Women in parliaments

National parliaments with a higher proportion of women members than the EP

Women in EP and EU national parliaments

Women in EP by political group

Female representatives in the EP by Member State

- **MT**: Malta, **FI**: Finland, **IE**: Ireland, **HR**: Croatia, **SE**: Sweden, **EE**: Estonia, **LV**: Latvia, **AT**: Austria, **ES**: Spain, **UK**: United Kingdom, **NL**: Netherlands, **FR**: France, **IT**: Italy, **SI**: Slovenia, **EP**: European Parliament, **DE**: Germany, **LU**: Luxembourg, **BE**: Belgium, **DK**: Denmark, **SK**: Slovakia, **PT**: Portugal, **EL**: Greece, **BG**: Bulgaria, **HU**: Hungary, **LT**: Lithuania, **CY**: Cyprus

- **Total seats**

- **Percentage of women Members in the EP (February plenary session, 2017)**

- **Gender quotas applicable to the electoral lists for the 2014 EP elections**

- **Electoral system applied at the 2014 EP elections**

*For more information on Italy, please see page 2.*
Women in national parliaments compared with the European Parliament

The map shows those national parliaments across the world which have a percentage of women Members equal to or above the 37.3% share of women Members in the European Parliament (EP). Worldwide there are 22 countries with 37.3% or more of women Members in their national parliament.

Women in national parliaments / Inter-parliamentary Union (information for 1 January 2017).

Women in EP and national parliaments

The graph illustrates the average representation of women in national parliaments in Member States and in the European Parliament. The line for national parliaments up to 1996 is illustrative only, as it is based on the data available for a limited number of Member States. A notable increase in the percentage of women in national parliaments can be seen in the mid-2000s, which could be the consequence of the introduction of electoral gender quotas in several Member States around this time (France - 2000, Belgium - 2002, Portugal - 2006, Spain - 2007).


Women in national parliaments / Inter-parliamentary Union (information for 1 July 2014).


Women in EP by political group

The hemicycle chart illustrates the distribution of women Members among the EP political groups, showing in which political groups the proportion of women is higher than the EP average (37.3%) and in which it is lower. (NB the groups are ordered by proportion of women Members rather than by position on the political spectrum.)

Source: based on information from the Members’ Administration Unit, for the February plenary session, 2017.

Female representatives in the EP by Member State

The graph shows the total number of seats in each Member State and the percentage of those which women were elected, please see the previous version of this infographic.

Gender quotas applicable to the 2014 EP elections

For the 2014 European elections, eight Member States had gender quotas that concern the make-up of electoral lists. Member States’ gender quotas are gender-neutral, meaning that they aim to avoid the under-representation of both women and men, so gender proportions apply to both sexes.

Only two Member States require lists in parity (50%/50%) – these are Belgium and France. Slovenia and Spain require gender-balanced electoral lists, where each gender must be represented by at least 40% of the candidates on the list.

Croatia has also introduced gender-balanced lists, but the requirement will be legally enforceable only at the third European elections, i.e. in 2019. The gender-balanced lists in Portugal must contain at least 33% (⅓) of each gender. Poland did not have a gender quota for the European elections in 2009, but introduced gender-balanced lists, with at least 35% of the candidates to be of each gender, which applied for the first time in the 2014 election. Romania’s electoral rules establish for the European elections that no all-women or all-men lists are possible.

In order to ensure that candidates from both sexes, and in particular female candidates, are placed in positions on an electoral list with a good chance of winning a seat, some Member States require the alternate ordering of men and women on the list (‘zipping’). This is the case of France, Belgium (only the first two positions on the list) and Portugal (not more than two consecutive candidates of the same sex on the list). Slovenian electoral legislation requires at least one candidate of each gender to be placed in the upper half of the list. In Spain, the 40%/60% ratio has to be kept within each five-candidate cluster on the list. Some Member States have gender clauses for national elections but not for the European elections, for instance Greece and Ireland.

Whilst in some Member States electoral lists which do not meet the requirements of the gender clause are invalid (e.g. Spain, Slovenia and Romania), in others such lists are admitted to the elections but the party or coalition submitting them is punished with a fine and/or a cut in electoral campaign subsidies (e.g. Portugal).

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Situation in Italy

Italy had gender-balanced lists (⅓ for each gender) for the 2004 and 2009 EP elections. It introduced a new system in 2014 whereby third preference votes were not counted if the voter had not voted for at least one candidate of each gender. Parity lists will be introduced as of 2019, and in addition, preferential votes will not be counted in full, if voters chose only candidates of one gender.

Voluntary party quotas

In those Member States without a legally binding electoral gender quota, political parties sometimes voluntarily introduce quotas for the nomination of candidates. This so called ‘incremental track’ seeking to increase women’s representation progressively is sometimes regarded as more successful than the ‘fast track’ of legislative gender quotas, given the examples of Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands which have large percentages of women in their national parliaments.

Electoral systems and women representation

Analysts have sought to establish a relationship between electoral systems and the percentage of women elected. Whilst there is agreement that proportional representation systems are more favourable for female candidates than majoritarian systems, the link between open electoral lists (preferential voting, cross-list preferential voting) and women elected has recently been challenged.


This is an updated version of an infographic by Evarts Anosovs, Eva-Maria Poptcheva, Giulio Sabbati published in January 2015.

Country codes:
Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Germany (DE), Estonia (EE), Ireland (IE), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), France (FR), Finland (FI), Sweden (SE), United Kingdom (UK),

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