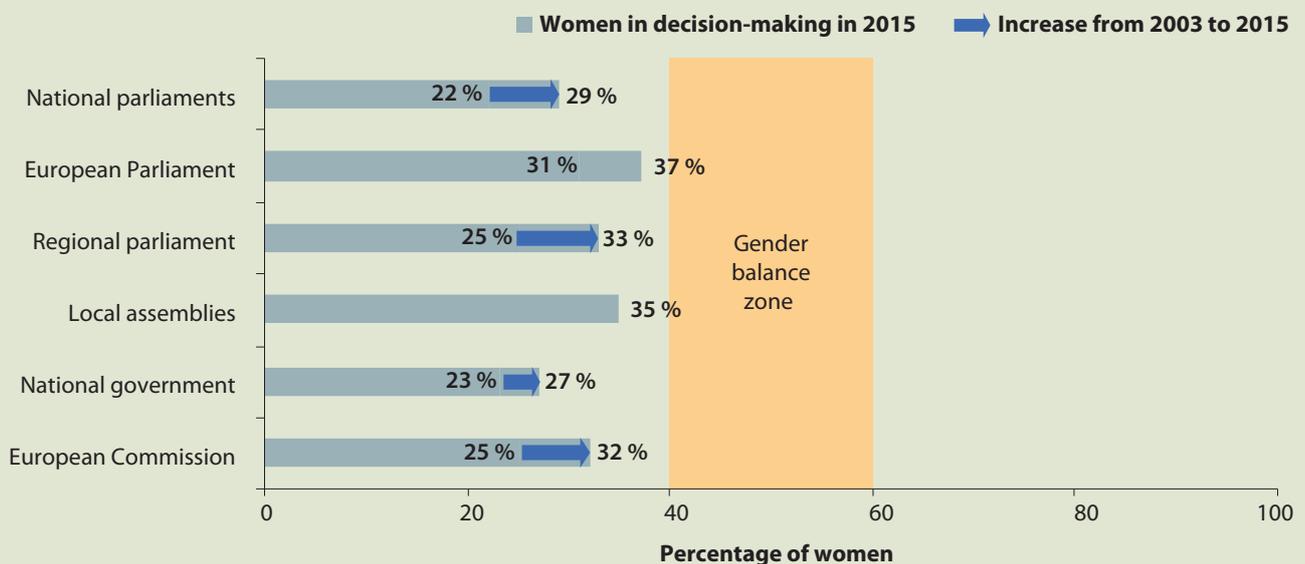
**Equal participation of women and men in politics is an important condition for effective democracy and good governance. Apart from strengthening and enhancing the democratic system, the participation of more women in political decision-making has many positive effects on society that can help improve the lives of women and men. Benefits include more equitable societies and inclusive governance, higher standards of living, positive development in education, health and infrastructure, and a decrease in political corruption.**

## A slow but steady road to the top for women

Over the past decade, women have been steadily increasing their share of top leadership positions in political institutions and public administration across the EU. The graph below shows the progress that has been made since 2003 at local, regional, national and European level.



Figure 1 – Improvements in gender balance in political power in the EU-28, 2003–2015



Source: European Commission, Database on Women and Men in Decision-Making.

## Men maintain their grip on political party leadership

### Women on the edge of informal networks

Most political parties in the EU are led by men, as shown in EIGE's report on Gender Equality in Power and Decision-Making (2015). The report points out that women accounted for only 13 % of leaders and 33 % of deputy leaders of major political parties across the EU in 2014. Formal and informal networks within political parties are of utmost importance in reaching top positions, maintaining party support and implementing policy changes. Informal networking after working hours is mostly done by men. Therefore, the existence of these networks in male-dominated spheres can sustain male dominance and leadership (EIGE's report on Gender equality in power and decision-making).

### Gender stereotypes hold women back from top roles

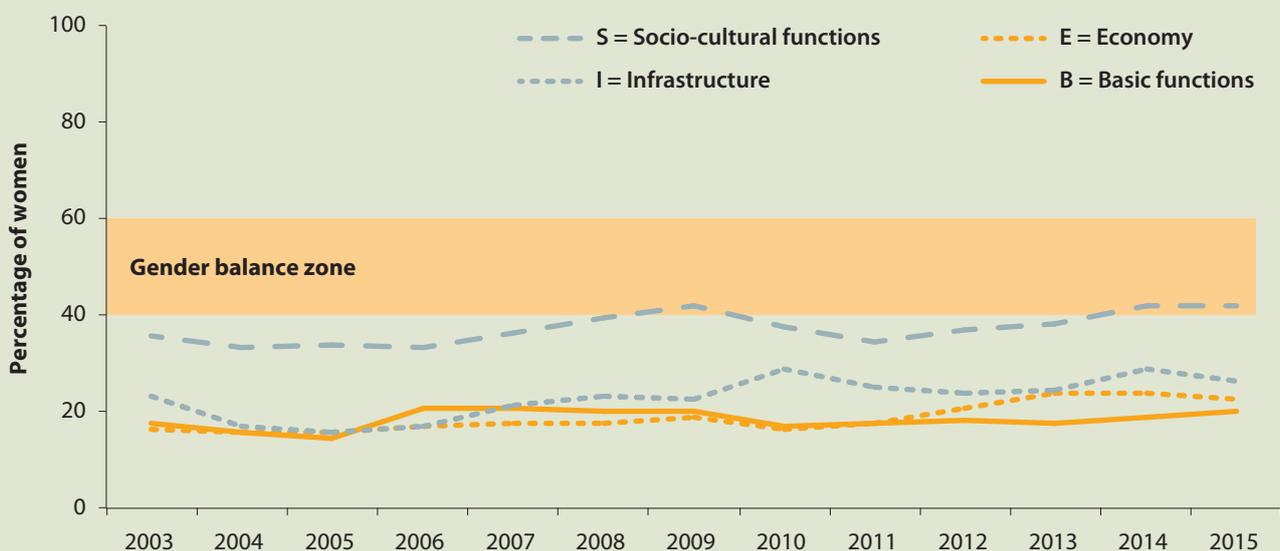
The persistence of gender-based stereotypes and the internal culture of many political parties, which is characterised by the prevailing 'masculine' leadership style, continue to hinder equal representa-

tion. Historically, leadership positions have been occupied mainly by men. The characteristics and skills expected of leaders — such as assertiveness, dominance or rational thinking — are typically linked to masculine characteristics and thus leadership is commonly associated with men. Gender stereotypes are also reflected in the distribution of cabinet portfolios and senior administrative positions in ministries. Men dominate portfolios relating to basic state functions such as defence, justice and foreign policy, whereas women are concentrated in ministries with socio-cultural functions, reinforcing stereotypical expectations that women are better suited to fields such as education, health and culture.

### Political parties shut the gate on women

Political parties play a key role in determining the degree and the quality of women's opportunities to participate in party politics. Women's opportunities to enter leadership positions are also in the hands of political parties and the party elites controlling the selection and admission processes. Political parties also determine the order of electoral lists, short lists for constituencies and party structures. For these reasons, political parties are often referred to as 'gate-keepers'.

Figure 2 – Proportion of women in government by type of portfolio in the EU-28, 2003–2015



## What is being done to improve gender balance?

Several EU Member States have strengthened their commitment to gender equality in political decision-making by introducing mandatory or voluntary gender quotas in order to create gender balance in politics and introduce targets for gender balance in candidate selection. EIGE's research findings show that Member States with binding or voluntary quotas had on average, the most pronounced increase in women's political representation since 2003. Figures show there was an increase of 10 percentage points to reach an average of 29 % women in national parliaments in 2014. In countries with no quota, women's representation stood at 27%, with minimal increase on average over the past decade. Quotas are one measure to improve gender balance, however alone, they are not enough. Other measures are such as public debate, campaigns, regular monitoring, and holistic programs to encourage more women into politics are also needed.

## Good practices to increase women's role in political decision-making

EIGE has identified a range of good practices in order to equip and empower more women with the relevant skills needed to pursue a political career, in an environment that is more diverse and representative.

**Targeted measures and initiatives:** Binding legal or voluntary measures implemented by political parties are found to increase women's participation in decision-making. A wider array of targeted incentives, such as public debate, awareness raising and more transparent recruitment and career development practices are also important for progress.

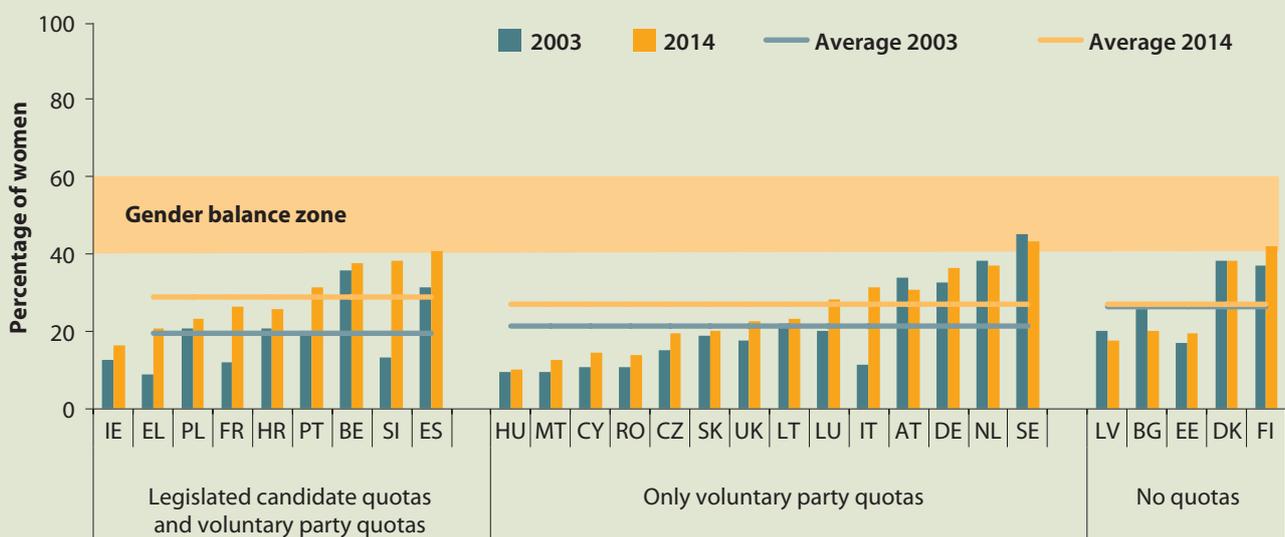
**Regular monitoring:** It's important to keep track of developments and assess what initiatives are successful or not. EIGE's Gender Statistics Database can help with monitoring as it provides access to sex-disaggregated data that can be compared across all EU Member States.

EIGE regularly produces reports reviewing different areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), as requested by the presidencies of the Council of the European Union. Most recent reports include:

- Gender equality in power and decision-making (2016);
- Gender gap in pensions in the EU (2015);
- Gender equality and economic independence: part-time work and self-employment (2014).

You can explore all of EIGE's previous BPfA reports and publications at <http://eige.europa.eu/monitoring-the-bpfa>

Figure 3 – Proportion of women in national parliaments where quotas are used in the EU-28, 2003–2015



Source: European Commission, Database on Women and Men in Decision-Making; QuotaProject, available at: <http://www.quotaproject.org/>; Krook, 2009; Thames and Williams, 2013.

**Engage young women:** Unless more young women are attracted to political life, the under-representation of women in elective office will continue. Mentoring, training courses, public campaigns and professional networking can play an important role in encouraging more women to stand for office and prepare them for a political career.



## A word on gender-sensitive parliaments

Parliaments that create an enabling environment for women, free from workplace harassment and discriminatory practices can support more women to become actively involved in politics. EIGE is developing an online, interactive tool that helps to measure the 'gender sensitivity' of a political insti-

**Gender balance:** An acceptable ratio is generally considered as 40/60.

**Gender parity:** A numerical concept often referred to as a ratio of 50/50.

**Critical mass:** When at least 30% of women or men are represented in decision-making positions

Source: *Gender Equality Glossary and Thesaurus*  
<http://eige.europa.eu/rdc/thesaurus>

<http://eige.europa.eu/rdc/thesaurus>

tution. The tool looks at a range of key criteria, from electoral systems to parliamentary working conditions. Through examining the barriers women face as politicians at all stages of their career, this new tool will help institutions to identify discriminatory practices and develop measures to address them.

## EU Policy priorities

The EU's commitment to equality between women and men in decision-making is reinforced in the European Commission's Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016–2019. It lists the promotion of gender equality in decision-making as one of the priority areas. The document also outlines action for the collection and dissemination of data on women and men in high decision-making positions, in close cooperation with EIGE.

The European Pact for Gender Equality 2011–2020 reaffirms the Council's commitment to gender equality, and also specifically seeks to 'promote women's empowerment in political and economic life.'

## European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policy makers 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.

## Contact details

<http://eige.europa.eu>   
[facebook.com/eige.europa.eu](https://www.facebook.com/eige.europa.eu)   
[twitter.com/eurogender](https://twitter.com/eurogender)   
[youtube.com/eurogender](https://www.youtube.com/eurogender)   
[eige.sec@eige.europa.eu](mailto:eige.sec@eige.europa.eu)   
 +370 5 215 7444 