

Gender equality in the European Parliament and in national parliaments in the European Union ahead of the 2024 election year

What is a gender-sensitive parliament?

As bastions of democracy and guardians of gender equality, gender-sensitive parliaments ensure that there are no barriers for women and men in all their diversity to participate equally and have equal influence over decision-making. They serve as a positive example of safe, gender-equal workplaces that ensure that everyone – members of parliament (MPs) and parliamentary

staff alike – has equal opportunities to contribute fully to the work that underpins the legislative process. They also set up structures and use tools to ensure that a gender perspective is mainstreamed in all parliamentary work, processes and outputs and that legislation across all policy areas has a fair and equal impact on diverse groups of women and men.

How is gender sensitivity assessed?

The [gender-sensitive parliaments self-assessment tool](#) of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) assesses and monitors gender equality in the organisation and work of parliaments. The assessment is broken down into five areas. This factsheet presents selected key findings from the assessment of gender sensitivity in the European

Parliament and in the national parliaments in the EU conducted in May–August 2023 ⁽¹⁾. It recognises efforts made since EIGE's first assessment in 2019 and highlights the space for improvement to promote and deliver gender equality in the parliaments' internal structures and legislative outputs.

Where do parliaments stand on their way to gender equality?

Area 1: Opportunities to enter parliament

Gender balance has been achieved in the European Parliament. National parliaments are lagging behind as women account for one in three MPs.

Area 3: Space on the parliamentary agenda

The European Parliament has made progress in advancing gender equality within its operational activities. Not all national parliaments have gender equality bodies and the use of gender mainstreaming tools is limited.

Area 5: Symbolic function

Few parliaments adequately recognize their symbolic function on gender equality with policies to enhance the gender-sensitivity of physical spaces and communication on gender equality.



Area 2: Opportunities to influence parliament's work

Persistent vertical and horizontal segregation remains an issue at EU and Member State levels. Provisions to ensure safe working conditions and work-life balance are mostly absent.

Area 4: Gender-sensitive legislation

The extent to which Member States have developed legislation dealing with gender equality in specific policy areas varies. Gender impact assessments of draft legislation are underused.

⁽¹⁾ Data collection covered both chambers in countries with bicameral parliaments. Information was primarily sourced from publicly available data, for example on websites and in published reports, with additional input from national parliamentary contacts when online information was unavailable.

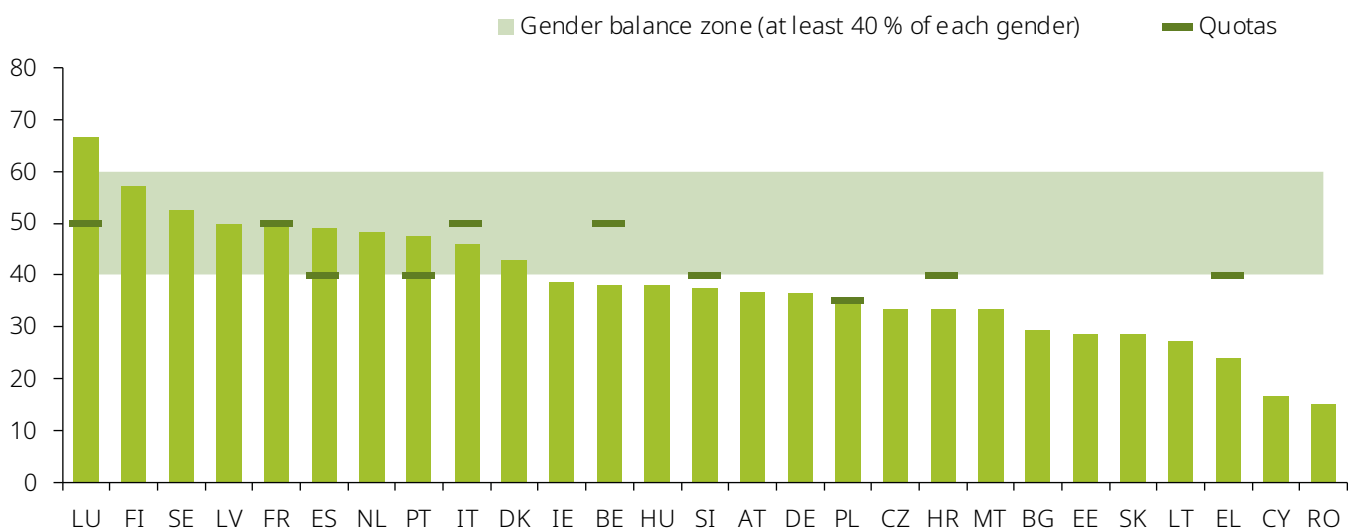
Area 1: Opportunities to enter parliament

Gender parity has been achieved in the European Parliament, but remains a challenge for Member States

The European Parliament achieved gender balance following the May 2019 elections (41 % women and 59 % men among Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)), but the post-Brexit restructuring and other midterm changes saw the share of women fall to 39 % before recovering to 40 % in November 2023 ⁽²⁾. The 2024 European elections represent a crucial opportunity to push further towards parity. In the absence of any EU-level legislation on gender quotas for European elections, the responsibility for ensuring that women and men have equal opportunities to be elected rests with Member States.

Ten Member States currently have a legislative gender quota applicable to European elections. Belgium, France, Italy and Luxembourg all require 50 % representation of each gender; Greece, Spain, Croatia, Portugal and Slovenia at least 40 %; and Poland at least 35 %. Eight of these already have at least 35 % women MEPs (Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia), leaving only Greece (24 %) and Croatia (33 %) with below 35 % representation and a significant gap between the quota threshold and the election result (Figure 1). Notably, the quota legislation in both countries fails to apply any placement rules to ensure equal visibility of women and men candidates.

Figure 1. Share of women among MEPs, by Member State, November 2023 (%)



Source: EIGE, data collection on gender-sensitive parliaments, 2023, based on EIGE's [Gender Statistics Database](#).

There are too few women members of parliament in national parliaments – gender parity is a distant goal

Most national parliaments ⁽³⁾ lag behind the European Parliament in terms of gender balance, although there are a few exceptions. Across the EU, men account for two thirds (67 %) of MPs in national parliaments (Figure 2). In August 2023, only six national parliaments had more than 40 %

women members (Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Austria, Finland, Sweden), while seven had less than 25 % women (Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Cyprus, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia). There has been little progress since EIGE's first assessment of gender-sensitive parliaments in 2019, with the share of women

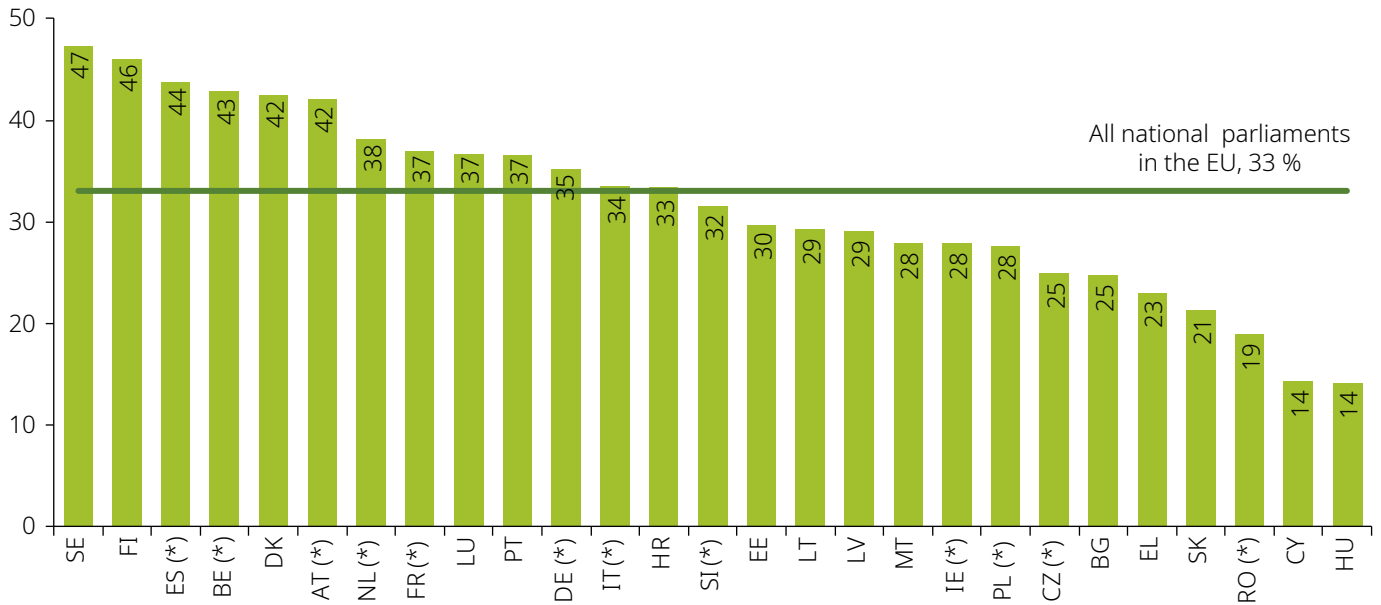
⁽²⁾ EIGE's Gender Statistics Database (2023), 'European Parliament: President and members' (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_pol_parl_wmid_eurparl).

⁽³⁾ Twelve Member States have bicameral national parliaments with upper and lower houses (Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Romania, Slovenia). Each house was assessed separately so that the assessment covered a total of 39 national houses/chambers, plus the European Parliament. Except where clearly referring to a specific house, data or text referring to a national parliament cover the aggregate situation in the case of quantitative data or the best-case scenario in the case of qualitative data (i.e. at least one of the houses fulfils the criterion of the issue concerned).

across all national parliaments in the EU rising only just over 1 percentage point (pp) from 32 % to 33 %. Over the last 20 years, the share of women members has improved at an

average of just 0.6 pp/year. At this rate of change, it will take another 11 years to achieve at least 40 % of each gender and 28 years to achieve gender parity.

Figure 2. Share of women among MPs in national parliaments in the EU, Q3 2023 (%)



NB: (*) Indicates a bicameral parliament. The members of both houses are taken into account.
 Source: EIGE, data collection on gender-sensitive parliaments, 2023, based on EIGE's [Gender Statistics Database](#).

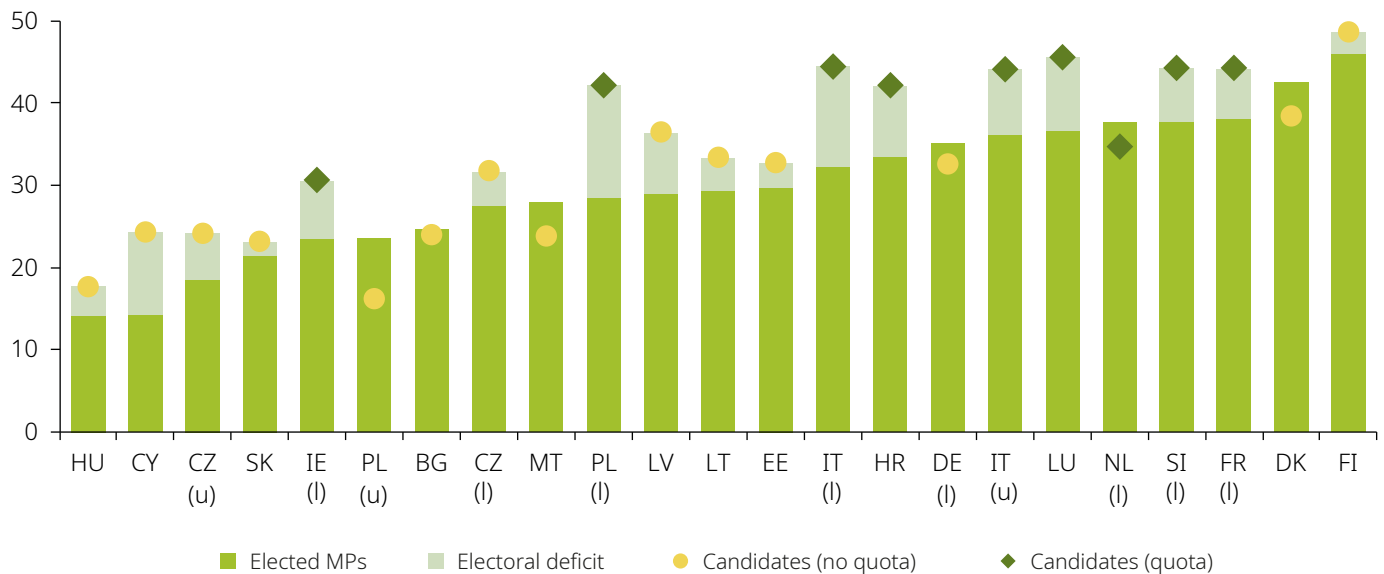
More women candidates are needed – higher quota levels are key

The first step to get more women elected is to have more women standing as candidates. Statistics on the number of candidates disaggregated by sex are not readily available for national elections in all Member States; this represents an important information deficit. Across the 20 Member States for which such data are available for the most recent national elections, women accounted for an average of just a third (34 %) of candidates (no change since 2019).

Comparing the proportion of women among candidates (markers in [Figure 3](#)) with the proportion of women sitting

in parliament (blue bars in [Figure 3](#)) highlights three key points. Firstly, as would be expected, the more women there are among candidates, the more women are elected. This indicates the need for higher quota levels to achieve gender parity. Secondly, in most cases (17 of 23 houses) there is an electoral deficit in that the proportion of women elected is smaller than the proportion of women candidates. Thirdly, the proportion of women among both candidates and MPs is generally higher when there is a legislative quota in place.

Figure 3. Share of women among candidates for the last national election and among current MPs, Q3 2023 (%)



NB: l, lower house; u, upper house. Those with no designation are unicameral parliaments. Malta does not have a legislative quota for candidates. Instead, it has a [post-election corrective mechanism](#) that applies if less than 40 % of either sex is elected. This allows up to 12 seats to be added for the under-represented sex. All 12 were added after the last election in March 2022, taking the share of women MPs from 14.9 % to 27.8 %.

Source: EIGE, data collection on gender-sensitive parliaments, 2023; data on candidates from [IPU Parline](#); data on MPs from EIGE's [Gender Statistics Database](#).

Area 2: Opportunities to influence parliament's work

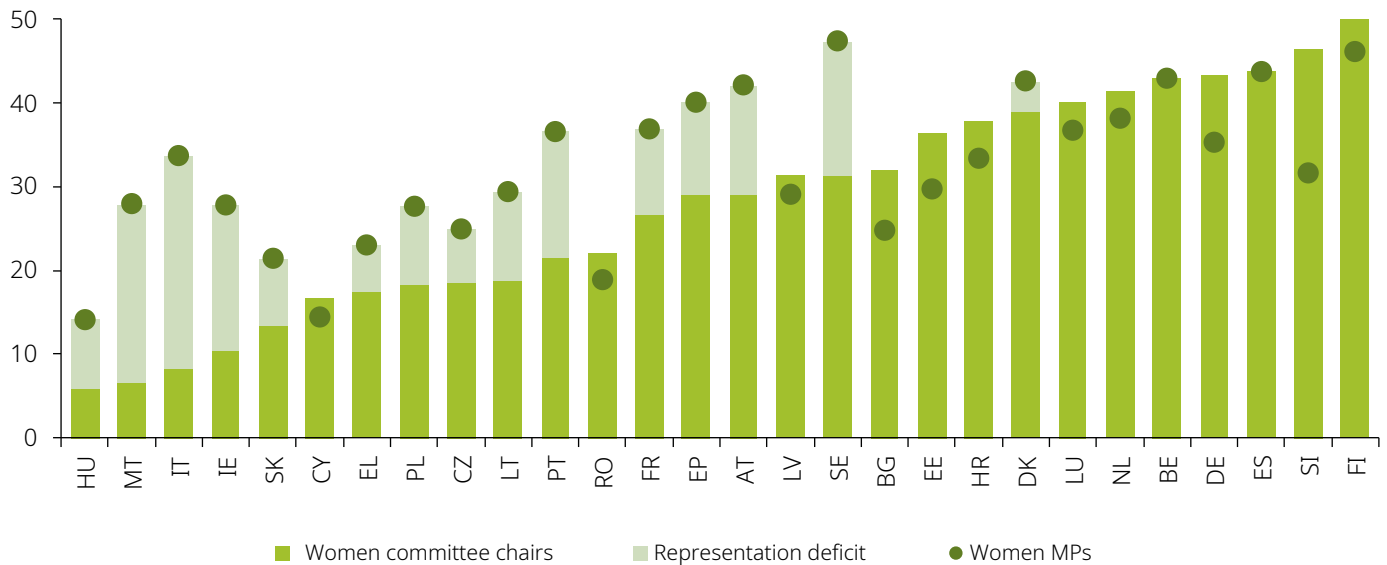
Gender segregation remains a concern – better access to key leadership positions can expand the influence of women members of parliament

The work done by parliamentary committees underpins the legislative process. In the European Parliament, their work is coordinated by the Conference of Committee Chairs, which comprises the chairs of each of the 20 standing committees and 4 subcommittees (7 women, 17 men). Notably, women are significantly less well represented among committee chairs (29 %) than among the group of MEPs from which the chairs are selected (40 %), resulting in a representation deficit of 11 pp. Women are better represented, however, among vice-chairs (44 %).

Across all EU national parliaments, there is an overall

representation deficit of just 4 pp (29 % women committee chairs compared with 33 % women MPs), but there are significant differences across countries (Figure 4). In 13 national parliaments, the proportion of women chairing parliamentary committees is equal to or higher than the proportion of women among MPs (Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Spain, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Finland). Women are under-represented in the remaining national parliaments, with representation deficits of more than 10 pp in eight cases (Ireland, France, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Austria, Portugal, Sweden).

Figure 4. The proportion of women chairing parliamentary committees compared with the proportion of women among MPs, 2023 (%)



NB: EP, European Parliament.

Source: EIGE, data collection on gender-sensitive parliaments, 2023, based on EIGE's [Gender Statistics Database](#).

Few parliaments have provisions to provide a safe working environment for members of parliament – gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, demands urgent attention

Having a working environment that is free from any form of discrimination, harassment or violence linked to gender and having working conditions that respect the work–life balance are crucial to ensure that both MPs and parliamentary staff can contribute fully to the work of the parliament. The European Parliament has provisions in place to address harassment and sexual harassment of MEPs.

There are only four Member States (Ireland, France, Luxembourg, Finland) in which at least one chamber of

parliament has a policy outlawing discrimination based on sex and/or a policy outlawing the sexual harassment of MPs. Protection for parliamentary staff generally derives from legislation or codes applicable to employees or (where relevant) specifically to civil servants, but the special status of MPs as elected public officials (in most countries) leaves a gap in the provisions. Other forms of violence against women in parliaments (e.g. cyber violence) are rarely addressed either at the European Parliament level or within national parliaments.

Area 3: Space on the parliamentary agenda

Structural support for gender equality varies across parliaments – the systematic inclusion of gender equality concerns demands well-resourced and mandated gender equality bodies

The European Parliament is committed to applying gender mainstreaming tools within its activities and reports, and it supports their use across other EU institutions. The Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality plays a key role in advancing gender equality and mainstreaming, yet its effectiveness in influencing other committees’ work in this

regard is limited, with its proposed amendments and suggestions seldom integrated into final legislative texts.

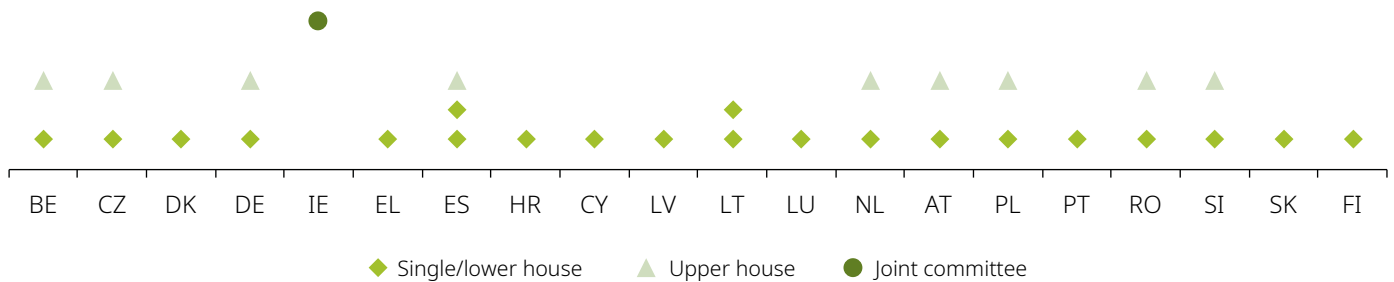
Most, but not all, national parliaments have a body responsible for promoting gender equality, either exclusively or as a clearly mandated part of a wider remit ⁽⁴⁾. Twenty national parliaments

⁽⁴⁾ Bulgaria, Italy, Hungary and Malta do not have any relevant body.

have parliamentary committees with responsibility for gender equality (Figure 5). Having a standing parliamentary committee with full legislative capacity to discuss, suggest and amend legislation on gender equality or from a gender equality

perspective shows commitment to gender equality and ensures that gender equality is mainstreamed into parliamentary work. To be effective, gender equality parliamentary committees need an adequate mandate and adequate resources.

Figure 5. Gender equality parliamentary committees by type of house in EU national parliaments, 2023



Source: EIGE, data collection on gender-sensitive parliaments, 2023.

Gender mainstreaming tools are underused – sustained commitment to their implementation is crucial to ensure lasting change towards achieving gender-sensitive parliaments

Gender mainstreaming tools shape legislative and organisational processes and workflows so that the results and effects of parliaments’ work meet gender equality objectives and benefit everyone in society. Gender equality action plans facilitate gender-responsive institutional transformation and outline the parliaments’ overarching goals in their work to advance gender equality⁽⁵⁾. Six national parliaments have gender equality action plans (Germany, Spain, Italy, Austria, Finland, Sweden).

The application of gender budgeting⁽⁶⁾ in the EU budget is being championed by the European Parliament, yet the parliament still needs to work on applying gender budgeting within its own budget. Seven national parliaments utilise gender budgeting as part of the process of scrutinising the national budget (Belgium, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Italy, Austria, Finland). Although parliaments may account for a small share of public spending, as the gatekeepers of gender equality they should be setting a good example. Only two parliaments (Spain, Austria) apply gender-responsive public procurement⁽⁷⁾.

Area 4: Parliaments’ production of gender-sensitive legislation

The European Parliament is a key actor in the promotion of gender equality – few national parliaments use gender impact assessments

A key test of the gender sensitivity of a parliament is whether it produces legislation that promotes gender equality and does not have an unequal impact on women and men in their diverse life situations. Recent examples of the crucial gender

equality legislation adopted by the European Parliament include the pay transparency directive⁽⁸⁾, the directive supporting gender balance in the leadership of listed companies⁽⁹⁾ and the directive on combating violence against women⁽¹⁰⁾. As

⁽⁵⁾ See EIGE (2024), *Gender Equality Action Plans for Parliaments: Step-by-step tool*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg (<https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/gender-equality-action-plans-for-parliaments.pdf>).

⁽⁶⁾ Gender budgeting is a strategy to achieve equality between women and men through an assessment of how public funds are collected and spent; see EIGE (n.d.), ‘Gender budgeting’, method/tool (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/tools-methods/gender-budgeting?language_content_entity=en#toc-what-is-gender-budgeting-).

⁽⁷⁾ Gender-responsive public procurement aims to ensure that the contracts for services or goods purchased by public bodies safeguard and/or promote gender equality in both their delivery processes and their final outputs; see EIGE (n.d.), ‘Gender-responsive public procurement’ (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/grpp?language_content_entity=en).

⁽⁸⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023L0970&qid=1684314303529>.

⁽⁹⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022L2381>.

⁽¹⁰⁾ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0338_EN.html.

of October 2023, the EU is a party to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

A gender impact assessment is used to examine how proposed legislation is likely to affect women and men so that any differential impact can be addressed before the legislation

is adopted. These assessments should be routine, yet only eight national parliaments (Denmark, Ireland, Croatia, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Slovakia, Finland) have binding rules that require a gender impact assessment of legislative proposals. In some Member States, however, assessments are undertaken but not by the parliament.

Area 5: Parliaments' compliance with their symbolic function

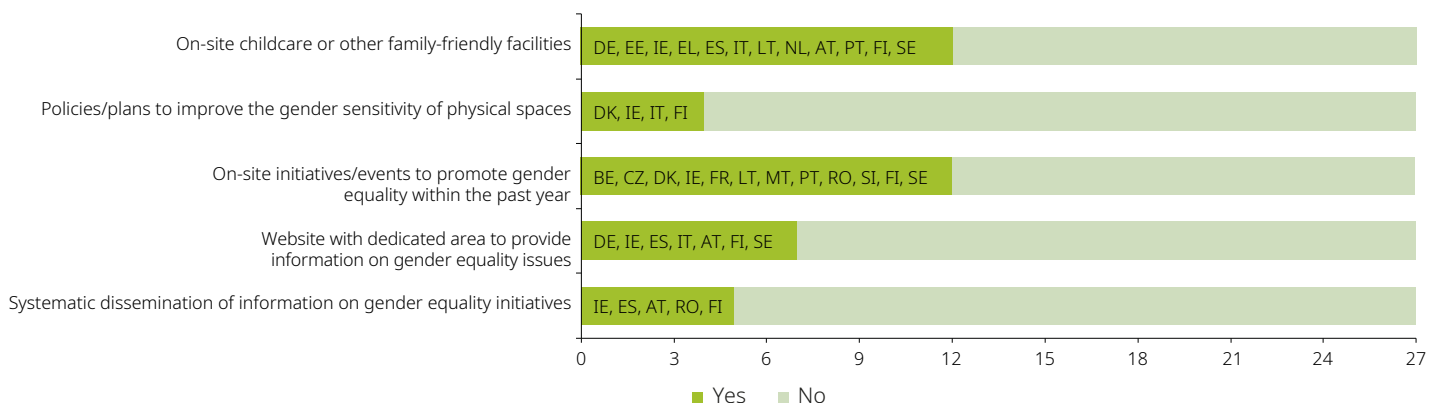
The European Parliament leads the way with initiatives to address gender equality in internal infrastructure and communication efforts; there is space for improvement in national parliaments

The European Parliament has recognised women in the naming of key structural assets (the Louise Weiss building in Strasbourg, the Simone Veil Agora in Brussels). Its main centres in Brussels and Strasbourg have crèche and other family-friendly facilities. Its unique contemporary art collection has adopted an acquisition strategy specifically aiming to ensure gender parity and it held the Art *Herstory* exhibition from the end of 2022 to early 2023 ⁽¹¹⁾. The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality actively communicates information on its activities through a dedicated area of the European Parliament's website, where users can find the latest

news, meeting reports, background materials, recordings of hearings and the committee's working calendar ⁽¹²⁾.

Parliaments in fewer than half of Member States have dedicated childcare facilities or other family-friendly rooms on their premises (Figure 6). Family-friendly working conditions are key to ensure the better reconciliation of the caring and professional responsibilities of MPs and staff. Fewer than half of national parliaments hosted initiatives/events to promote gender equality on their premises between May 2022 and May 2023. Few national parliaments consistently or sufficiently raise awareness of their work on gender equality through their communications with the public.

Figure 6. National parliaments in the EU demonstrating commitment to their symbolic function, 2023



Source: EIGE, data collection on gender-sensitive parliaments, 2023.

⁽¹¹⁾ <https://art-collection.europarl.europa.eu/en/exhibitions/art-herstory/>.

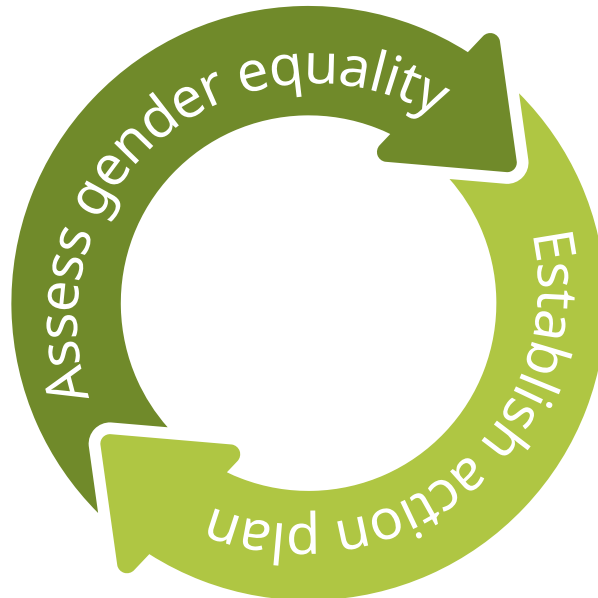
⁽¹²⁾ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/femm/home/highlights>.

What can parliaments do to advance gender equality?

Take EIGE's gender-sensitive parliaments self assessment

The tool will help you to:

- Establish the state of play
- Identify main gender inequalities
- Monitor progress towards gender equality



Use EIGE's tool on gender equality action plans for parliaments

The tool provides step-by-step guidance to:

- Develop and adopt
- Monitor and implement
- Evaluate your gender equality action plan

Further information

The findings of EIGE's second EU-wide assessment of the gender sensitivity of the European Parliament and the national parliaments in the 27 Member States are available in this [report](#).

For more data from EIGE's data collections on gender-sensitive parliaments (2019, 2023), please see EIGE's [Gender Statistics Database](#), where you can also find more data on [women and men in decision-making](#).

Check out EIGE's [gender-sensitive parliaments toolkit](#) for practical guidance on assessing the state of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in your parliament and then establishing a gender equality action plan as a next step towards achieving transformative change for gender equality.

European Institute for Gender Equality

We are an independent centre and the primary source for information on gender equality in the European Union. We contribute to making the European Union become a Union of Equality, where women and men, girls and boys in all their diversity are free to pursue their chosen path in life, have equal opportunities to thrive, and can equally participate in and lead our societies.

© European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024

European Institute for Gender Equality
Gedimino pr. 16
LT01103
Vilnius
LITHUANIA
Tel. +370 52157444
Email: eige.sec@eige.europa.eu

Find us on

