



Gender Balance in the Security Sector

Women gain ground in security and peacekeeping leadership, but progress remains slow

In 2025, the world marked the 25th anniversary of the United Nations (UN) resolution on women, peace and security. This resolution, together with the 2024 General Recommendation No 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), urges UN member states to ensure gender parity in peace and security decision-making ⁽¹⁾. But this milestone still underscores a persistent gap: despite formal commitments, decision-making structures in security and peacekeeping remain imbalanced.

This brief presents recent data and trends on women's and men's representation in decision-making roles across the defence and security sectors, including the armed forces, and in peacekeeping.

The analysis covers the EU and its Member States and major international organisations active in this field, including the UN, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NATO is a political and military alliance of 32 countries from Europe and North America. It has both civilian and military structures. The North Atlantic Council (or 'Council') is NATO's main political decision-making body, the NATO Secretary General is its highest international civil servant and the Military Committee is its senior military authority.

Men dominate EU representation on the Council

Each member nation is represented in the North Atlantic Council by a permanent representative. As of November 2025, 6 of the 32 permanent representatives were women (19 %) (Figure 1). Among the 23 EU Member States that are NATO members, only three representatives are women (13 %).

The role of NATO Secretary General has been held by men throughout the 75-year history of the organisation ⁽²⁾. The current Deputy Secretary General is only the second woman in this post ⁽³⁾.

The Permanent Representatives of the Military Committee, with one senior military officer representing each NATO member nation, are currently all men.

⁽¹⁾ CEDAW, General Recommendation No 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, United Nations, 2024.

⁽²⁾ The majority of the secretaries general within the last 75 years have been prime ministers, ministers of defence or foreign ministers. These are roles that have traditionally been held by men – see the section '[Women break through in defence leadership, though momentum has slowed since 2020](#)'.

⁽³⁾ The current Deputy Secretary General is [Radmila Shekerinska](#). The first woman appointed to this role was [Rose Gottemoeller](#), who served from October 2016 to October 2019.

Figure 1 | Shares of women and men among members of the North Atlantic Council and the Military Committee, November 2025



NB: *Military Committee refers to permanent Military Representatives (MilReps).*

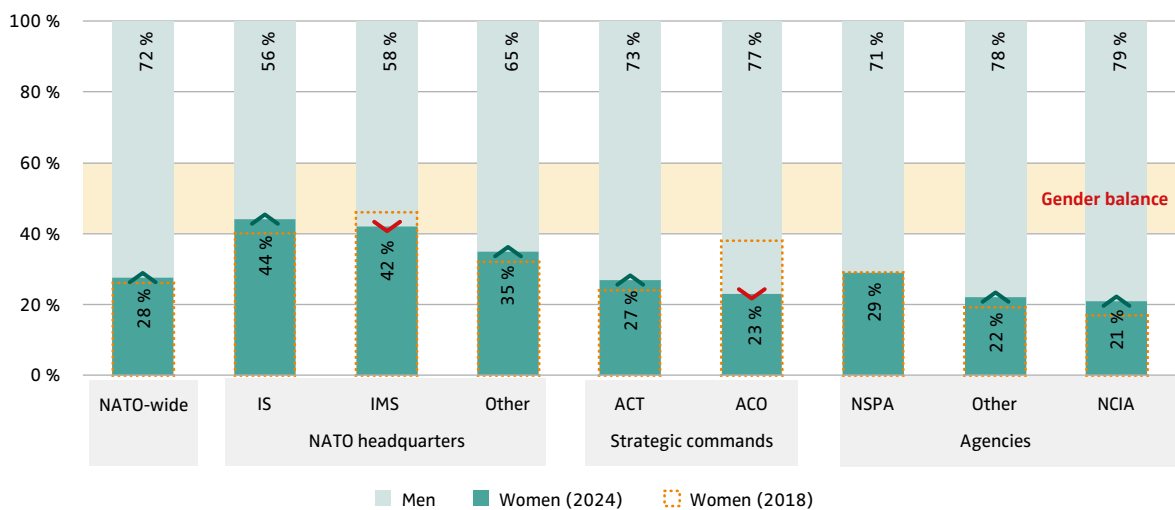
Source: European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), based on direct data collection from the NATO website, November 2025.

NATO civilian workforce remains male-dominated, with stronger representation of women at headquarters than in commands and agencies

In 2024, women made up 28 % of NATO’s civilian workforce, with the other 72 % being men (Figure 2). However, this aggregate figure masks marked differences across entities. Women were better represented in NATO headquarters entities than in strategic commands and agencies. Within NATO headquarters, both the International Staff (IS) and the International Military Staff (IMS) were close to achieving gender balance, with women accounting for 44 % and 42 % of civilian staff, respectively. By contrast, men represented more than 70 % of civilian staff in both the strategic commands and NATO agencies.

Compared with 2018, the share of women in NATO’s civilian workforce had increased only slightly, from 26 % to 28 %. This pattern is broadly reflected across entities, with two notable exceptions. In the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA), women’s representation remained unchanged at 29 %. In contrast, the share of women declined in both the IMS and Allied Command Operations (ACO). The decline was particularly sharp in ACO, where the share of women in the organisation fell by 15 percentage points, from 38 % in 2018 to 23 % in 2024.

Figure 2 | Shares of women and men among civilian staff, NATO-wide and by entity, 2018 and 2024

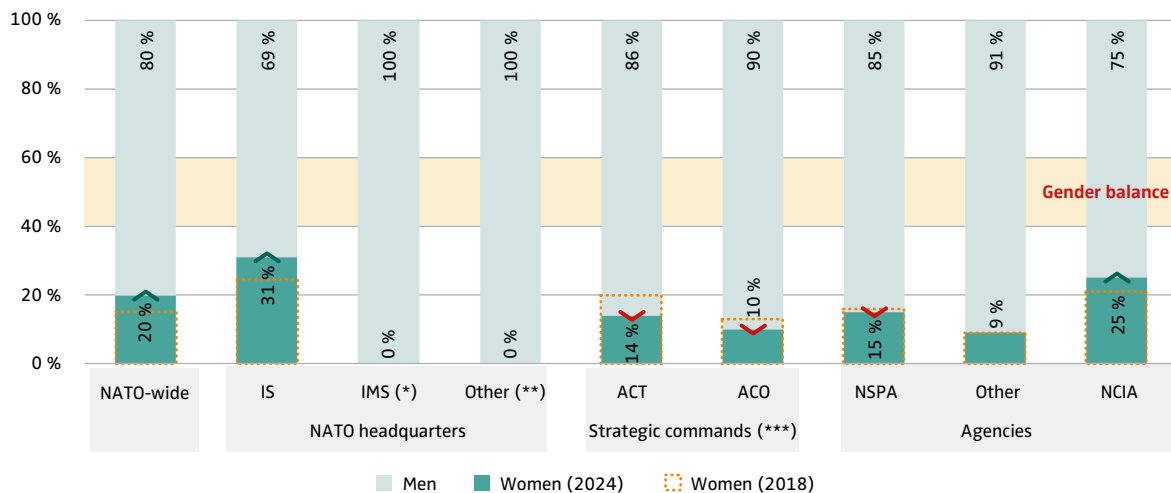


NB: ACO = Allied Command Operations; ACT = Allied Command Transformation; IMS = International Military Staff; IS = International Staff; NCIA = NATO Communications and Information Agency; NSPA = NATO Support and Procurement Agency. ‘NATO-wide’ covers all entities. Sources: EIGE, based on data from NATO, ‘2018 annual diversity and inclusion report’, 2019; and NATO, ‘2024 annual report on diversity, inclusion and accessibility’, 2025.

Women were also under-represented in civilian leadership posts. In 2024, in only two NATO entities were more than 20 % of civilian leadership positions held by women: the IS (31 %, up from 25 % in 2018) and the NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCIA) (25 %, up from 21 % in 2018) (Figure 3).

In all NATO headquarters entities except the IS, civilian leadership posts were held exclusively by men in both 2018 and 2024.

Figure 3 | Share of women and men in civilian leadership positions, NATO-wide and by entity, 2018 and 2024



(*) Data refers to two leadership positions held by civilian staff in the IMS in 2024.

(**) Data refers to six leadership positions held by civilian staff in other NATO headquarters entities in 2024.

(***) Data refers to 20 leadership positions in ACO and 7 in ACT held by civilian staff in 2024.

NB: ACO = Allied Command Operations; ACT = Allied Command Transformation; IMS = International Military Staff; IS = International Staff; NCIA = NATO Communications and Information Agency; NSPA = NATO Support and Procurement Agency. 'NATO-wide' covers all entities.

Sources: EIGE, based on data from NATO, '2018 annual diversity and inclusion report', 2019; and NATO, '2024 annual report on diversity, inclusion and accessibility', 2025.

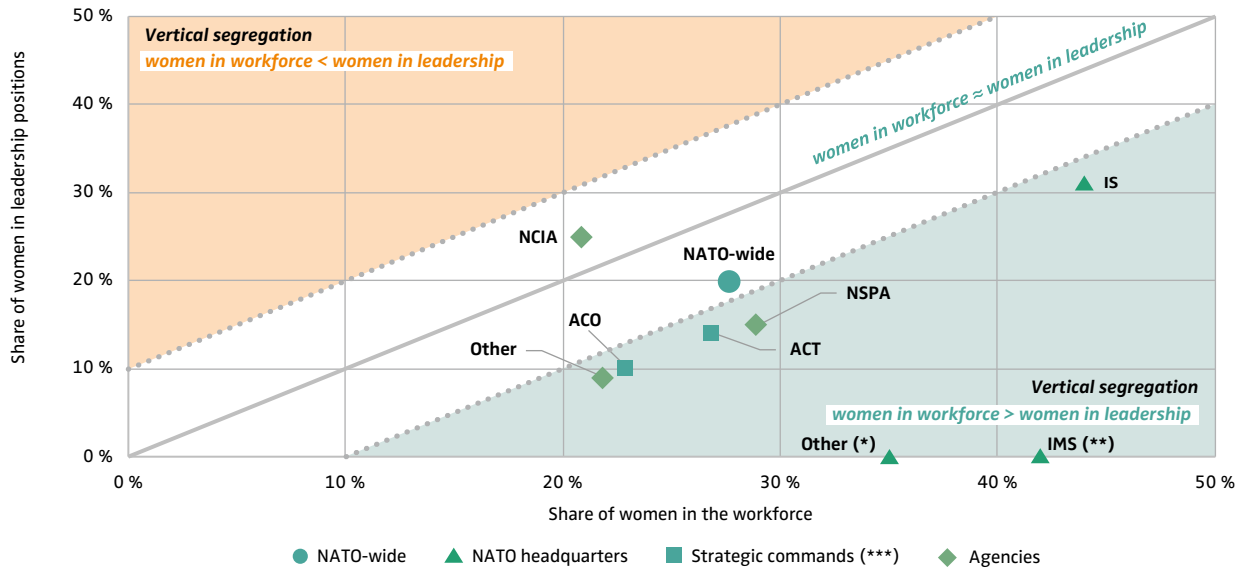
Vertical segregation persists – women remain under-represented in civilian leadership across NATO entities

In 2024, women accounted for 28 % of NATO's civilian workforce but held only 20 % of civilian leadership positions, pointing to a continued gap in access to decision-making roles (Figure 5).

Overall, the 8 percentage point gap between women's representation in the workforce and in leadership indicates persistent vertical segregation across NATO entities (Figure 4). This pattern is visible in almost all entities, although its scale varies. The largest gaps appear in the IS, the NSPA and other NATO agencies, where differences reach around 13–14 percentage points. In the IMS and in other NATO headquarters entities, civilian leadership posts were held exclusively by men despite relatively high shares of women in the workforce (42 % and 35 %, respectively).

A more balanced pattern is observed in the NCIA, where women accounted for 25 % of civilian leadership positions, compared with 21 % of the workforce.

Figure 4 | Share of women in the civilian workforce and in leadership positions, NATO-wide and by entity, 2024



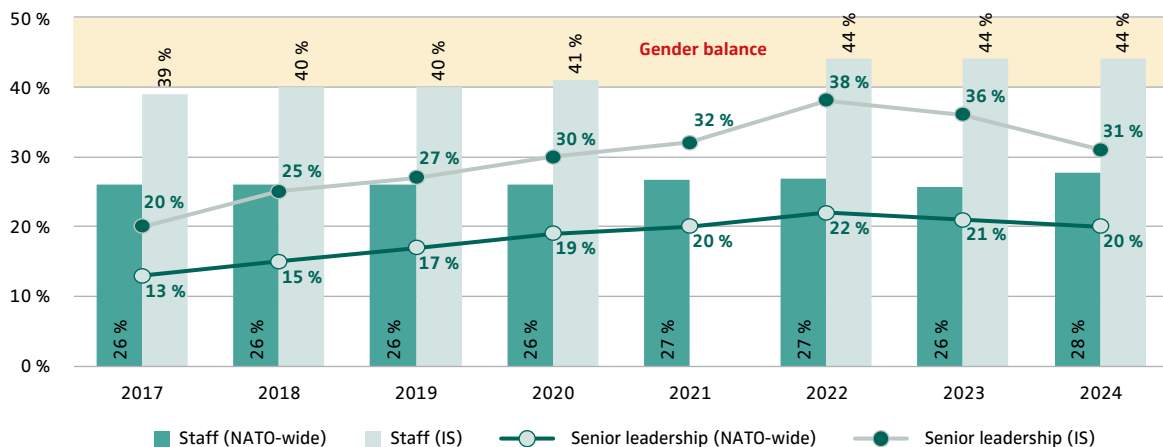
(*) Data refers to six leadership positions held by civilian staff in other NATO headquarters entities in 2024.
 (**) Data refers to two leadership positions held by civilian staff in the IMS in 2024.
 (***) Data refers to 20 leadership positions held by civilian staff in ACO and 7 in ACT in 2024.

NB: ACO = Allied Command Operations; ACT = Allied Command Transformation; IMS = International Military Staff; IS = International Staff; NCIA = NATO Communications and Information Agency; NSPA = NATO Support and Procurement Agency. 'NATO-wide' covers all entities.
 Source: EIGE, based on data from NATO, '2024 annual report on diversity, inclusion and accessibility', 2025.

International Staff has reached near gender balance in the workforce, but leadership gains remain fragile

Within the IS, gender balance at the workforce level has been maintained since 2018, with women accounting for around 44 % of staff in 2022–2024. By contrast, women’s representation in senior leadership, although higher than the NATO-wide average, has weakened in recent years. After rising from 13 % in 2017 to 22 % in 2022, it fell back to 20 % NATO-wide in 2024, with 31 % in the IS, suggesting that gains in women’s leadership remain uneven and vulnerable to reversal (Figure 5).

Figure 5 | Share of women in senior leadership positions among civilian staff, NATO-wide and IS, 2017–2024



NB: Data for the share of women among IS staff is not available for 2021.
 Sources: EIGE, based on data from NATO’s annual diversity and inclusion reports and Secretary General annual reports.

National armed forces in the EU

National armed forces are a key part of every country's security sector. They protect national territory, support international peace operations and respond to threats such as cyberattacks and hybrid warfare. They are central to carrying out national defence strategies and to contributing to collective security under international frameworks.

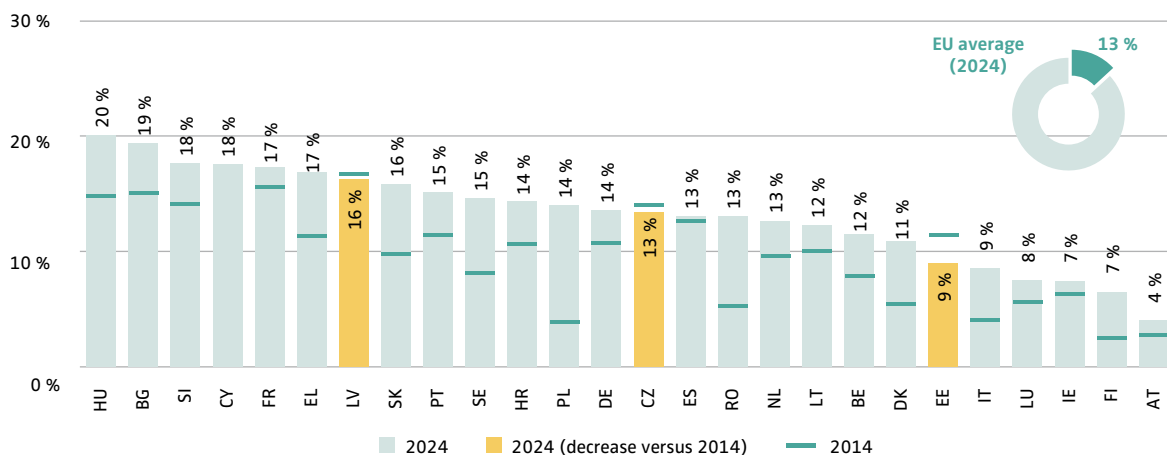
Some EU Member States such as France have introduced targets to increase the share of women in the armed forces ⁽⁴⁾. However, in most countries, progress depends on voluntary measures, recruitment campaigns and equal opportunity policies rather than formal targets. Germany, for example, has a specific diversity policy for its armed forces ⁽⁵⁾ and regularly publishes statistics informing the public about the current situation ⁽⁶⁾. Spain has set up a military observatory for equality between women and men in the armed forces, which publishes annual statistics as part of its wider actions ⁽⁷⁾.

EU armed forces remain dominated by men

The 2024 statistics show that women remain under-represented in the armed forces in the 26 EU Member States with available data. On average, women made up 13 % of full-time personnel, compared with 9 % in 2014 ⁽⁸⁾.

Hungary is the only EU Member State where women represent as many as one in five full-time personnel (20 %). In six Member States, the share of women is below 10 % (Figure 6). Most EU Member States have seen growth since 2014, especially Poland (from 4 % to 14 %) and Finland (from 2 % to 7 %). Estonia is the only Member State with a clear drop (from 11 % to 9 %), while Latvia and Czechia show smaller declines.

Figure 6 | Share of women among full-time members of national armed forces of EU Member States, 2014 and 2024



NB: 2024 data for Malta is not available; 2014 data for Cyprus and Malta is not available.

Sources: EIGE, based on data extracted from NATO, *The NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives 2023–2024 summary of the national reports of NATO member and partner nations*, Brussels; Permanent Mission of the Republic of Poland to the United Nations Office in Vienna, 'Exchange of information on the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security – Poland 2024', 2025 [data for Poland]; Ministry of National Defence (Romania), 'Conference of MoND gender advisors and the launch of "She for Romania" campaign', Ministry of National Defence website, 5 March 2025 [data for Romania]; and NATO, *Summary of the national reports of NATO member and partner nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspective*, Brussels, 2020 [2014 data for Ireland, Poland and Sweden].

⁽⁴⁾ The 2019 diversity plan of the Ministry of the Armed Forces in France sets indicative targets for increasing female representation in the military. See <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/sga/Le%20Plan%20mixite%3%A9.pdf>.

⁽⁵⁾ Federal Ministry of Defence (Germany), 'Ministry of Defence implements new diversity strategy', Federal Ministry of Defence website, 30 October 2024, <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/neue-diversitaetsstrategie-in-kraft-5852916>.

⁽⁶⁾ German Armed Forces, 'Women in the armed forces', <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/selbstverstaendnis/chancengerechtigkeit-bundeswehr/frauen-bundeswehr>.

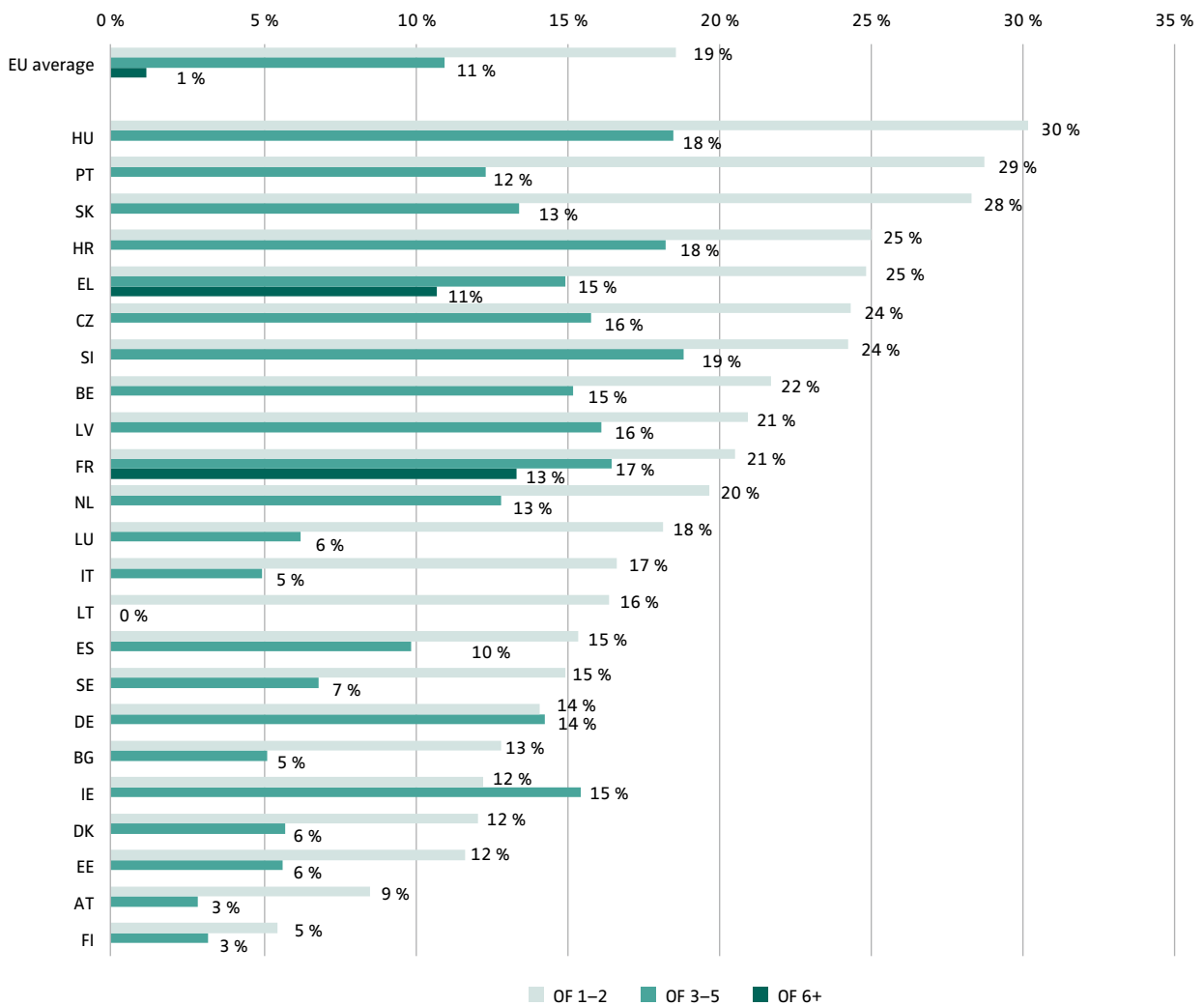
⁽⁷⁾ Ministry of Defence (Spain), 'Military observatory for equality between women and men in the armed forces', Ministry of Defence website, <https://www.defensa.gob.es/ministerio/organigrama/subdef/omi/>.

⁽⁸⁾ The data for 2024 is not available for Malta. The data for 2014 is not available for Cyprus or Malta.

Women’s access to top military leadership still limited across the EU

Data by rank and sex is available for 23 EU Member States that are NATO member or partner countries ⁽⁹⁾. In 2024, only Greece and France reported women in the highest ranks (category ‘OF 6+’, general officer) (see Figure 7). 19 EU Member States had no women in these positions ⁽¹⁰⁾. Overall, women held 1 % of the top-ranking positions. Although women account for an average of 13 % of armed forces personnel, their share declines at higher ranks. They represent 11 % of mid-ranking officers (categories OF 3 to OF 5) and 19 % of junior officers (categories OF 1 and OF 2). In Hungary, Portugal, Slovakia, Croatia and Greece, women accounted for at least 25 % of junior officers.

Figure 7 | Share of women in officer ranks, EU, 2024



NB: ‘OF 1–2’ = junior officers; ‘OF 3–5’ = senior or field-grade officers; ‘OF 6+’ = general officers. The data is sorted by highest to lowest share of women holding ‘OF 1–2’ positions. The data for Czechia and Estonia refers to 2022 (2024 data not available). The data for Cyprus, Malta, Poland and Romania is not available.

Sources: EIGE, based on data on the overall distribution of women and men by rank for each country published in NATO, [Summary of the national reports of NATO member and partner nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspective](#), Brussels, 2020 [data for Czechia and Estonia]; and NATO, [The NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives 2023–2024 summary of the national reports of NATO member and partner nations](#), Brussels.

⁽⁹⁾ As of November 2025, 23 EU Member States were NATO member countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden). Three further Member States are NATO partner countries (Ireland, Malta and Austria). Cyprus is neither a member nor a partner.

⁽¹⁰⁾ IE and LT reported 0 % of men and women in OF 6+ positions.

Common security and defence policy peacekeeping missions

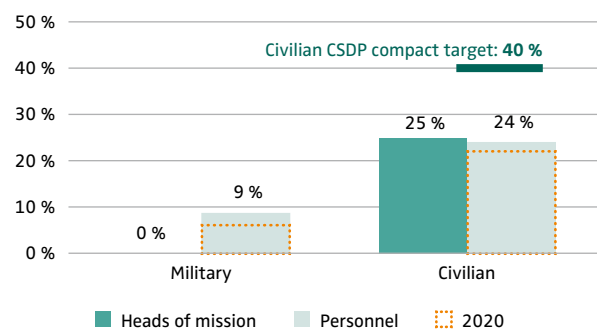
The common security and defence policy (CSDP) is a cornerstone of the European Union's common foreign and security policy and guides the EU's civilian and military missions aimed at crisis management, international security and peacekeeping.

Women lead more often in civilian missions, with the 40 % target still to be achieved

In 2025, women led a quarter of civilian CSDP missions (25 %), an improvement from 2020, when all such positions were held by men (see Figure 8). In contrast, none of the military CSDP missions has ever had a woman head of mission.

Progress towards gender balance in mission staffing remains limited. By 2025, women accounted for less than 1 in 10 military staff (9 %, up from 6 % in 2020) and 24 % of civilian staff (up from 22 %). The latter figure remains below the 40 % target set in the 2023 civilian CSDP compact, which was endorsed by the Member States and EU institutions. The compact commits to increasing women's participation to at least 40 % and striving for parity by mid 2027 ⁽¹¹⁾.

Figure 8 | Share of women among heads and personnel of military and civilian CSDP missions, October 2020 and June 2025



Sources: EIGE, based on data from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *Women in Multilateral Peace Operations in 2020: What's the state of play?*, 2020; and Pfeifer Cruz, C. and Ahmad, A. S., *Women in Multilateral Peace Operations in 2025: What is the state of play?*, SIPRI, Solna, 2025.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

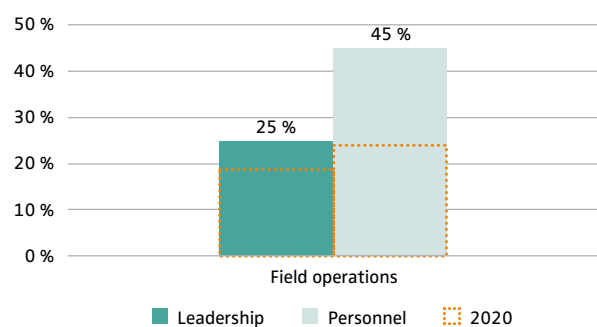
The OSCE is an intergovernmental organisation of 57 member states from Europe, North America and Asia. It promotes stability, peace and democracy, through political dialogue and field operations across its region.

In 2024, the OSCE renewed its 20-year-old commitment to advancing gender equality across the organisation and in participating states. However, this commitment does not include binding numerical targets or specific goals to be reached ⁽¹²⁾.

More women in field operations and room to grow in leadership

Between 2020 and 2025, the share of women personnel in OSCE field operations rose from 24 % to 45 % (see Figure 9). Progress in leadership roles was

Figure 9 | Share of women in leadership and personnel positions in OSCE field operations, 2020 and 2025



NB: Leadership positions cover heads of mission of OSCE field operations.

Sources: EIGE, based on data from SIPRI, *Women in Multilateral Peace Operations in 2020: What's the state of play?*, 2020; and Pfeifer Cruz, C. and Ahmad, A. S., *Women in Multilateral Peace Operations in 2025: What is the state of play?*, SIPRI, Solna, 2025.

⁽¹¹⁾ European External Action Service, 'Civilian CSDP compact – Towards more effective civilian missions', European External Action Service website, 22 May 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/civilian-csdp-compact-towards-more-effective-civilian-missions_en.

⁽¹²⁾ For more information, see <https://www.osce.org/chairpersonship/582250>. This renewed commitment was made on the 20th anniversary of the OSCE's original gender equality action plan. See OSCE, Ministerial Council Decision No 14/04 – 2004 OSCE action plan for the promotion of gender equality, Sofia, 7 December 2004.

more limited: the share of women increased from 19 % to 25 % but mainly because the total number of heads of mission (covered under leadership positions) decreased from 16 to 12 while the number of women remained at 3.

United Nations

The UN plays a central role in global peace and security through its Security Council and deployed UN peacekeeping operations. The Security Council is also responsible for maintaining international peace, overseeing peacekeeping missions and setting global norms on disarmament and security. It has 15 members, each with one vote, of which 10 are elected for two-year terms and 5 are permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States). The permanent members hold a special voting power known as the ‘veto’, and all UN members are required to comply with the Security Council’s decisions.

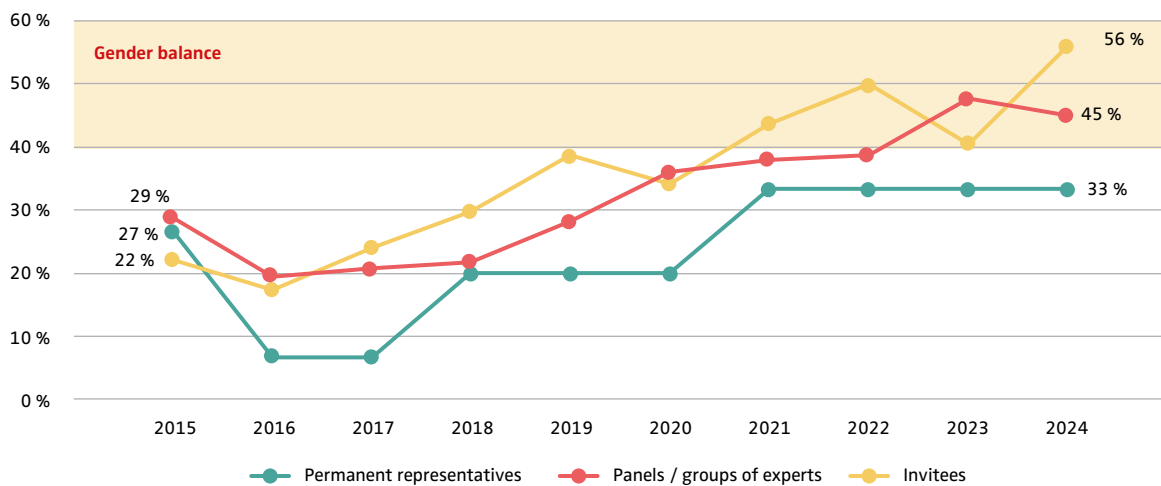
UN peacekeeping operations support countries in the fragile transition from conflict to peace, providing security, political assistance and peacebuilding infrastructure. In May 2025, there were 11 active UN-led peacekeeping operations ⁽¹³⁾.

Women gain ground on the UN Security Council, but men still lead

The UN Security Council may invite members of the United Nations Secretariat or other persons to provide information or support its discussions. Members of panels and groups of experts supporting sanctions committees can also brief the Security Council.

From 2015 to 2024, the share of women invited to address the Security Council more than doubled from 22 % to 56 %. Women’s participation in panels and groups of experts has also increased, jumping from 29 % to 45 % over the same period (Figure 10). Despite this progress, decision-making power (i.e. voting rights) remains in the hands of men. In 2024, women held a third (33 %) of the 15 permanent representative posts on the Security Council, up from 27 % in 2015. Conversely, as of February 2026, all five permanent members with veto power were represented by men ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Figure 10 | Share of women on the UN Security Council, by role, 2015–2024



Source: EIGE, based on data from Security Council Affairs Division, ‘Women at the Security Council dashboard’, UN website, data extracted on 14 November 2025, <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/women-security-council>.

⁽¹³⁾ United Nations Peacekeeping, ‘Peacekeeping operations fact sheet’, 31 May 2025, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/peacekeeping_fact_sheet_may_2025_english_revision_1.pdf.

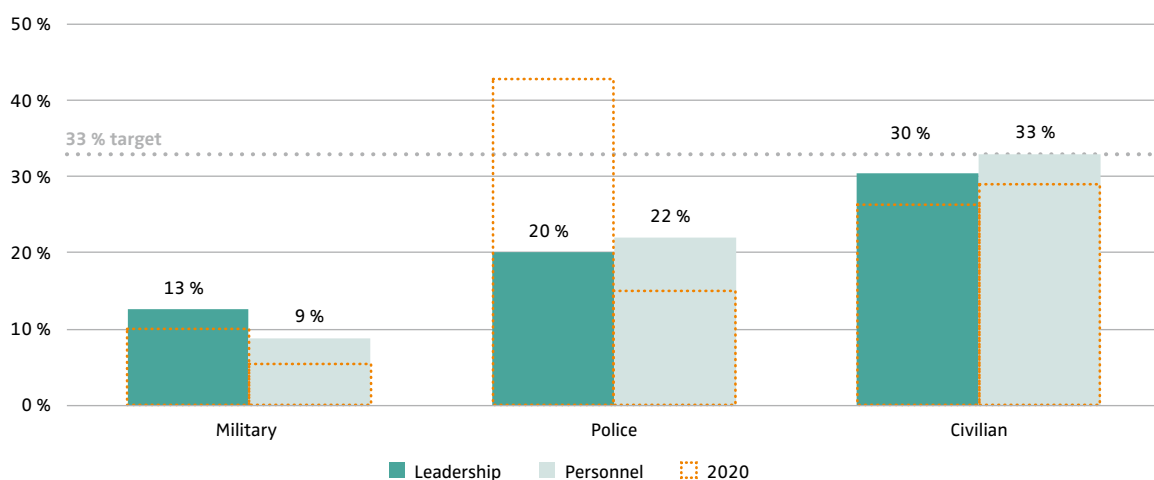
⁽¹⁴⁾ See links by country on the UN Security Council website at <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/current-members>. Data collected 17 February 2026.

Growing leadership of women in UN peacekeeping operations, with police roles still lagging

Between 2020 and 2025, the share of women in UN peacekeeping operations increased across all the main categories: military operations (from 5 % to 9 %), police operations (from 15 % to 22 %) and civilian operations (from 29 % to 33 %) (Figure 11). However, progress was not uniform in leadership roles: women's representation rose among military force commanders (from 10 % to 13 %) and heads of civilian missions (from 26 % to 30 %), but more than halved among chief police officers from 43 % (3 out of 7) to 20 % (1 out of 5).

The data for 2025 shows no significant vertical segregation in UN peacekeeping operations, as the proportion of women in leadership positions largely reflects their share in the corresponding personnel, with differences of less than 5 percentage points in all types of operations (i.e. military, police and civilian).

Figure 11 | Share of women in leadership and personnel positions in UN peacekeeping operations, 2020 and 2025



NB: For each year, data for leadership refers to October, and data for personnel refers to June. Leadership positions cover military (force commanders in UN peacekeeping operations), police (chief police officers) and civilian (heads of UN peacekeeping operations and special political missions).

Sources: EIGE, based on data from SIPRI, *Women in Multilateral Peace Operations in 2020: What's the state of play?*, 2020; and Pfeifer Cruz, C. and Ahmad, A. S., *Women in Multilateral Peace Operations in 2025: What is the state of play?*, SIPRI, Solna, 2025.

Stronger peace, stronger voices – eight EU Member States back UN pledge for women's full involvement

In 2023, the UN committed to a minimum target of 33 % for women's participation in mediation and peace processes ⁽¹⁵⁾. In October 2024, the Security Council launched the common pledge for women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace processes. A year later, 8 of the 27 EU Member States (Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland), and the EU as an institution, had signed the pledge ⁽¹⁶⁾.

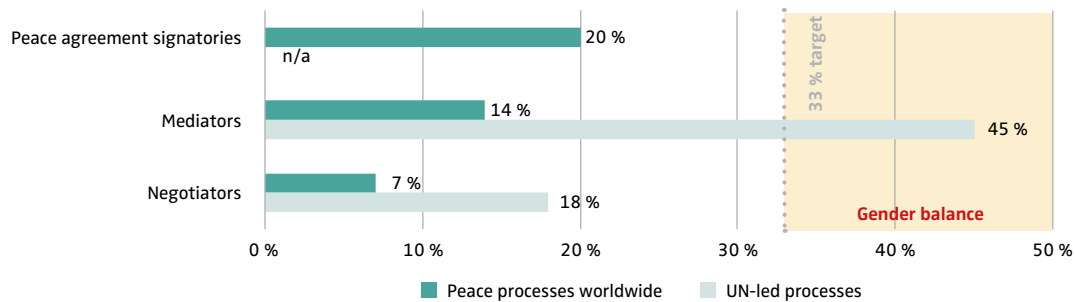
Yet women remain far from equal in representation in peace processes. They are especially under-represented among negotiators (appointed by parties to conflicts), who hold the power to make binding decisions and accept or reject peace proposals. Their presence is somewhat higher among mediators, whose role focuses on facilitation rather than formal decision-making.

⁽¹⁵⁾ UN Secretary General, *Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary General*, UN Security Council, 2023, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4024756?ln=en&v=pdf>.

⁽¹⁶⁾ UN Peacemaker, 'A common pledge for women's participation', UN website, accessed 6 January 2026, <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/thematic-areas/gender-women-peace-security/common-pledge>. List of adopters as of 12 December 2025.

In 2024, women represented 7 % of negotiators and 14 % of mediators across 65 formal peace processes worldwide (Figure 12). Their participation was higher among signatories of peace agreements, averaging 20 % across 36 agreements ⁽¹⁷⁾. Mediation teams in the four UN co-led peace processes performed comparatively better, reaching gender balance with 45 % women. However, women accounted for only 18 % on average in the four peace and constitution-making processes led, co-led or supported by the UN in 2024 – a rate that is well below the UN’s recommended minimum threshold of 33 % ⁽¹⁸⁾.

Figure 12 | Share of women as mediators, negotiators and signatories in peace processes worldwide and UN-led peace processes, 2024



NB: The data on peace processes worldwide is based on 65 active peace processes in 2024 and represents an average of the shares of women in the relevant position per process. The data on UN-led processes covers four peace processes led or co-led by the UN.

Source: EIGE, based on data from UN Secretary General, *Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary General*, UN Security Council, 2025, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/report/united-nations-security-council-women-and-peace-and-security-report-of-the-secretary-general/n2523645-1.pdf>.

EU institutions and agencies dealing with security-related issues

The 2024–2029 **European Commission** lists defence and security as one of its seven priorities ⁽¹⁹⁾. The Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs oversees internal security, border management and migration, while the Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space leads work on the defence and space sectors. The EU Anti-trafficking Coordinator improves cooperation between EU institutions, agencies, Member States and international partners, and develops EU policies to combat trafficking in human beings.

The European Parliament addresses security and defence through three **permanent committees**: the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), which oversees legislation and policies to ensure freedom, security and justice; the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), which shapes and monitors the EU’s common foreign and security policy; and the Committee on Security and Defence (SEDE), which focuses on European defence and related strategies, including the rearm Europe plan, and became a full committee in January 2025.

In addition, eight specialised **EU agencies** provide technical expertise, build capabilities and foster resilience against emerging threats and work on different aspects of defence, law enforcement and security ⁽²⁰⁾.

⁽¹⁷⁾ UN Secretary General, *Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary General*, UN Security Council, September 2025, A related infographic with key highlights can be found at <https://knowledge.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/infographic-un-secretary-generals-annual-report-on-women-and-peace-and-security-2025-en.pdf>.

⁽¹⁸⁾ No data on signatories of UN led or co-led processes is presented, as no agreements were concluded in 2024.

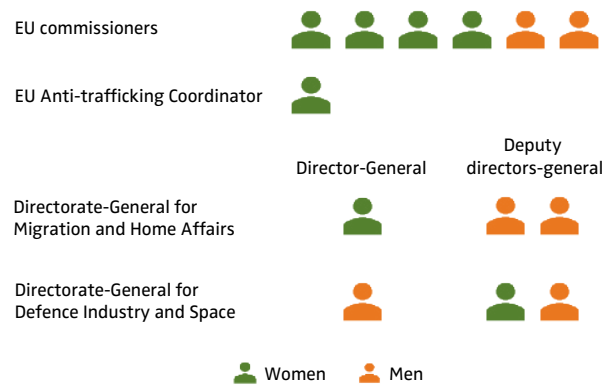
⁽¹⁹⁾ von der Leyen, U., *Europe’s Choice – Political guidelines for the next European Commission: 2024–2029*, Strasbourg, 18 July 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf.

⁽²⁰⁾ The European Defence Agency (EDA), the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and the European Union Satellite Centre (EU Satcen) operate under the CSDP; the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) work on law enforcement; the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) and the European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA) work on cybersecurity and IT systems; and finally the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) works on border protection.

European Commission achieves gender balance in top security and defence roles

As of February 2026, four of the six commissioners responsible for security and defence were women ⁽²¹⁾. The post of Director-General for Defence Industry and Space was held by a man, while the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs was led by a woman, and across both directorates-general three men and one woman were deputy directors-general (Figure 13). The EU Anti-trafficking Coordinator, in post since 2021, is a woman. Overall, women held 7 of the 13 key political and administrative posts on security and defence in the European Commission (54 %).

Figure 13 | Women and men in key political and administrative positions with responsibilities on security and defence in the European Commission, February 2026

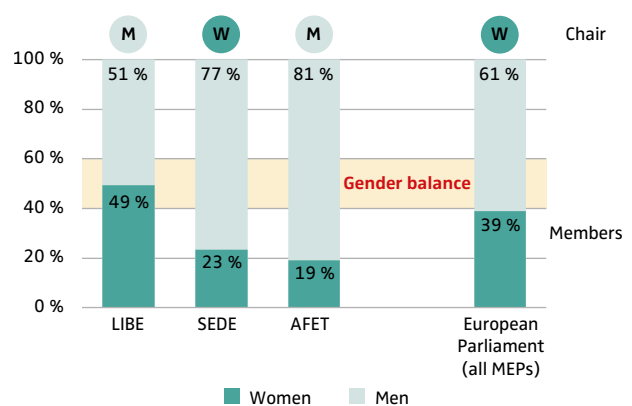


Source: EIGE, based on direct data collection from the European Commission website (February 2026).

Security committees in the European Parliament show advances towards gender balance

As of July 2025, the European Parliament was made up of 39 % women and 61 % men. There was a much lower share of women in two of the three permanent committees dealing with security issues: 19 % (15 out of 79 members) in AFET and 23 % (10 out of 43) in SEDE. In contrast, LIBE had practically the same number of women and men (37 and 38, respectively). LIBE and AFET were chaired by men, while SEDE was chaired by a woman (Figure 14).

Figure 14 | Share of women and men among chairs and members of European Parliament committees dealing with security, and of the European Parliament, July 2025



NB: MEP = Member of the European Parliament.

Source: EIGE, based on unpublished microdata from EIGE, Gender Statistics Database, 'Committees of the European Parliament: President and members', 2025.

Gender balance in the top positions of EU agencies dealing with security, defence or law enforcement

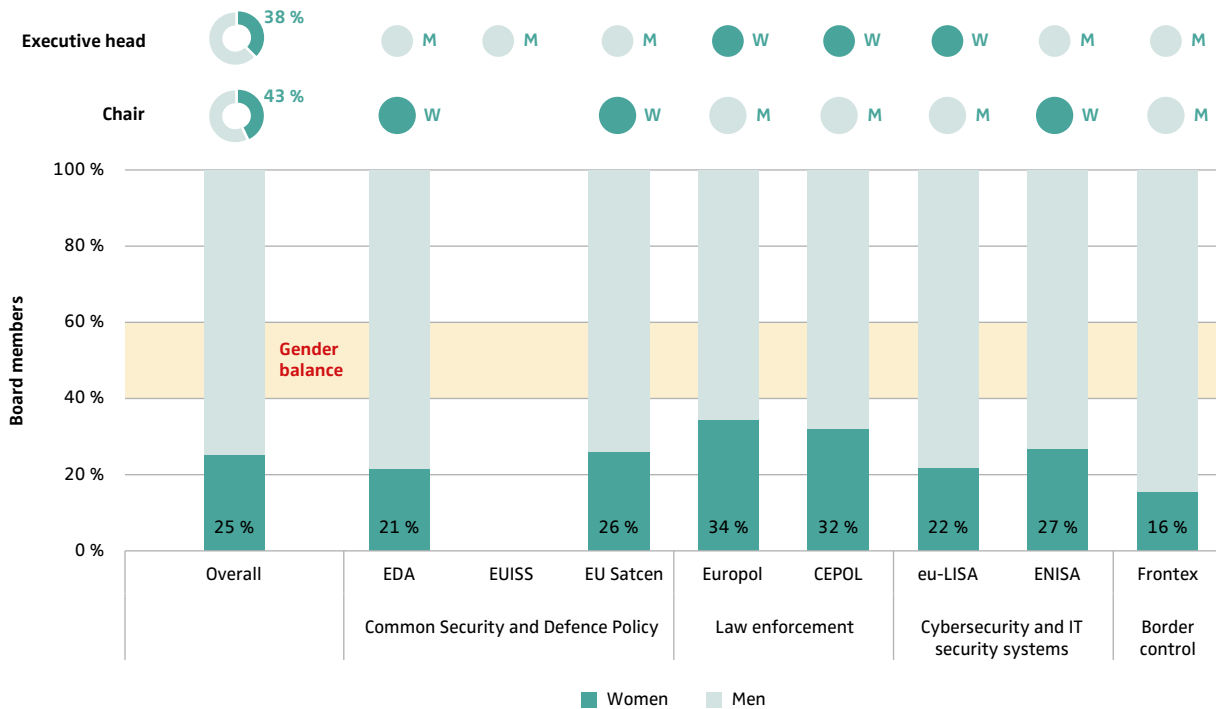
Based on data collected in July 2025, the top leadership of the eight EU agencies focused on defence, law enforcement and security is relatively gender balanced. Three agencies – the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) and the European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA) – had a woman executive head (i.e. 3 out of 8, or 38 %) (see Figure 15). Another three – the European Defence Agency (EDA), European Union Satellite Centre (EU Satcen) and European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) – were chaired by women (i.e. 3 out of the 7 agencies for

⁽²¹⁾ These are the Executive Vice-President for Technological Sovereignty, Security and Democracy; the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission; the Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness; the Commissioner for Defence and Space; the Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management; and the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration (see the European Commission webpage on security and defence at https://commission.europa.eu/priorities-2024-2029/security-and-defence_en).

which data is available, or 43 %). The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) is the only security-related agency where both top positions were held by men.

At the board level, women were under-represented, with 25 % of seats of all board members across the eight agencies. Frontex had the lowest share of women board members (16 %), while Europol and CEPOL had the highest shares (34 % and 32 %, respectively).

Figure 15 | Shares of women and men among board members and numbers of men and women chairs and executive heads of EU agencies dealing with security, July 2025



NB: EUISS = European Union Institute for Security Studies. Data is not available for the board (members or chair) of the EUISS. The EDA Steering Board is made up of defence ministers from EU Member States; note, however, that there may be discrepancies with data presented in the national governments section below due to when data was collected (July for EU agencies versus November for national governments). Source: EIGE, based on data from EIGE, Gender Statistics Database, 'European agencies: Presidents, members and executive heads', 2025.

National governments: defence and border control

National security encompasses internal security, border control and defence:

- internal security focuses on law enforcement and public safety;
- border control ensures the integrity of national borders;
- defence involves military preparedness and strategic operations.

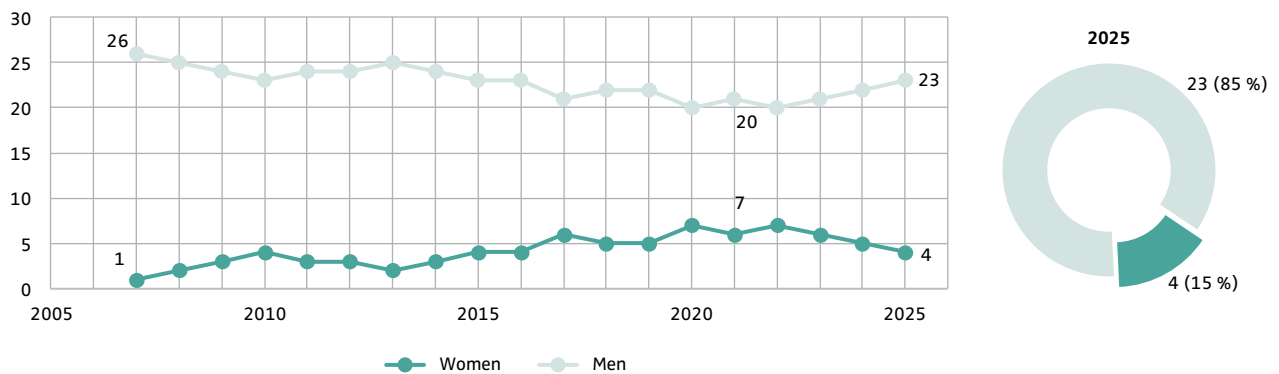
Together, these functions protect a country's sovereignty and ensure preparedness for emerging threats. Responsibilities are usually split across ministries: defence is typically led by a minister of defence, while internal security and border control fall under ministries of the interior, home affairs or public security.

Women break through in defence leadership, though momentum has slowed since 2020

Every EU Member State has a senior ⁽²²⁾ defence minister, either in a dedicated role or as part of a broader portfolio. As of November 2025, this position was held by men in 23 of the 27 EU Member States (85 %); the exceptions are Czechia, Spain, Luxembourg and Austria, where the role was held by women (Figure 16) ⁽²³⁾.

The number of women senior defence ministers in the EU Member States rose from 1 in 2007 (4 %) to a peak of 7 in both 2020 and 2022 (26 %). Since then, the number has declined each year, dropping to 4 in 2025 (15 %).

Figure 16 | Number and share of women among senior defence ministers, EU-27, 2007–2025



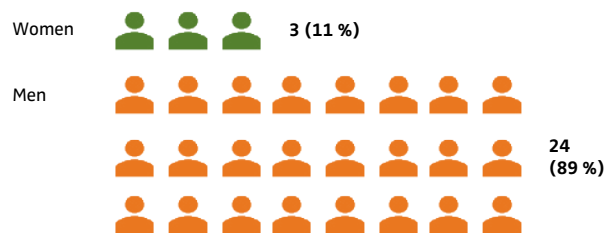
NB: Data refers to the fourth quarter of each reference year.

Source: EIGE, based on unpublished microdata from EIGE, Gender Statistics Database, 'National governments: Ministers by seniority and function of government', 2025.

Men account for eight in nine senior ministers responsible for internal security and border control

Responsibility for internal security and border control in government cabinets across the EU remains dominated by men. As of November 2025, only 3 (France, Portugal and Finland) out of the 27 EU Member States (or 11 %) had women in these senior roles (Figure 17).

Figure 17 | Numbers and shares of women and men among senior ministers responsible for internal security and border control, EU-27, November 2025



Source: EIGE, based on unpublished microdata from EIGE, Gender Statistics Database, 'National governments: Ministers by seniority and function of government', 2026.

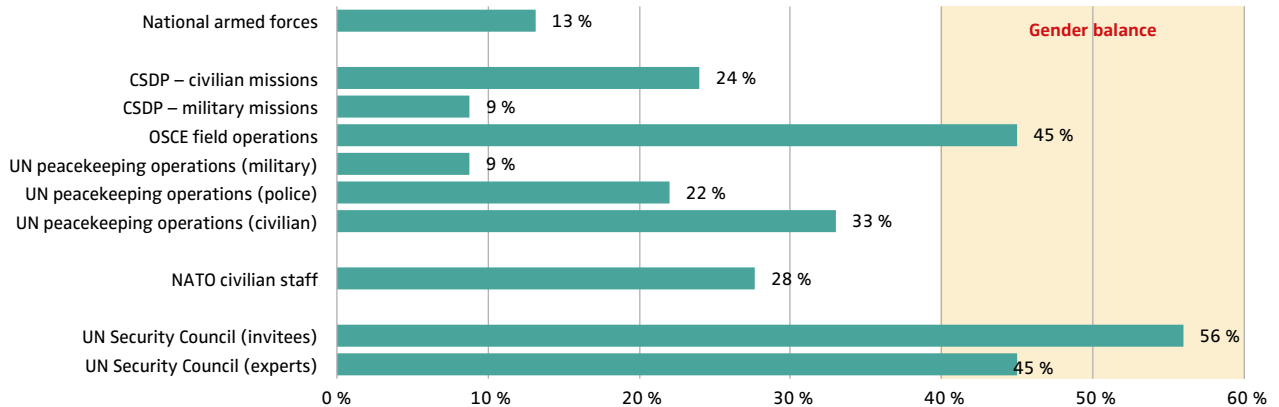
⁽²²⁾ 'Senior' here being a member of the government with a seat in the cabinet.

⁽²³⁾ The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) collects quarterly data for all EU Member States on gender balance among ministers in national governments. The data is published with a breakdown by broad function of government (basic, economic, infrastructure-based, sociocultural) but the underlying microdata allows for a more detailed breakdown of specific portfolios, such as defence or border control.

Overview: persistent gender gap in leadership in the security and defence sectors at the national and international levels, but EU institutions lead the way

The latest data shows progress in women’s participation in some international security roles. Women’s share in OSCE field operations rose from 24 % in 2020 to 45 % in 2025, and gender balance was reached among invitees and experts at the UN Security Council in 2024 (Figure 18). However, women remain under-represented in many security-related areas, particularly in national armed forces (13 % in 2024) and in the military missions or operations of the CSDP and the UN (9 % in both cases in 2025).

Figure 18 | Share of women in the security sector, 2024 and 2025

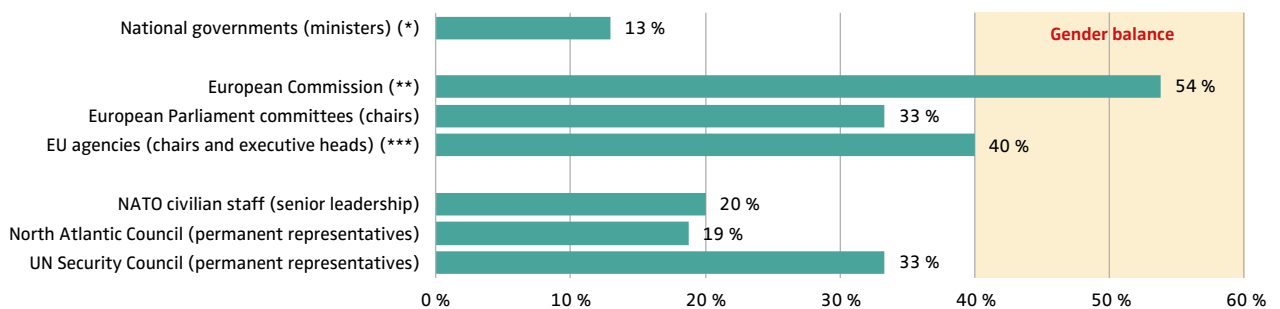


NB: Data refers to 2024 for national armed forces, NATO civilian staff and UN Security Council invitees/experts, and 2025 for CSDP, OSCE and UN peacekeeping operations.

Sources: Various (see sections above).

Many key **decision-making positions** remain dominated by men. Across EU Member States, women make up 13 % of ministers responsible for defence, security or border control; 33 % of permanent representatives to the UN Security Council (2024); and 19 % of permanent representatives to the North Atlantic Council (2025) (Figure 19). In 2024, women held 20 % of leadership positions among NATO civilian staff. At the EU level, the picture is more balanced: in 2025 women held 54 % of key security-related positions in the European Commission and 40 % of head and chair positions in EU agencies.

Figure 19 | Share of women in security sector decision-making roles (political and administrative), 2024, 2025 and 2026



(*) Data combines statistics for both ministers of defence and security (4 out of 27) and ministers for border control (3 out of 27) (i.e. 7 out of 54).

(**) Data combines statistics for positions of EU commissioners, the EU Anti-trafficking Coordinator, directors-general and deputy directors-general with responsibilities for security and defence.

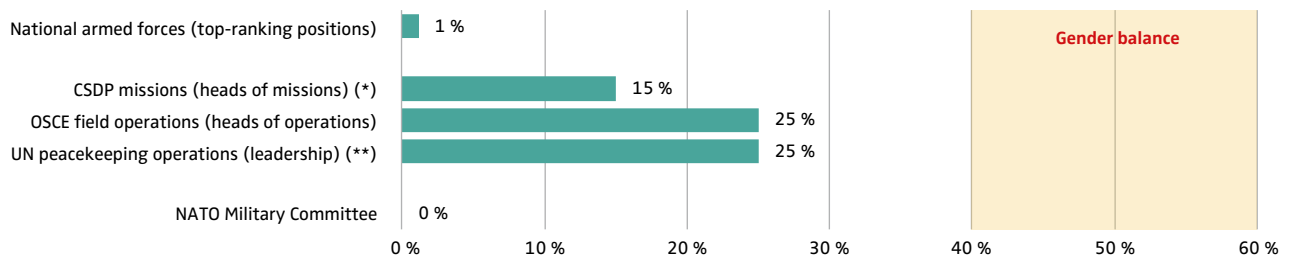
(***) Data combines statistics for the positions of chair (3 women out of 7) and executive head (3 out of 8) (i.e. 6 out of 15).

NB: Data refers to 2024 for NATO civilian staff and the UN Security Council, to 2025 for national government ministers, European Parliament committees, EU agencies and the North Atlantic Council, and to 2026 for the European Commission.

Sources: Various (see sections above).

Even fewer women hold military leadership roles. In 2024, women held 1 % of top-ranking posts in national armed forces, and 19 EU Member States had no women in these positions (Figure 20). In 2025, women accounted for 15 % of heads of CSDP missions and 25 % of leadership roles in OSCE field operations and UN peacekeeping missions. The NATO Military Committee was comprised solely of men in 2025.

Figure 20 | Share of women in security sector decision-making roles (military and operations), 2024 and 2025



(*) Data combines statistics for heads of military and civilian missions (3 women out of 20 total positions).

(**) Data combines statistics for military, police and civilian leadership positions (9 women out of 36 total positions).

NB: Data refers to 2024 for national armed forces and to 2025 for CSDP missions, OSCE field operations, UN peacekeeping operations and the NATO Military Committee.

Sources: Various (see sections above).

What next? Driving change and measuring progress

Neither widespread recognition of the importance of involving women in decision-making at all levels in peacekeeping and conflict resolution nor formal commitments to improving the situation are fully translating into results. The latest available figures underscore the need for **enforceable targets, accountability** and **sustained data monitoring** to track progress and inform evidence-based policies.

Further information

If you want to learn more about the main gender inequalities in security and get a better understanding of why and how to mainstream a gender perspective in the policy area, check out EIGE's brief on gender and security, available here: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/security>.

For more data on women and men in decision-making, check out EIGE's Gender Statistics Database as a one-stop source for all gender statistics at the EU and Member State levels, available here: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs>.



Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

For any use or reproduction of elements that are not owned by EIGE, permission may need to be sought directly from the respective rightholders.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2026

© European Institute for Gender Equality, 2026

Manuscript completed in June 2026

PDF: ISBN 978-92-9486-351-5
doi:[10.2839/8059022](https://doi.org/10.2839/8059022)
MH-01-26-046-EN-N

European Institute for Gender Equality

Gedimino pr. 16
LT-01103 Vilnius
LITHUANIA

eige.europa.eu

Follow us



The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) produces independent research and shares best practice to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination based on gender. As the EU agency for gender equality, we help people achieve equal opportunities so everyone can thrive, independent of their gender and background.