

Statistical brief: gender balance in politics

Political assemblies and executives too often fail to reflect the gender diversity of the population they represent, with women significantly under-represented in many cases. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) regularly monitors the situation in parliaments and governments across the EU and in

the seven EU candidate and potential candidate countries that receive support from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA beneficiaries), as well as in Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

European Parliament elections broke through the 40 % threshold and the European Commission elected a female president for the very first time

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 out of 747 seats (40.7 %) in the constitutive session of the new parliament in July. Currently, just over half (15) of the Member States ⁽¹⁾ have a gender-balanced representation (i.e. at least 40 % of each gender amongst their MEPs); Cyprus is the only Member State to have no women MEPs at all. The elec-

tion of David Sassoli as President of the European Parliament means that a man has led the European Parliament 86 % of the time since it became a directly elected institution in 1979 ⁽²⁾.

The new European Commission also has the most gender-balanced configuration to date, with 12 women (44.4 %) and 15 men (55.6 %) ⁽³⁾, and its first woman president following the election of Ursula von der Leyen.

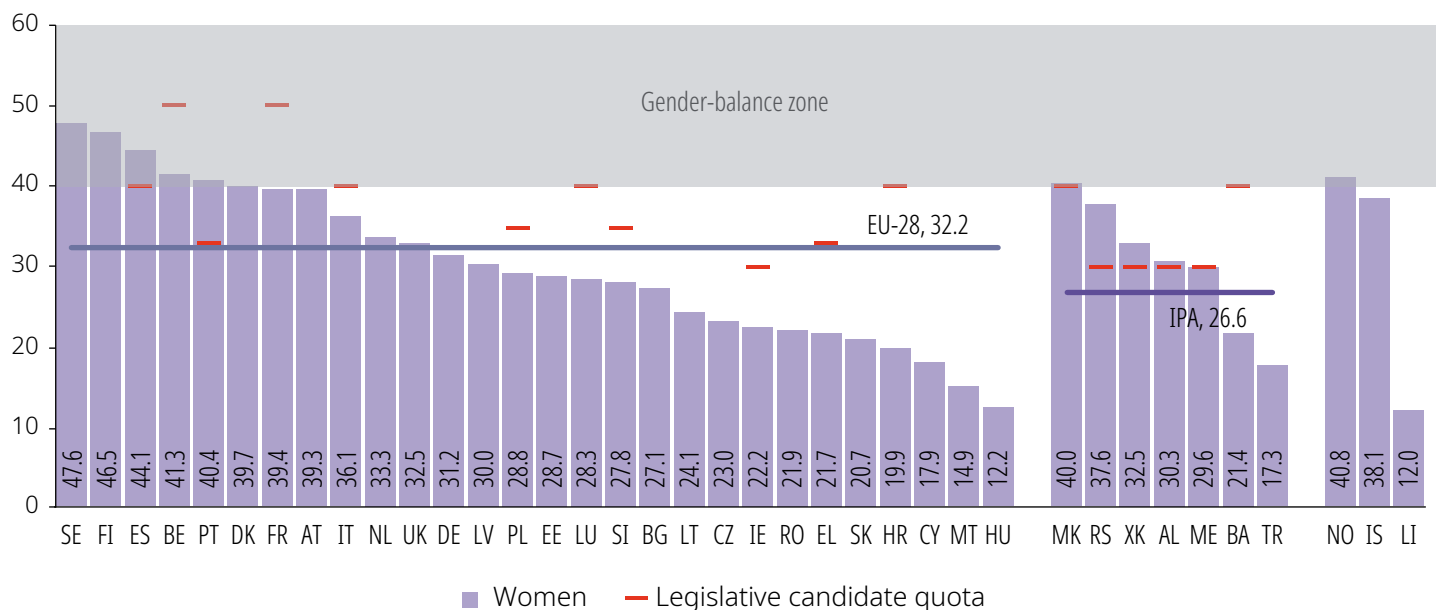
Women account for just under a third of members of national parliaments

In November 2019, the combined members of the single/lower houses of national parliaments across the EU were two-thirds men (67.8 %) and one-third women (32.2 %), and just five out of 28 had a woman leader (Bulgaria, Spain, Latvia, the Netherlands and Poland). Parliaments in Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Finland and Sweden include at least 40 % of each gender, but

women hold less than one in five seats in Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary and Malta (Figure 1).

In the IPA beneficiaries the imbalance is slightly more pronounced, with 73.4 % men and 26.6 % women across all seven countries; only Montenegro has a gender-balanced parliament and only Serbia has a woman leading the national parliament.

Figure 1: Share of women in the single/lower houses of national parliaments, %, November 2019



Source: EIGE's Gender Statistics Database, national parliaments. Data for the United Kingdom refer to 2019 Q3, when its parliament was dissolved

(1) Denmark, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.
 (2) Of the 16 Presidents of the European Parliament since 1979, only two have been women (see <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/the-president/en/the-presidency>). The figure of 86 % is based on the actual length of tenure of each president, measured up to the end of November 2019.
 (3) Note that the current Commission only has 27 members, as the United Kingdom refused to nominate a candidate pending its anticipated withdrawal from the EU.

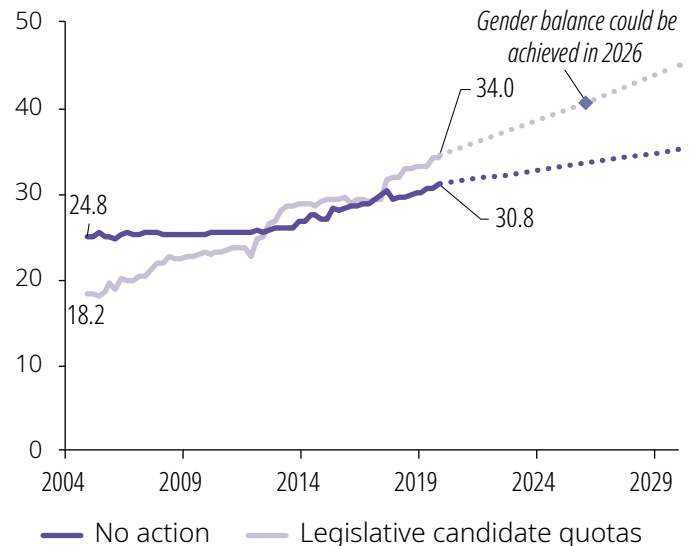
Legislative action generally stimulates progress

Over the last 20 years, a number of countries have taken steps to improve the gender balance in their parliaments through the application of legislative quotas that aim to ensure a minimum proportion of each gender (though usually the focus is on women) amongst candidates, sometimes with additional requirements regarding the placement of candidates on lists⁽⁴⁾. Legislative candidate quotas are currently in place in 11 Member States⁽⁵⁾ and in all IPA beneficiaries except Turkey. The use of compliant candidate lists does not, however, necessarily translate into electoral results and, across the EU to date, only in Spain and Portugal has the proportion of elected women members matched (or exceeded) the quota target. In IPA beneficiaries, quotas seem to have had more impact, whereby the parliaments of Albania, Kosovo⁽⁶⁾, North Macedonia and Serbia have at least as many women as targeted by the respective candidate quota, whilst Montenegro is only marginally short of the target (29.6 % women versus the 30 % quota).

Whilst legislative quotas do not guarantee progress, there is clear evidence of a generally positive impact. Considering the improvement in Member States since 2004 (the first year with complete data⁽⁷⁾), the proportion of women members of parliament in countries with legislative candidate quotas has almost doubled, from 18.2 % to 34.0 % (+ 15.8 percentage points (pp)), while countries without quotas started from a higher base (24.8 %) but ended lower (30.8 %, an increase of just 6.0 pp) (Figure 2)⁽⁸⁾. If both groups continue at their respective rates of change, countries with legislated quotas will

achieve gender balance in 6 years, whereas those taking no action will need more than two decades (roughly until 2042).

Figure 2: Trends in the share of women in single/lower houses of national parliaments in the 28 Member States by type of action, %, 2004–2019 and projections to 2030



Source: EIGE's Gender Statistics Database, national parliaments. Countries have been grouped according to whether or not they have applied a legislative candidate quota to the national parliament elections. The 'legislative candidate quota' group covers Member States with a legislated gender quota applied in full to the latest elections for the national parliament. The 'no action' group covers Member States with no legislative candidate quota or with a quota that has not yet been fully applied

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

Political parties are seen as the gatekeepers of gender equality in political representation since they determine the selection of candidates and how they are presented to the electorate. Whilst many political parties have put in place voluntary gender quotas (independently of any legislation that may apply) in relation to candidates, there remains a significant gender imbalance in their internal structures. In 2019 women accounted for less than one in five (17.1 %) leaders of major political parties in the Member States⁽⁹⁾ (i.e. those with at least 5 % of

seats in the relevant national parliament) and just over one in three deputy leaders (34.5 %). Women have even less power in the IPA beneficiaries, where they accounted for 6.5 % of leaders and 13.9 % of deputy leaders.

Moreover, there is little sign of any significant progress being made over time (Figure 3). Notably, in Czechia, Hungary, Malta and Slovakia, as well as in all IPA beneficiaries except Turkey, none of the major political parties has had a woman leader since the first data collection in 2011.

⁽⁴⁾ For example, 'zippering' (alternate women and men) or having at least one woman in every three on a ranked list.

⁽⁵⁾ In chronological order: France (50 %), 2000; Belgium (50 %), 2002; Portugal (33 %), 2006; Slovenia (35 %), 2006; Spain (40 %), 2007; Greece (33 %), 2008; Croatia (40 %), 2008; Poland (35 %), 2011; Ireland (30 %), 2012; Italy (40 %), 2017; and Luxembourg (40 %), 2016.

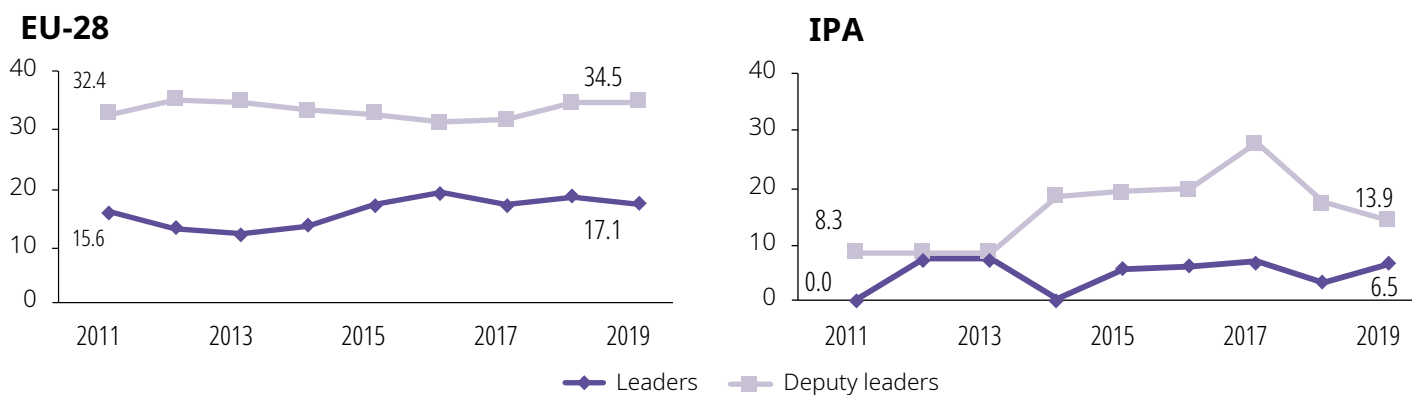
⁽⁶⁾ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

⁽⁷⁾ Excluding Croatia, which has been included from 2007.

⁽⁸⁾ In Luxembourg a quota was introduced in 2016 but will not be fully applied until the next elections. It has, therefore, been included in the 'no action' group.

⁽⁹⁾ Data collection in May 2019 covered 152 major political parties across the 28 Member States.

Figure 3: Share of women leaders and deputy leaders of major political parties in Member States and IPA beneficiaries, %, 2011–2019



Source: EIGE’s Gender Statistics Database, major political parties

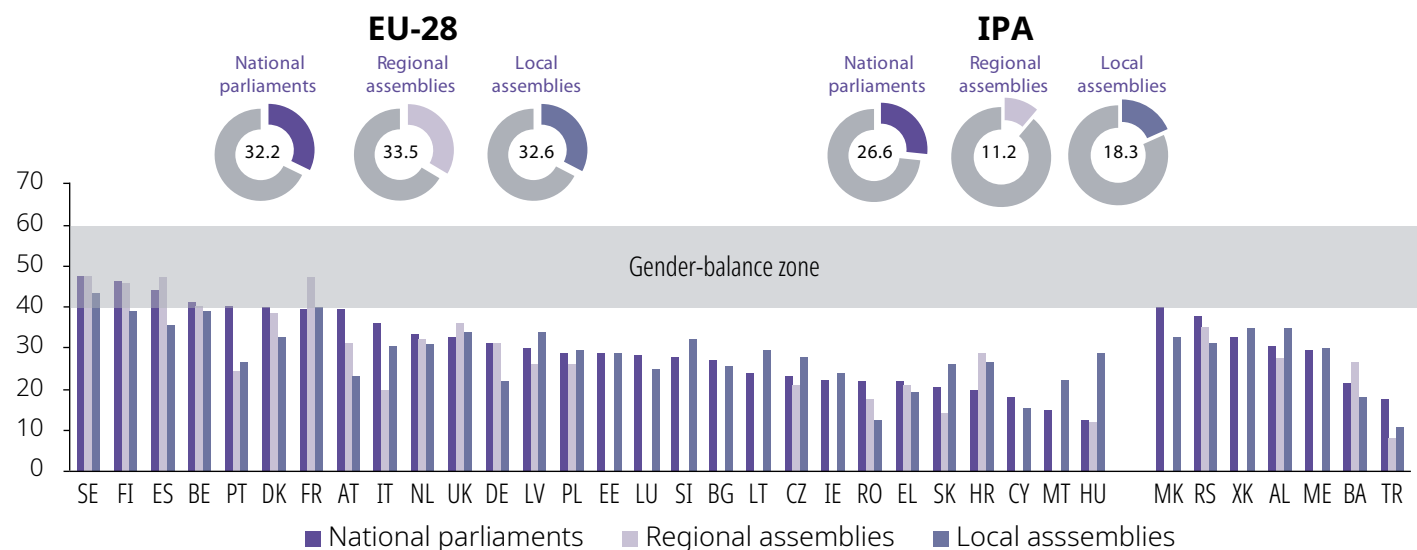
NB: IPA beneficiaries have progressively been added to EIGE’s data collection. Data shown cover North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey between 2011 and 2014, Montenegro since 2015 and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo since 2018

Gender imbalances in political representation persist across levels

In the EU as a whole, the proportion of women participating in elected assemblies is remarkably similar across territorial levels: 32.2 % at national level, 33.5 % at regional level⁽¹⁰⁾ and 32.6 % at local level⁽¹¹⁾ (Figure 4). In general, this is also true at country level. Although the base level of women’s representation varies across countries, within each country there is less than a 10-pp difference between the shares of women at national, regional and local levels in 21 of the 28 Member States⁽¹²⁾.

Sweden is the only Member State with a gender-balanced representation in national parliaments as well as in regional and local assemblies. Belgium, Spain, France and Finland have at least a third of women represented at all levels. In contrast, Greece and Romania have less than 25 % women in all three levels, as do Ireland, Cyprus and Malta in two levels (these countries have no regional authorities).

Figure 4: Share of women in national parliaments, regional assemblies and local assemblies, %, 2019



Source: EIGE’s Gender Statistics Database, national parliaments, regional assemblies and local/municipal councils

NB: Countries are sorted (Member States and IPA beneficiaries separately) by descending share of women in national parliaments

⁽¹⁰⁾ EIGE’s data collection covers the elected assemblies of regions endowed with powers of self-government and acting between the central government and local authorities (though not necessarily within any formal hierarchy). The following countries do not have any regions conforming to this definition and therefore have no data for the regional level: Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland, Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia.

⁽¹¹⁾ The EU-level figure for local politics is heavily influenced by France, which contributes over 40 % of the councillors recorded. Excluding France, women account for 27 % of councillors in the remaining countries.

⁽¹²⁾ The exceptions are Spain, Italy, Latvia, Hungary, Austria, Portugal and Slovakia.

In the IPA beneficiaries, women's representation is generally lower than in the EU and there are greater differences between levels (26.6 % at national level, 11.2 % at regional level and 18.3 % at local level). Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia

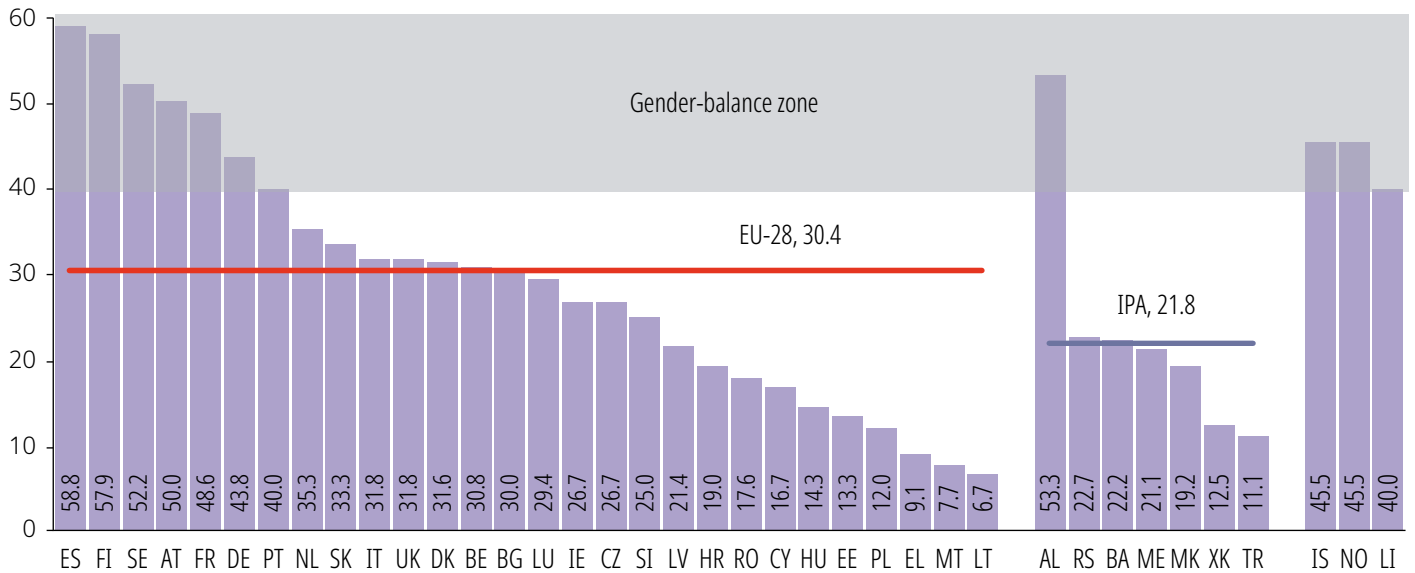
and Serbia have at least 30 % women at all relevant levels, but Turkey has less than 20 % at all levels and only just over one in 10 women at regional and local levels.

Men account for seven in 10 government ministers

In November 2019, 24 of the 28 Member States had a man as prime minister, the exceptions being Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Austria. Men also accounted for the large majority (69.6 %) of senior ministers (i.e. those with a seat in the cabinet), with women holding only 30.4 % of these positions (Figure 5). Governments were gender balanced in

Germany, Spain, France, Austria, Portugal, Finland and Sweden, but women held less than one in 10 cabinet positions in Greece, Lithuania and Malta. Gender imbalances are equally pronounced in all IPA beneficiaries (21.8 % women overall) except in Albania, where women form a slight majority (8:7).

Figure 5: Share of women in national governments (senior ministers), %, November 2019



Source: EIGE's Gender Statistics Database, [national governments](#)

This note is based on data published on EIGE's Gender Statistics Database in Q4 2019. Access the most updated data [here](#). Comprehensive information about the basis for the sample and specifications of the data can be found under the 'Metadata' tab of each indicator (e.g. [here](#))

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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