

STUDY

Requested by the FEMM committee



Women in political decision-making in view of the next European elections



Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs
Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union
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Women in political decision-making in view of the next European elections

STUDY

Abstract

This study was commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the FEMM Committee. It provides analysis of women's representation within the European Parliament and European Union institutions, key factors affecting gender balance among elected representatives, and strategies and actions to promote gender balance. It also presents case studies of three Member States conducted through the lens of parity democracy, and issues recommendations for political parties, Member States, and EU institutions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- EC** European Commission
- EIGE** European Institute for Gender Equality
- EP** European Parliament
- EU** European Union
- EWL** European Women's Lobby
- MEP** Member of the European Parliament
- NGO** Non-Governmental Organisation
- UK** United Kingdom

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Achieving gender parity in representative politics is required not only to uphold social justice and women's rights, but as an important condition of effective democracy and good governance that strengthens and enhances the democratic system. Despite this being a key objective of the European Union (EU), however, women remain severely underrepresented within our democratic institutions. Such underrepresentation constitutes a serious democratic deficit that demands urgent resolution. This report examines ways to address women's descriptive underrepresentation within the European Parliament, though we caution that equal presence does not mean equal power: once elected, women face the highly gendered power dynamic of the political system. Gender balance is a necessary – but not sufficient – condition of gender equality within the political sphere.

Aims

This study aims to contribute to our understanding of, and ability to address, women's underrepresentation in positions of political power and particularly within the European Parliament. It seeks to do this by providing:

- a clear overview of women's descriptive representation within the European Parliament and EU institutions;
- an explanation of the key factors affecting gender balance within different electoral systems;
- an appraisal of political parties', Member States', and EU institutions' strategies and actions to increase women's political participation, including:
 - quotas and putting women in winnable positions
 - access to funding linked to gender auditing, gender equality, and gender-related activities
 - capacity-building and training
 - awareness-raising campaigns
- information on examples of these strategies and actions in three case study Member States;
- recommendations for political parties, Member States, and EU institutions on achieving gender balance and diversity in equality within the European Parliament.

Methods

The findings of this report are based on the following methods:

- desk-review of the academic and research literature on parity democracy and women's underrepresentation in politics;
- desk-review of political parties', Member States', and EU institutions' strategies and actions for gender balance;
- interviews with a representative of the European Women's Lobby, and key stakeholders in each case study country, including women Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), MEP candidates, political party representatives involved in electoral candidate selection, and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) focused on women's rights and gender equality.

Findings

Achieving gender equality in decision-making is one of the European Union's stated objectives, reflected in a range of EU-level policy instruments and recommendations. However, while the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) recommends that representation of women, and of men, in bodies such as the European

Parliament should not fall below 40%, at the last European elections only 11 Member States out of 28 achieved this level of gender balance among their MEPs. By April 2018, this had reduced to just seven Member States.

A key conclusion of this report is that political parties have considerable influence over the degree of gender balance among a country's MEPs. This is most obviously the case in strict closed list systems, where each party determines which candidates are placed in prime position to take the party's seats. But even in more open systems, in which voters are able to express preferences for particular candidates, parties' recruitment strategies, selection processes, working practices, and culture significantly affect both supply of and demand for women candidates. While the evidence suggests that fewer women than men put themselves up for election, political parties, as well as Member States and EU institutions, must respond by asking themselves what they can do to change that, including how they can work to increase the appeal to women of a political career.

The international evidence suggests that the best results are seen when parties undertake ambitious, multi-faceted, coordinated programmes of action that seek to change the status quo of internal party practices and cultures as well as building women's capacity.

We begin this report with a brief review of the level of gender balance within the European Parliament, setting out how persistent and widespread gender imbalance is. We then go on to consider the different types of electoral systems used by Member States for the European elections, and how these different systems affect supply of and demand for women candidates. We set out the main factors affecting gender balance under different electoral systems, highlighting evidence of the influence of party-level candidate selection processes, but also a range of cultural, social, and economic factors, some of which become more or less consequential depending on the system in place. Key factors affecting gender balance include voter bias against women; gendered economic inequalities; media sexism; threats and abuse toward women in political life; a lack of work-life balance in the political field coupled with women's disproportionate caring responsibilities; and, crucially, male-dominated political cultures and practices.

We then present a review of Member States' and political parties' strategies and actions for gender balance, focusing in particular on electoral gender quotas (including list positioning rules and strategies for placing women in winnable positions), provision of funding linked to parties' levels of gender equality, capacity-building initiatives targeted at women, and gender equality communication campaigns. Finally, we present findings from case studies of three EU Member States (Poland, Spain, and Sweden) conducted through the lens of parity democracy.

Importantly, gender balance measures such as quotas applied to candidate selection, and in particular zipping, can mitigate much of the bias and disadvantage faced by women in political life by maintaining a high level of demand for women candidates. Where zipping or other effective measures are employed, the party 'selectorate' do not determine *whether* women are to be included among the party's candidates but, rather, *which* women are.

However, quotas are not a panacea for gendered inequality within politics and should not be pursued in isolation. Further steps must be taken to ensure a diverse range of women are empowered to pursue political careers. Even within those countries that perform best on women's descriptive representation, we are still a long way from achieving diversity in equality, and the striking lack of diversity among MEPs demonstrates the need to acknowledge and address how multiple, intersecting vectors of disadvantage related to gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexuality function to degrade our democratic institutions. As we work to improve the European Parliament's gender balance, we must do so in a way that promotes genuine descriptive and substantive representation of women's diversity.

Nonetheless, zipping is certainly an effective method of ensuring not only that party lists are gender balanced but also that women are placed in winnable positions. We also present international evidence that legislated quotas should be accompanied by sanctions for non-compliance, in the form of rejection of lists by national electoral authorities. By comparison, restricting parties' access to funding or imposing financial penalties for non-

compliance with gender goals can be an ineffective measure, particularly for larger parties that may prefer to pay the penalty or forgo funding rather than work to deliver gender equality. We found little evidence of the use of gender auditing of political parties, or support for party funding being linked to audit results. However, a number of respondents in each case study country expressed strong support for the provision of earmarked funds to support women's electoral campaigns, and their career development more broadly.

In terms of capacity-building initiatives targeted at women, the best evidence is that these should be multi-faceted and coordinated, providing not only on training in political skills, but also mentoring from senior women politicians, and support to build networks and gain direct experience of political processes and activities. Findings from our interviews suggest the key political skills that matter most to women pursuing political careers include media engagement, using social media to engage voters while defending against cyberviolence, public speaking, rhetoric, debating, negotiating tactics, budgeting, preparing for meetings, launching ideas, and also combatting power and domination techniques. However, in all case study countries, our findings suggest that political parties not doing enough on training and capacity-building. Particularly within Spain and Poland, there are too few opportunities for less experienced women to be mentored by more established and experienced politicians, and to access specialist training in political skills.

There is also a need for parties to work to communicate clear commitments to promoting women's rights and gender equality, and increasing the number of women representing them in parliament. Generally, our case study respondents were either unaware of or under-impressed by existing campaigns. We would urge that any awareness-raising campaigns will ring hollow – and, indeed, the efficacy of any capacity-building initiatives will remain limited – as long as party structures, working practices, and cultures function to the detriment of women. For awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives to work, parties must ensure women are genuinely empowered to become involved at all levels of the party in all kinds of roles, providing routes for progression from these roles to candidacy, and upholding good practice regarding work-life balance.

Recommendations

Immediate-term recommendations

Given that, at the time of writing, parties are finalising their candidates lists for the upcoming European elections, there are still opportunities for immediate action to improve the gender balance of the next parliament. Drawing on our research findings, we suggest these actions should focus on making direct appeals to political parties to construct gender balanced lists, and raising the profile of gender balance among the wider public, through media and information drives.

National political parties should:

- consider the findings of this report and compose candidate lists that will improve gender balance among their elected representatives.

National women's advocacy groups should:

- consider commissioning national polls to explore the voting public's understanding of and appetite for gender balance in European politics. The results of such polls can be newsworthy, support lobbying and campaigning, and help to galvanise political parties to make more equitable choices in their list selections.

European political groups (Europarties) should:

- exert influence on national parties to encourage them as far as possible to consider the importance of gender balance as they finalise their candidate lists.

European women's advocacy groups should:

- maximise media coverage of the issue of gender balance through the provision of press packs including key statistics on Member States' and political parties' records on gender balance;

- coordinate closely with women's lobbies and advocacy groups at the national level to ensure that key messages about the necessity of gender balance, statistics on gender imbalance in the European Parliament, and opportunities to promote gender balance are consistently communicated to target audiences, including political parties and voters.

Short to medium-term recommendations

In addition to immediate-term action to improve gender balance outcomes at the forthcoming election, our research findings motivate a range of recommendations for national political parties, Member States, and EU institutions to act to improve gender balance over the short to medium term.

Political parties have considerable influence over the degree of gender balance among a country's MEPs, and should act to implement ambitious, multi-faceted, coordinated programmes of action that seek to change the status quo of internal party practices and cultures as well as building women's capacity.

Specifically, national political parties should:

- implement 50% quotas with zipping throughout party lists;
- ensure candidate selection boards are diverse and trained in the benefits of diversity in equality;
- provide earmarked funding for women candidates' campaigns;
- provide wide-ranging capacity-building programmes for women to develop their skills, experience, and networks;
- ensure membership recruitment drives are designed to attract women to the party in a range of roles and provide routes of progression from these roles to candidacy;
- ensure internal working practices and cultures are respectful toward women and support a good work-life balance;
- and ensure communications campaigns clearly and consistently communicate parties' commitments to a women's rights and gender equality agenda.

Member States should:

- provide, or expand provision of, earmarked funding for women candidates' electoral campaigns, and for women's capacity development, networking, and organising;
- where a low level of gender balance among MEPs persists, consider the introduction of legislated quotas with zipping throughout party lists and legal sanctions for non-compliance in the form of rejection of party lists.

EU institutions should:

- continue to promote parity democracy across the EU, closely monitor progress toward equality, and gather and disseminate evidence on what works in increasing women's political participation and empowerment;
- act to implement and normalise good practice regarding work-life balance, and deliver on commitments to becoming gender balance role models by recruiting more women into senior positions;
- expand funding for women's capacity development, networking, and organising, and particularly for evidence-based programmes that can be evaluated for efficacy;
- fund a capacity needs assessment of all political parties represented in the European Parliament to inform the development of bespoke, evaluated programmes for women's capacity development at the national level;
- consider coordinating an international mentoring scheme to champion and spread good practice in achieving gender balance in politics.

1. GENDER BALANCE IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

KEY FINDINGS

- Achieving gender balance in decision-making positions is a key element of parity democracy.
- The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) recommends that representation of women, and of men, in democratic bodies such as the European Parliament should not fall below 40%.
- At the last European Parliament elections in 2014, only 11 out of 28 Member States achieved this level of gender balance among their MEPs. By April 2018, this had reduced to just seven Member States.

1.1. Why gender balance in politics matters

Gender equality within the political sphere, or ‘parity democracy’, requires the ‘full integration of women, on an equal footing with men, at all levels and in all areas of the workings of a democratic society’ (EIGE, 2019).¹ Parity democracy is necessary not only to uphold social justice and women’s rights, but as an important condition of effective democracy and good governance that strengthens and enhances the democratic system. A key element of this is achieving gender balance in decision-making positions: that is, equal (or near-equal) representation of women and men in any decision-making body in public and political life (such as the European Parliament). For example, EIGE recommends that representation of women, and of men, in such bodies should not fall ‘below 40% as a parity threshold’ (EIGE 2019).² Similarly, ‘critical mass’ theorists argue that, to have genuine influence within decision-making, women need to constitute at least 30% of the decision-making body.³ As MacRae (2012) found, and as we explore further throughout this report, the aim of achieving gender balance has been incorporated into a number of key EU-level policy instruments, though EU institutions and bodies themselves generally remain male-dominated.⁴

Increased descriptive representation (or, a quantitative increase in women in politics) has sometimes been advocated on the grounds that woman politicians tend to identify with and want to represent the interests of other women in society, and the more there are, the more they are able to represent those interests. Together with Childs and Krook (2009), Lovenduski and Norris (2003), and others, however, we would urge that the body of evidence suggests a more nuanced relationship between the numbers of women elected and the passage of policy that is favourable to women as a group.⁵ ⁶ First, not all women are committed to a gender equality or women’s rights agenda. Further, the ability of women politicians successfully to implement such an agenda, and to deliver substantive representation of women’s interests once they have been elected, varies depending on a range of factors. As Kokkonen and Wängnerud (2016) and others have shown, such factors often include, *inter alia*, the willingness of male colleagues to advance the interests of women.⁷ Women elected to positions of power may also experience ‘backlash’ effects, in various forms, which limit their exercise of power (Krook, 2015).⁸ So, equal presence does not mean equal power: once elected, women face the highly gendered power dynamic of the political system. Gender balance must be viewed as only one important element of gender equality in the

¹ EIGE (2019) *Gender Equality Glossary and Thesaurus*, available from: <https://eige.europa.eu/rdc/thesaurus/terms/1311>

² EIGE (2019) *Gender Equality Glossary and Thesaurus*, available from: <https://eige.europa.eu/rdc/thesaurus/terms/1149>

³ Dahlerup, D. (2006) ‘The story of The Theory of Critical Mass’, in *Politics & Gender*, 2(4): 511-522

⁴ MacRae, H. (2012) ‘Double-Speak: The European Union and Gender Parity’, in *West European Politics*, 35(2): 301-318

⁵ Childs, S. and Krook, M. (2009) ‘Analysing women’s substantive representation: from critical mass to critical actors’, in *Government and Opposition*, 44(2): 125-145

⁶ Lovenduski, J. and Norris, P. (2003) ‘Westminster Women: The politics of presence’, in *Political Studies*, 51: 84-102

⁷ Kokkonen, A. and Wängnerud, L. (2016) ‘Women’s Presence in Politics and Male Politicians’ Commitment to Gender Equality in Politics: Evidence from 290 Swedish Local Councils’, in *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 38(2): 199-220

⁸ Krook, M. (2015) ‘Empowerment versus backlash: gender quotas and critical mass theory’, in *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 2(1): 184-188

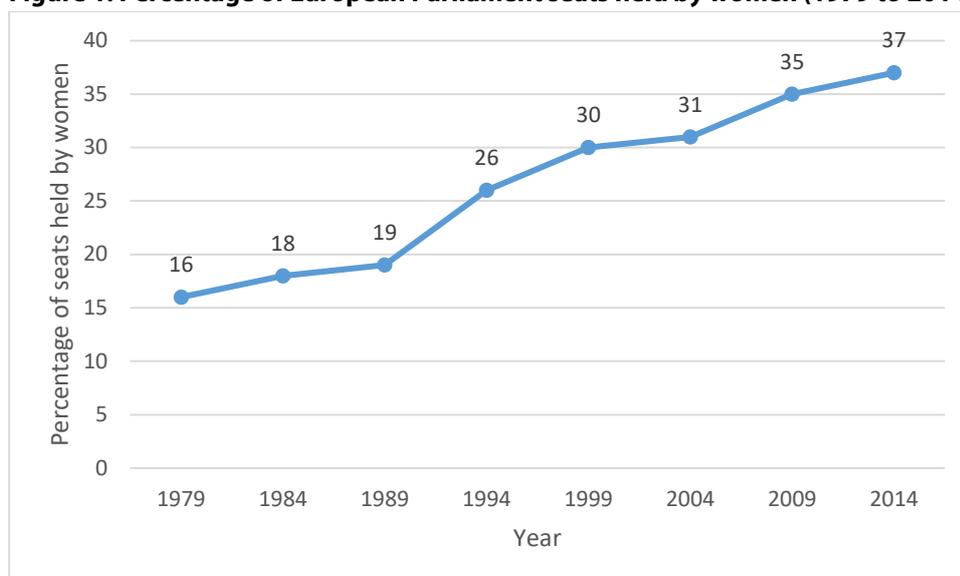
political sphere: it is required by but not a sufficient condition of parity democracy. While we focus primarily throughout this study on the gender imbalance of the European Parliament and women's descriptive underrepresentation within it, it is important never to lose sight of how this fits into the wider picture of gender inequality within the political sphere.

1.2. Gender balance among MEPs

Of the European Parliament's 751 seats, little more than a third are currently held by women. At the opening session of the current term following the 2014 parliamentary elections, women held 36.9% of seats.⁹ The latest available figures, for April 2018, show that changes to the composition of Parliament subsequently caused a slight decrease to 36.2%.¹⁰

As Figure 1 shows, women's descriptive underrepresentation has been a permanent feature of the European Parliament since its inception. While incremental improvements have been made, progress is moving at an unacceptably slow pace. It has taken two decades for the proportion of women to grow from just under a third in 1999, to just over a third today.

Figure 1: Percentage of European Parliament seats held by women (1979 to 2014)



Source: European Parliament (2019) *Results of the 2014 European elections: Men and women distribution*, available from: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/gender-balance.html>

The problem is also widespread across the European Union; it is not simply a feature of a small number of Member States with relatively large numbers of seats. As Figure 2 and Table 1 show, the majority of Member States are far from achieving balanced numbers of women and men MEPs. At April 2018, just seven of 28 Member States occupied what EIGE terms the 'gender balance zone', with between 40% and 60% women MEPs (Croatia, France, Ireland, Malta, Spain, Sweden, and the UK). Two Member States (Malta and Sweden) had precisely equal gender balance among their MEPs, and women made up over half of MEPs in a further three Member States (Croatia, Finland, and Ireland). Men were in the majority in the remaining 23 Member States. In half of all current Member States – 14 countries – men made up two-thirds or more of MEPs.

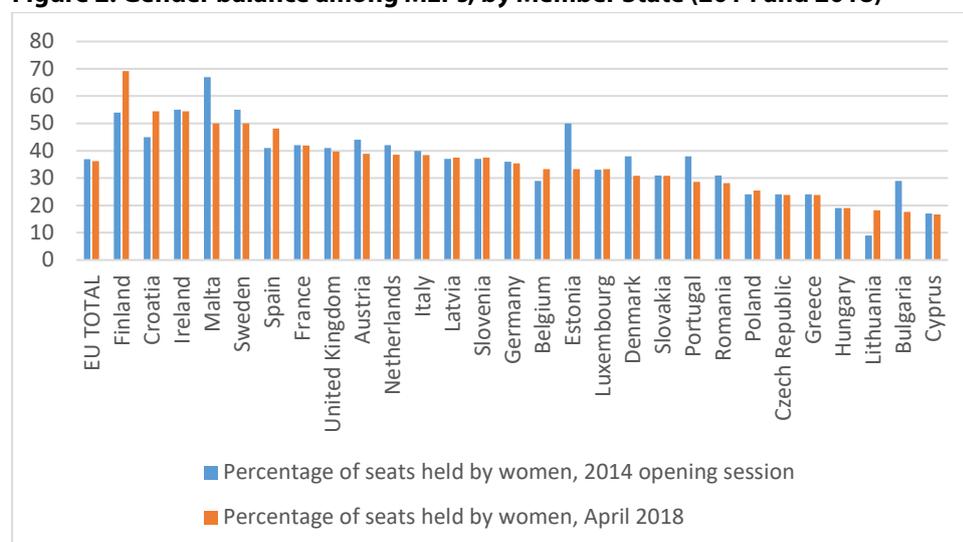
In the absence of detailed demographic data on MEPs, which is not routinely collected, we cannot reliably quantify how many women from minority ethnic backgrounds, women with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ women

⁹ European Parliament (2019) *Results of the 2014 European elections: Men and women distribution*, available from: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/gender-balance.html>

¹⁰ European Parliamentary Research Service (2018) *European Parliament: Facts and Figures*, available from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2018\)614733](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2018)614733)

have been elected as MEPs. We can still, however, reasonably conclude that these groups are generally underrepresented in parliamentary seats.¹¹ It is important to focus, therefore, on how intersectional disadvantages affect not only how many but also which women are elected to Parliament. Women face multiple, interrelated vectors of disadvantage related to gender but also to other factors such as ethnicity, disability, and sexuality. As we work to improve the European Parliament's gender balance, we must do so in a way that promotes genuine descriptive and substantive representation of women's diversity.

Figure 2: Gender balance among MEPs, by Member State (2014 and 2018)



Sources: European Parliament (2019) *Results of the 2014 European elections: Men and women distribution*, available from:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/gender-balance.html>;

European Parliamentary Research Service (2018) *European Parliament: Facts and Figures*, available from:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2018\)614733](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2018)614733)

Table 1: Gender balance among MEPs, by Member State (2014 and 2018)

Member State	Number of seats (2014-2019)	Percentage of seats held by women (at July 2014 opening session)	Percentage of seats held by women (at April 2018)
EU TOTAL	751	36.9	36.2
Austria	18	44	39
Belgium	21	29	33
Bulgaria	17	29	18
Croatia	11	45	55
Cyprus	6	17	17
Czech Republic	21	24	24
Denmark	13	38	31
Estonia	6	50	33
Finland	13	54	69
France	74	42	42
Germany	96	36	35

¹¹ It has been frequently observed that ethnic diversity among MEPs is lower than it would be if Parliament's demographics reflected EU population demographics: parliamentarians are disproportionately white. For example, in August 2018, it was reported that, while a European Parliament that was strictly proportionate to EU's demographics would see an estimated 22 seats held by black MEPs, just three seats were actually held by black MEPs (see Rankin, J. (2018) 'The EU is too white', article in *The Guardian*, available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/29/eu-is-too-white-brex-it-likely-to-make-it-worse>).

Member State	Number of seats (2014-2019)	Percentage of seats held by women (at July 2014 opening session)	Percentage of seats held by women (at April 2018)
Greece	21	24	24
Hungary	21	19	19
Ireland	11	55	55
Italy	73	40	38
Latvia	8	37	38
Lithuania	11	9	18
Luxembourg	6	33	33
Malta	6	67	50
Netherlands	26	42	38
Poland	51	24	25
Portugal	21	38	27
Romania	32	31	28
Slovakia	13	31	31
Slovenia	8	37	38
Spain	54	41	48
Sweden	20	55	50
United Kingdom	73	41	40

Sources: European Parliament (2019) *Results of the 2014 European elections: Results by Member State*, available from:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/seats-member-state-absolut.html>;

European Parliament (2019) *Results of the 2014 European elections: Men and women distribution*, available from:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/gender-balance.html>;

European Parliamentary Research Service (2018) *European Parliament: Facts and Figures*, available from:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2018\)614733](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2018)614733)

2. MEMBER STATE SYSTEMS FOR THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

KEY FINDINGS

- Electoral systems matter to gender balance because they have consequences for the supply of and demand for women politicians.
- All elections to the European Parliament must be based on proportional representation and use either a list system or a single transferable vote system. The majority of Member States, 19 in total, use some form of preferential voting, while seven use closed list systems, and two use the single transferable vote system.
- Each Member State's electoral system can be categorised according to how open or closed it is. In more closed systems, parties control who takes up their seats, while in more open systems, voters can express preferences for candidates.
- Parties' and voters' respective shares of influence over which candidates take seats matter to how effective particular strategies to promote gender balance will be.

2.1. Electoral systems and gender balance

Electoral systems matter to gender balance because they have consequences for the supply of and demand for women politicians.¹² In section 3 of this report, we review in more detail the range of cultural, social, political, and economic factors that affect supply of and demand for women MEPs. As we will argue, some of these factors become more or less consequential depending on the electoral system in place. This section therefore provides an overview of the different systems used by Member States for elections to the European Parliament. We first set out a typology of electoral systems, before designating the system of each Member State to a type.

2.2. Typology of electoral systems

While there is some flexibility for each Member State to design the system used for its elections to the European Parliament in accordance with national preferences, Article 1 of Council Decision 2002/772/EC requires that 'elections must be based on proportional representation and use either the list system or the single transferable vote system'.¹³

Under these different systems, while parties gain seats in some kind of proportion to their share of the vote, parties and voters have differing degrees of influence over which candidates take up party seats. That is because voters tend to be able to vote either for political parties, or for individual candidates, or for a mix of both. While parties and voters always share influence over who takes a party's seats, how that influence is shared has implications for how to address gender imbalance among elected representatives.

Under the single transferable vote (STV) system, the voter has one vote but can rank preferred candidates in order of choice and is not restricted to choosing candidates from a single party. Candidates must receive a minimum number of votes to be elected. Results are, then, relatively strongly based on voters' preferences about candidates and in that sense we can generally categorise STV systems as relatively 'open' in democratic terms.

Some Member States operate a closed list system. In closed list elections, parties develop lists of candidates and voters chose between the parties' lists. Parties then allocate the seats they win to candidates in accordance with

¹² Golder, S., Stephenson, L., Van der Straeten, K., Blais, A., Bol, D., Harfst, P., and Laslier, J. (2017) 'Votes for Women: Electoral Systems and Support for Female Candidates', in *Politics & Gender*, 13(1): 107-131

¹³ Council Decision 2002/772/EC, available from: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ftu/pdf/en/FTU_1.3.4.pdf

their positions on the lists. As voters cannot change the order of candidates on the list, parties retain a significant degree of control over who takes up party seats. In this sense, these systems are relatively 'closed'.

The remaining Member States use some form of the preferential voting system, under which voters can express some preference regarding candidates on party lists. Different versions of the preferential voting system afford differing degrees of influence to voters over which candidates take parties' seats. For example, some more 'open' preferential voting systems allow voters to vote for candidates from different party lists. Some systems that are best described as 'mixed' require voters to choose one list but permit them to change the position of one or all candidates on that list. In mixed systems, parties generally decide who takes a proportion of their seats, while the others are filled on the basis of numbers of votes.

Table 2 below summarises the different types of electoral system and provides an indication for each of how influence over who gets seats is generally shared between voters and parties, and how open or closed the systems tend to be. While this typology is useful as a broad framework, it is of course important to recognise that such influence is always shared to some degree between parties and voters, and that respective shares are affected by variations in the implementation of any particular type of electoral system.

Table 2: Typology of electoral systems

<i>Electoral system</i>	Closed lists	Single transferable vote	Preferential voting	
			Open lists	Semi-open lists
<i>Influence over candidate election</i>	Strong party preference	Strong voter preference	Strong voter preference	Mix of party and voter preference
<i>Open or closed</i>	More closed	More open	More open	Mixed

2.3. Electoral systems by Member State

In accordance with the typology described above, we set out the electoral system of each Member State in Table 3 below. The majority of Member States – 19 in total – use some form of preferential voting, while seven use closed list systems, and two use single transferable vote systems. In terms of the openness of electoral systems, a 2015 report by Opcit Research for the European Parliament categorised eight systems as closed, 10 as open, and the remaining 10 as mixed.¹⁴ As we examine in further detail in the next section of this report, these differences in openness – or, in parties' and voters' respective shares of influence over which candidates take seats – have consequences both for the gender balance of elected representatives, and for the efficacy of strategies to promote gender balance.

Table 3: Electoral systems by Member State

Member State	Electoral system	Openness
Austria	Preferential Voting	Mixed
Belgium	Preferential Voting	Mixed
Bulgaria	Preferential Voting	Open
Croatia	Preferential Voting	Open
Cyprus	Preferential Voting	Open
Czech Republic	Preferential Voting	Open
Denmark	Preferential Voting	Mixed
Estonia	Preferential Voting	Closed
Finland	Preferential Voting	Open

¹⁴ Opcit Research (2015) *Analysis of political parties' and independent candidates' policies for gender balance in the European Parliament after the elections of 2014*, available from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2015\)536448](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2015)536448)

Member State	Electoral system	Openness
France	Closed Lists	Closed
Germany	Closed Lists	Closed
Greece	Preferential Voting	Mixed
Hungary	Closed Lists	Closed
Ireland	Single Transferable Vote	Open
Italy	Preferential Voting	Open
Latvia	Preferential Voting	Open
Lithuania	Preferential Voting	Mixed
Luxembourg	Preferential Voting	Mixed
Malta	Single Transferable Vote	Open
Netherlands	Preferential Voting	Open
Poland	Preferential Voting	Mixed
Portugal	Closed Lists	Mixed
Romania	Closed Lists	Closed
Slovakia	Preferential Voting	Closed
Slovenia	Preferential Voting	Mixed
Spain	Closed Lists	Closed
Sweden	Preferential Voting	Mixed
United Kingdom	Closed lists in England, Scotland, and Wales; STV in Northern Ireland	Closed

Sources: European Parliamentary Research Service (2018) *2019 European elections: National rules*, available from:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_ATA\(2018\)623556](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_ATA(2018)623556);

Opcit Research (2015) *Analysis of political parties' and independent candidates' policies for gender balance in the European Parliament after the elections of 2014*, available from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2015\)536448](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2015)536448)

3. FACTORS AFFECTING GENDER BALANCE UNDER DIFFERENT ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

KEY FINDINGS

- Factors affecting supply of and demand for women politicians include institutional aspects of the political system, including the electoral system and party-level candidate selection processes, but also a range of cultural, social, and economic factors, some of which become more or less consequential depending on the system in place. Key factors affecting gender balance include voter bias against women; gendered economic inequality; a lack of work-life balance in the political field coupled with women's disproportionate caring responsibilities; media sexism; threats and abuse toward women in political life; and male-dominated political culture.
- Within more open systems, voters' preferences about candidates become more decisive, and so the factors affecting these preferences become more important. Within more closed systems, parties have greater control over who takes their seats, and so party-level decisions about who to select or whether to apply gender balance measures to nomination and selection processes become more decisive for gender balance.
- Factors affecting the supply of women candidates become less important in systems that maintain demand by, for example, implementing gender quotas.

3.1. Factors affecting supply of and demand for women candidates

There is a broad range of literature analysing the factors that influence women's political participation. Matland (2005) identifies three crucial hurdles women must pass before entering a parliament: first, women need to select themselves; second, women need to be selected as candidates by political parties; and third, women need to be selected by voters.¹⁵ Women's self-selection can be broadly conceived as a matter of the 'supply' of women candidates, while selection by parties and voters relates to 'demand' for women candidates, though the range of factors that disadvantage women at each hurdle are overlapping and interrelated. Factors affecting supply and demand for women politicians include institutional aspects of the political system, including the electoral system and party-level candidate selection processes, but also a range of cultural, social, and economic factors, some of which become more or less consequential depending on the system in place.

In general, within more open systems, voters' preferences about candidates become more decisive, and so the factors affecting these preferences become more important. Within more closed systems, parties have greater control over who takes their seats, and so party-level decisions about who to select or whether to apply gender balance measures to nomination and selection processes become more decisive for gender balance. Further, factors affecting the supply of women candidates become less important in systems that maintain demand by, for example, implementing gender quotas. Overall, introducing measures that maintain demand for women candidates at the party and national levels can help to mitigate gender imbalances among elected representatives, regardless of whether the initial pool of women willing to stand as candidates was smaller than that of men.

3.2. Supply of candidates

With regard to the factors that affect women's choices to pursue election, it has sometimes been claimed that fewer women than men put themselves forward for election because fewer women have the required confidence or political ambition. There is evidence that women's political activity is, on average, more likely to be focused on

¹⁵ Matland, R. (2005) 'Enhancing women's political participation: legislative recruitment and electoral systems', in *Women in parliament: Beyond numbers*, 2: 93-111

certain forms of grassroots politics than on representative politics. For example, Marien et al. (2010) find that more men than women participate in 'institutionalised and electoral' forms of politics, while more women engage in some forms of cause-oriented activism.¹⁶

However, as explanations for gender inequalities in the supply of candidates, claims regarding women's confidence or ambitions are question-begging: if fewer women than men have the confidence or ambition to pursue election, why is that the case? In seeking to understand gendered differences, it is essential not to individualise women's choices by simply attributing them to women's personal preferences and divorcing them from the broader cultural, social, political, and economic contexts in which they are made. Women's levels of confidence and the shape of their ambitions are not immutable but shaped by their socialisation, experiences, and opportunities in a world of pervasive gender inequality. (Importantly, some of these opportunities – such as training and mentoring in political skills – are in the gift of political parties, who can thereby have a significant impact on women's confidence and ambitions.)

Women's choices to self-select are also informed by the risks and costs of entering representative politics, and reasonable expectations of a male-dominated and androcentric model and culture of representative politics may have a deterrent effect on women. Even where laws and regulations nominally give women equal status, the ongoing prevalence of patriarchal norms, values, and attitudes within political culture signals to women that, even if elected, they would not face a level playing field with men. A wealth of research illuminates the gendered nature of political and leadership culture, and its inequalitarian consequences. For example, Eagly and Karau (2002) explore how certain traits are both strongly associated with leadership and perceived as 'masculine'; and how, as a consequence, women in leadership positions who exhibit these traits can be perceived negatively.¹⁷ Ryan and Haslam (2005) highlight the prevalence of assumptions that women generally have less capacity and potential to be leaders than men.¹⁸ Further, Murray (2014) reports that women, and particularly those selected by a process involving gender quotas, are more likely than men to be expected to demonstrate their abilities, to prove themselves and justify their presence.¹⁹

It is well-established that media coverage of women candidates and politicians is disproportionately negative and that justified expectations of media hostility are likely to discourage women from standing for election. For example, Haraldsson and Wängnerud's (2018) global study on the relationship between media sexism and women in politics found that 'the higher the level of media sexism, the lower the share of women candidates'.²⁰ The authors hypothesize that 'sexist portrayals of women in the media stifle ambition among women who, in a less sexist media environment, would be willing to stand as political candidates'.

As well as heightened media hostility and sexism, women politicians in Europe face significant threats, harassment, and violence from the public and from their political colleagues, both directly and through social media. A 2018 study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) interviewed women Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff from 45 European countries.²¹ Of the 81 women MPs who were interviewed, 85% reported having suffered psychological violence in the course of their term of office, 68% had been the target of comments relating to their physical appearance or based on

¹⁶ Marien, S., Hooghe, M., and Quintelier, E. (2010) 'Inequalities in Non-Institutionalised forms of Political Participation: A Multi-Level Analysis of 25 Countries', in *Political Studies*, 58(1): 187-213

¹⁷ Eagly, A. and Karau, S. (2002) 'Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders', in *Psychological Review*, 109(3): 573-598

¹⁸ Ryan, M. and Haslam, S. (2005) 'The glass cliff: Evidence that women over-presented in precarious leadership positions', in *British Journal of Management*, 16: 81-90

¹⁹ Murray, R. (2014), 'Quotas for Men: Reframing gender quotas as a means of improving representation for all', in *American Political Science Review*, 108(3): 520-532

²⁰ Amanda Haraldsson, A. and Wängnerud, L. (2018) 'The effect of media sexism on women's political ambition: evidence from a worldwide study', in *Feminist Media Studies*, 1-17

²¹ IPU and PACE (2018) *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe*, available from: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>

gender stereotypes, 58% had been the target of online sexist attacks on social networks, 47% had received death threats or threats of rape or beating, 25% had suffered sexual violence, and 15% had suffered physical violence. The study also found that 'female MPs under the age of 40 were more frequently subject to psychological and sexual harassment', and that 'female MPs active in the fight against gender inequality and violence against women were often singled out for attack'.

Women's choices are also often influenced by the disproportionate burden they bear for household and caring labour, coupled with insufficient childcare provision, in the context of extremely demanding and unpredictable working patterns of MEPs (EIGE, 2013 and 2015).^{22 23} Involvement in representative politics currently requires a very significant commitment of time and energy, and therefore sacrifices or work-life imbalances that many women with caring and other responsibilities may be unable or unwilling to make. It is well-established how detrimental an effect such requirements have on women's ability to pursue election and other leadership positions.^{24 25 26}

Another key factor affecting women's choices to enter representation politics is their economic position. Given the relative economic disadvantage faced by women as a group, compared to men, the financial barriers to election are on average harder for women to surmount. Further, research by Barber et al. (2015) suggests that women receive less in private campaign donations on average than their male counterparts, and are therefore more reliant either on their own personal wealth or on party support to attract support from voters.²⁷ Similarly, research by Opcit Research for the European Parliament (2015) found that women tend to have less money available to them than men to finance campaigns that are essential to entry into representative politics.²⁸

So, factors contributing to gender imbalance in the supply of candidates may include gendered differences in levels of confidence and types of ambition, but these are in turn shaped by gendered differences in socialisation, experiences, and opportunities, and indeed by recognition of the costs and risks associated with election, which are disproportionately negative for women. At a more fundamental level, then, explanations of why fewer women than men choose to pursue election can be found in the broader gender inequalities that pervade culture, society, politics, and the economy. Specifically, some of the most important explanatory factors relate to the lack of gender parity in the associated economic costs, costs to work-life balance, media hostility, harassment and violence, and a model and culture of representative politics and leadership that disadvantage women. In each of these areas, further research is required to explore in more detail how women's disadvantages are simultaneously influenced by interwoven forms of stratification relating to factors such as ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and socio-economic position.

²² EIGE (2013) *Gender Equality Index: Report*, available from: <http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Gender-Equality-Index-Report.pdf>

²³ EIGE (2015) *Gender Equality in Power and Decision-Making: Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States*, available from: <https://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications/gender-equality-power-and-decision-making-report>

²⁴ Teele, D, Kalla, J., and Rosenbluth F. (2015) 'The Ties That Double Bind: Social Roles and Women's Underrepresentation in Politics', in *American Political Science Review*, 112(3): 525-541

²⁵ Britton, D. (2010) 'Engendering the University through policy and practice: Barriers to promotion to full professor for women in the science, engineering, and math disciplines', in Riegraf, B, Aulenbacher, B, Kirsch-Auwärter, E., and Müller, U. (eds.), *Gender Change in Academia: Re-Mapping the Fields of Work, Knowledge, and Politics from a Gender Perspective*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS

²⁶ Jones, S., Charles, N., and Davies, C. (2008) 'Transforming masculinist political cultures? Doing politics in new political institutions', in *Sociological Research Online*, 14(2): 1-13

²⁷ Barber, M., Butler, D., & Preece, J. (2016). Gender Inequalities in Campaign Finance. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 11(2), 219-248.

²⁸ Opcit Research (2015) *Analysis of political parties' and independent candidates' policies for gender balance in the European Parliament after the elections of 2014*, available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536448/IPOL_STU\(2015\)536448_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536448/IPOL_STU(2015)536448_EN.pdf)

The question remains, however, how consequential these supply-side factors are in limiting gender balance within parliaments, and how reliant efforts to improve gender balance are on addressing them. The issues discussed above should, of course, be addressed as a matter of justice and fairness, because they are wrong in themselves and because they have a wide array of negative effects. But they are also long-standing problems, and improvements in these areas have been both slow and hard-won. And in fact, much of the most recent research demonstrates that, even if the supply of women candidates is relatively low, the effect of this on gender balance among MEPs can be effectively mitigated or neutralised by addressing demand for women candidates and representatives.²⁹ In other words, women's descriptive underrepresentation can largely be explained with reference to demand-side factors.

3.3. Demand for candidates among voters and parties: setting women up to win

With regard to the level of demand for women MEPs among voters, clearly voters' values and attitudes concerning gender and political office, and the broader inequalities that shape them, have a significant influence. Even in the most culturally egalitarian countries, there remain voters with biases – whether conscious or unconscious – against electing women to political power, reflecting long-standing social norms and arrangements that have only recently begun to change. (For example, as discussed above, dominant conceptions of leadership often disfavour women, and in particular women with certain minority demographic characteristics.) Particularly within more open systems, and holding other things equal, such biases work to disadvantage women as voters cast their votes for candidates, and to disadvantage women of colour, women living with disabilities, LBGQTQ+ women, and socio-economically disadvantaged women in multiple, intersecting ways.

And, of course, other things are not equal. In democratic systems in which voters rely to at least some degree on traditional media for information about the candidates they may vote for, media representation of candidates is an important influence on voters' choices. As highlighted above, however, research evidence demonstrates that traditional media do not tend to 'play fair' with women standing for election or those who have been elected. A study by Ross et al. (2012) of media coverage of candidates for the UK's national election in 2010 found that 'women were much less likely to feature in news stories than men, [and] were much more likely to be mentioned or quoted in feature articles focused explicitly on gender issues, made interesting because of their sex and couthure rather than their political abilities and experience'.³⁰ Far from operating on a level playing field to attract voters' attention, then, women candidates receive quantitatively less and qualitatively narrower coverage. As Kittilson and Fridkin (2008) suggest, media portrayals of women candidates in stereotypical terms have 'important implications for voters' perceptions of candidates and may shape widely shared attitudes toward women's role in the political arena'.³¹

In Matland's (2005) terms, as well as selecting themselves, and being selected by voters, women seeking election must (excepting the minority of independent, non-partisan candidates) also overcome the hurdle of being selected by a political party. It is well-established within political science that party processes and decisions significantly affect the proportion of women elected. Political parties are the gatekeepers to gender balanced descriptive representation, not least because they run nominations and selections.

A key factor affecting parties' selection of candidates is, necessarily, their calculation of what voters' will favour. Parties have strong incentives to play to their constituencies' prejudices, including sexist views on gender roles and politics, if they believe that will maximise their vote. The attitudes of the 'selectorate' – that is, those within political parties who directly influence selection of candidates – toward gender equality and women in power, and the value they place on parity democracy, also matter. And these are in turn related to parties' histories of

²⁹ Ashe, J. and Stewart, K. (2012) 'Legislative Recruitment: Using Diagnostic Testing to Explain Underrepresentation', in *Party Politics*, 18 (5): 687–707

³⁰ Ross, K., Evans, E., and Harrison, L. (2012) 'The Gender of News and News of Gender: A Study of Sex, Politics, and Press Coverage of the 2010 British General Election', in *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(1): 3-20

³¹ Kittilson, M. and Fridkin, K. (2008) 'Gender, Candidate Portrayals and Election Campaigns: A Comparative Perspective', in *Politics & Gender*, 4(3): 371-392

traditions, cultures, practices, commitments, and beliefs, sustained and transformed down the generations of party supporters. Generally, parties pursuing more egalitarian conceptions of social justice have led the way in initiating and progressing gender equality measures and initiatives. A 2015 report by Opcit Research for the European Parliament found evidence to suggest that 'long held beliefs within political parties' are closely associated with their support for positive action to improve gender balance among their parliamentary representatives, and that, in very broad terms, 'left and green-leaning parties are generally supportive of positive action such as quotas, whereas liberals and right-leaning parties are not'.³² This is likely to be due to, *inter alia*, parties' values and also, importantly, parties' recognition of the values of their voter base and voters' likely reactions to positive action at the ballot box.

The processes used by political parties to nominate and select candidates, and perhaps most decisively certain forms of positive action within more closed electoral systems, are crucial levers for achieving gender balance among elected representatives. Across Europe, parties vary in terms of how many women they nominate and select, and where they place women on party lists or in districts, depending (among other things) on their organisational processes, including the way candidates are selected. In particular, party-level gender quotas, gender-balancing list ordering systems such as zipping or twinning, and policies of standing women in winnable seats can strongly influence the gender balance of parties' elected representatives. (To illustrate, a party that uses strict zipping within a strict closed list system will, assuming it wins an even number of seats, achieve a 50:50 ratio of women to men among its representatives.) In addition, beyond those actions and processes directly relating to candidate selection, parties engage to varying degrees in action to promote women candidates ahead of voting day. They also work to varying degrees to promote the ideals of parity democracy (within their parties and more broadly), and to support women in the party to become viable candidates (for example, to accumulate political experience in higher profile or more public-facing roles, or to develop political skills through training and mentoring). In section 4 of this report, we examine in further detail these kinds of party-level strategies, processes, and actions, exploring where and how parties across the EU have implemented successful measures to promote gender balance.

3.4. Electoral systems

There is a wide range of literature exploring how the design of electoral systems affects the gender balance of elected representatives. Various studies suggest that women have higher levels of descriptive representation in proportional electoral systems, compared with plurality or majority systems.^{33 34 35 36} All EU Member States use a proportional representation system for electing MEPs, in line with Council Decision 2002/772/EC, but as discussed above these vary in nature and in the proportion of women they elect.

Some studies suggest that the openness of the ballot structure in PR systems (in the sense of openness discussed in section 2.2) matters to gender balance. Some earlier studies found that strong voter-preference systems, such as preferential voting systems with open lists, were associated with greater gender balance.³⁷ However, more recent studies show that closed list systems are associated with greater gender balance.^{38 39}

³² Opcit Research (2015) *Analysis of political parties' and independent candidates' policies for gender balance in the European Parliament after the elections of 2014*, available at:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536448/IPOL_STU\(2015\)536448_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536448/IPOL_STU(2015)536448_EN.pdf)

³³ Schwindt-Bayer, L. A. and Mishler, W. (2005) 'An Integrated Model of Women's Representation', in the *Journal of Politics*, 67(2): 407-428

³⁴ Paxton, P. and Kunovich, S. (2003) 'Women's political representation: The importance of ideology', in *Social Forces*, 82(1), 87-113

³⁵ Matland, R. E. and Studlar, D. T. (1998) 'Gender and the electoral opportunity structure in the Canadian provinces', in *Political Research Quarterly*, 51(1), 117-140

³⁶ Norris, P. and Franklin, M. (1997) Social representation, in *European Journal of Political Research*, 32(2), 185-210

³⁷ Shugart, M. S. and Taagepera, R. (1994) 'Plurality versus majority election of presidents: A proposal for a "double complement rule"', in *Comparative Political Studies*, 27(3), 323-348

³⁸ Paxton, P. and Kunovich, S. (2003) 'Women's political representation: The importance of ideology', in *Social Forces*, 82(1), 87-113

³⁹ Htun, M. (2005) 'Women in political power in Latin America', in *Europe (OSCE countries)*, 16, 14-8

It should be clear, however, that if the openness of the electoral system has an effect on gender balance, it is necessarily mediated by other factors. In more closed systems, parties' willingness to place women in their seats and/or to employ gender balance measures is key. In more open systems, voters' willingness to vote specific women candidates into power becomes more decisive.

In closed list systems, voters vote only for a party and not for individual candidates on party lists, and the task of appointing individual candidates to seats won by a party is allocated to the parties themselves. In this context, political parties have decisive influence over the gender balance of their MEPs because they can choose list arrangements that will deliver gender balance in however many seats they win. In the absence of specific measures, the 'selectorate' may yet select candidates in a balanced way. Or the process may be subject to gender balancing quotas or measures of various forms; for example, placing a specific gender ratio requirement on all or the top part of party lists, or requiring party lists to be 'zipped', such that women and men are positioned in alternating list places.

By contrast, in more open systems, voters are able to vote directly for individual candidates and so have more influence over which candidates get elected. In open list systems, the order of candidates on party lists is not relevant as seats are allocated on the basis of the quantity of votes won by individual candidates, and so party-level list arrangements such as zipping are not effective methods of promoting gender balance.

In Member States with relatively high levels of public support for parity democracy and low levels of voter bias against women candidates, a strong voter-preference system might therefore, other things equal, not be so likely to deliver worse gender balance than a closed list system. Conversely, the gender-balancing effect of closed list systems in countries with higher levels of voter bias against women may be stronger inasmuch as parties create gender balanced lists.

Matland (2005) claims that closed list systems tend to produce better outcomes for women when it is easier to convince party 'gatekeepers' to champion women – for example, by introducing quotas or measures such as zipping that ensure gender balance in the party's seats – than it is to convince voters to vote for women. Of course, the decisions of political parties in arranging their lists, even in closed list systems, depend to some degree on public attitudes towards gender equality and women in politics: parties still consider voter preferences. To illustrate, in countries with closed list systems where voter bias against women candidates is widespread, voters may be discouraged from selecting a party with very balanced lists if there are alternatives, which creates a disincentive for parties to create balanced lists.

One method that can work effectively to neutralise the effects of these biases and disincentives, and the effects of wider gender inequalities that disadvantage women in the European Parliament elections, is to introduce national legislated quotas that require gender balance among a Member State's candidates. These may be supported by legal and financial sanctions for non-compliance. Such measures essentially mitigate low levels of demand for women candidates among voters and parties, and indeed also low levels of supply of women candidates, by enforcing demand nationally across parties. In the next section of this report, we examine in further detail the variety of quotas used by Member States for the European Parliament elections.

In sum, women face disadvantages at each hurdle to entering representative politics. In addition to national electoral systems and party-level selection processes, the evidence suggests that gender balance among elected representatives can be affected by, *inter alia*, voter bias against women, gendered economic inequality, a lack of work-life balance in the political field coupled with women's disproportionate caring responsibilities, media sexism, threats and abuse toward women in political life, and male-dominated political cultures. Crucially, however, the negative influence of these factors on gender balance can be effectively mitigated or neutralised by party- or national-level gender balancing measures that assure demand for women candidates and representatives.

4. MEMBER STATES' AND POLITICAL PARTIES' STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR GENDER BALANCE

KEY FINDINGS

- Quotas can be an effective method of achieving and sustaining gender balance among Member State MEPs, but their efficacy is dependent on a range of factors. These include the electoral system (quotas may be less effective in more open systems), the stringency and scope of the quota, and enforcement of sanctions for non-compliance.
- Quotas should require a minimum of 50% of candidates to be women and include rules on list positioning, particularly at the top of party lists, to ensure women are placed in winnable positions. Zipping is the most effective method for achieving gender balance throughout lists.
- Legislated quotas should be accompanied by sanctions for non-compliance. International evidence suggests rejection of lists by electoral authorities provides an effective deterrent to parties' non-compliance. Restricting parties' access to funding or imposing financial penalties for non-compliance can be ineffective if not accompanied by rejection of lists, as parties may choose to pay the penalty rather than balance their lists.
- Quotas are not a panacea for gendered inequality within politics and should not be pursued in isolation. Further steps must be taken to ensure a diverse range of women are empowered to pursue political careers. The international evidence suggests that the best results are seen when parties undertake ambitious, multi-faceted, coordinated programmes of action that seek to change the status quo of internal party practices and cultures as well as building women's capacity.
- Parties should deliver capacity-building initiatives targeted at women that focus not only on training and mentoring, but also on building networks and providing direct experience of political processes and activities.
- Parties should consider how best to target local recruitment drives at women and provide routes of progression from all levels of the party to candidacy, while ensuring their internal working practices and cultures do not work to women's disadvantage.
- Political parties and the European Parliament itself should follow best practice on work-life balance to ensure women (and others) with caring responsibilities are not deterred or set at a disadvantage.

4.1. Electoral gender quotas, list positioning, and funding linked to gender equality

Electoral gender quotas started gaining traction in Europe the 1990s, when they were introduced by several political parties and some Member States. These moves were supported and encouraged at the level of EU policy by a range of measures including Council Recommendation 96/694/EC of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process, the European Parliament's Resolution of 11 February 1994 on women in decision-making, and Council Resolution of 27 March 1995 on the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making. Quotas are an example of positive action in that they aim to increase participation of a specific group, but it is important to recognise that gender quotas neither provide women with an unfair advantage over men, nor discriminate against men: rather, they work as a temporary measure to offset significant and persistent unfair disadvantages faced by women in the political field. They are useful, then, only for as long as those background disadvantages persist.

Electoral gender quotas take a range of different forms. One important distinction can be drawn between legislated or 'hard' quotas that are enshrined in national law or constitutions, and 'soft' quotas that are voluntarily implemented by individual political parties. In the last European Parliament elections, in May 2014, nine Member States had some form of legislated gender quota that imposed requirements on the gender balance of electoral

lists. Eight of these required a minimum proportion of female (or both female and male) candidates, between 33% and 50% (Belgium, Croatia, France, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain). Romania implemented a quota of sorts, though this required only that each party had at least one candidate of each sex, and so was by far the least demanding of the legislated quotas in use.

With regard to putting women candidates into winnable positions on party lists, six of the Member States with legislated quotas imposed some form of list position requirement. As outlined earlier in this report, in party list systems, the order candidates are placed on lists is important. Within closed list systems, for example, women may make up a third of a party's candidates and yet, if they are all placed at the bottom of the list, may win no seats. As Dahlerup and Johansson (2013) note, 'a quota system that does not include such rank-order rules may have no effect at all. [...] Consequently, many quota systems today combine rules about the total number of women and men on the candidate lists, for instance, no less than 40 and no more than 60 per cent of each sex, with specific rules concerning the gender composition among the top candidates'.⁴⁰ List position rules, used at the national or party level, or both, vary. One of the most effective approaches, particularly within closed list systems, is zipping. This requires alternation of women and men on party lists, either throughout the whole list (as in France) or throughout the top portion of the list. This ensures a degree of gender balance among candidates and among the parliamentary seats filled in accordance with list positions (as opposed to votes). Other list position rules apply to the top sections of lists, or to every few names. Belgium, for example, requires that the first two candidates on party lists cannot be of the same sex, while Slovenia requires that at least one candidate of each sex must be placed in the first half of each electoral list. In Spain, the 40% quota applies both to the whole list and to every five names.

Legislated quotas can be implemented alongside sanctions for non-compliance. In most cases within the EU, lists that do not comply with legislated requirements are rejected and may not be used for the election. In a small number of Member States, however, there are financial repercussions. In Croatia, a fine of HRK 50,000 is imposed on political parties that fail to comply; in France, parties face reduced public funding; in Italy, parties face partial loss of subsidies; and in Portugal, financial sanctions are imposed.

In several more EU Member States, there are no national legislated quotas but many political parties voluntarily implement quotas in candidate selection, as well as measures to ensure women occupy winnable positions on party lists. In Austria, for example, the Greens have a 50% quota for women on party lists, the Social Democratic Party has a 40% quota, and the Austrian People's Party has a 33% quota. Within some Member States with legislated quotas, some parties go further than the legal requirements and voluntarily implement additional quotas. Within Italy, for example, which has a national quota of 33%, the Democratic Party uses a 50% quota with zipping on electoral lists. Various analyses have shown that left-leaning parties are more likely to use voluntary quotas than right-leaning parties, and are likely to have greater gender balance among their elected representatives, to the extent that political ideology is a greater determinant of descriptive representation than place.⁴¹ ⁴² Relatedly, while the introduction of quotas depends on political will and a degree of commitment to gender equality, they may be least likely to be implemented where they are most needed.

Table 4 below provides a summary of the legislated quotas, list position requirements, and sanctions for non-compliance implemented by Member States for the European Parliament elections.

⁴⁰ Dahlerup, D and Johansson, E. (2013) *Electoral Gender Quota Systems and their Implementation in Europe: 2013 Update*, available from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/493011/IPOL-FEMM_NT\(2013\)493011_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/493011/IPOL-FEMM_NT(2013)493011_EN.pdf)

⁴¹ Opcit Research (2013) *Women in decision-making: The role of the new media for increased political participation*, available from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/493010/IPOL-FEMM_ET\(2013\)493010_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/493010/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2013)493010_EN.pdf)

⁴² Keith, D. and Verge, T (2016) 'Nonmainstream left parties and women's representation in Western Europe', in *Party Politics*, 24(4): 397-409

Table 4: Member State-level quotas, list position requirements, and sanctions (2014)

Member State	Quota requirement	List position requirement	Sanction for non-compliance	Electoral system	Gender balance (% of seats won by women in 2014)
Belgium	50%	The first two candidates on the list cannot be of the same sex	Rejection of electoral list	Preferential Voting	29%
France	50%	Alternation of male and female candidates on lists	Rejection of electoral list and financial penalty (reduced public funding)	Closed Lists	42%
Croatia	40%	None	Fine of HRK 50,000 imposed on political parties	Preferential Voting	45%
Slovenia	40%	At least one candidate of each sex must be placed in the first half of each electoral list	Rejection of electoral list	Preferential Voting	37%
Spain	40%	Quotas applied to whole lists and to every 5 posts	Rejection of electoral list (parties are first given time to amend lists)	Closed Lists	41%
Poland	35%	None	Rejection of electoral list (parties are first given time to amend lists)	Preferential Voting	24%
Italy	33%	Some districts require alternation of male and female candidates on lists	Reduction of party funding (partial loss of subsidies)	Preferential Voting	40%
Portugal	33%	Lists cannot include more than two consecutive names of the same sex	Financial sanctions imposed and non-compliance made public	Closed Lists	38%

Member State	Quota requirement	List position requirement	Sanction for non-compliance	Electoral system	Gender balance (% of seats won by women in 2014)
Romania	>0	None	No data	Closed Lists	31%

Sources: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2019) *Electoral System Design Database*, available from:

<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/electoral-system-design>;

European Parliamentary Research Service (2018) *2019 European elections: National rules*, available from:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_ATA\(2018\)623556](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_ATA(2018)623556);

European Parliament (2019) *Results of the 2014 European elections: Men and women distribution*, available from:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/gender-balance.html>

Electoral gender quotas are an effective method of achieving and sustaining gender balance among MEPs, though their efficacy is dependent on a range of factors. First, of course, their efficacy in promoting gender balance depends in part on the electoral system in place. As discussed earlier in this report, within more open systems, voters' preferences about candidates become more decisive, and so the order in which parties would prefer candidates to take seats becomes less relevant. Second, the impact of quotas is affected by the stringency of their requirements. We recommend that quotas require a minimum of 50% of candidates to be women. They should also ensure gender balance among winnable list positions, with zipping the most effective method for achieving this. Third, holding levels of stringency equal, the scope of the quota is key. Party-level voluntary quotas help to improve women's representation among a party's MEPs, but may have limited impact on the gender balance of the country's MEPs if only used by parties that gain few of the country's seats. National legislated quotas, on the other hand, are more expansive in scope. In holding every party to the same standard, they can cut through the biases of individual parties and their voter bases.

Where legislated quotas are in place, imposition of sanctions is key to avoiding non-compliance. The evidence from international quota studies strongly suggests that rejection of party lists is an effective sanction, provided that the national electoral authority has the required legal power to reject lists that break rules and also actually uses that power. Dahlerup and Johansson (2013), for example, conclude that 'when it is clearly communicated by the electoral authorities to the political parties that their lists will be rejected and therefore will not be able to participate in the election, when the required number of women in the required rank order on the list is not obtained, the effect has proved to be strong'.⁴³ Thus, effective implementation of legal sanctions (rejection of lists) depends on there being a formal infrastructure and process in place, and sufficient political will, to enable sanctions to be carried out. Where this is the case, the evidence suggests that political parties do act to avoid rejection of their lists by ensuring they select the mandated proportion of women candidates.

The evidence is more limited and mixed with regard to the efficacy of financial sanctions for non-compliance with legislated quotas. In France, women took a smaller proportion of seats in the last European elections than the national candidate quota requirement (though France remains in EIGE's 'gender balance zone'), while in Croatia, Italy, and Portugal they took a higher proportion of seats. The weakness of financial sanctions for non-compliance (or incentives for compliance), is that bigger political parties may simply choose to pay the penalty (or forgo the incentive), as has happened in France.⁴⁴ This demonstrates that financial sanctions may only act as a deterrent to non-compliance among smaller political parties. Where financial sanctions are imposed, they should be accompanied by additional sanctions such as rejection of lists.

In addition to financial sanctions for non-compliance with legislated quotas, Member States may arrange to make provision of public funding to political parties conditional on reaching certain benchmarks of gender equality. A

⁴³ Dahlerup, D and Johansson, E. (2013) *Electoral Gender Quota Systems and their Implementation in Europe: 2013 Update*, available from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/493011/IPOL-FEMM_NT\(2013\)493011_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/493011/IPOL-FEMM_NT(2013)493011_EN.pdf)

⁴⁴ Dahlerup, D. and Freidenvall, L. (2011) *Electoral gender quota systems and their implementation in Europe*, available from: [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2008/408309/IPOL-FEMM_ET\(2008\)408309_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2008/408309/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2008)408309_EN.pdf)

very small number of countries have followed this approach at the level of national or sub-national politics. Within Romania, political parties that promote women on eligible places on electoral lists are allocated an increased amount from the state budget in proportion to the number of mandates obtained by women candidates. Within Croatia, for each elected MP or member of a representative body of a local or regional government unit who belongs to an under-represented gender, political parties are entitled to a bonus of 10% of the amount allocated for each MP or member. As with financial sanctions for non-compliance with quotas, these kinds of financial incentives are likely to be weighed by political parties against their other priorities, and parties that are financially better off may choose to forgo them. However, they have the advantage that payment is 'by result'. A different approach to financial incentives is to earmark funds for activities that promote gender equality. For example, in Ireland, political parties must spend 10% of any contributions they receive through tax deductions on activities aimed at fostering women's participation in politics. In Finland, all political parties are required to allocate 12% of their annual party subsidy to support women's groups. This kind of approach does not work as an incentive to achieve a particular outcome, such as more women candidates or representatives, by providing an *ex post* reward for achieving that outcome. Rather, it is intended to provide funding for work that fosters the *ex ante* conditions under which egalitarian outcomes become more likely.

In sum, electoral quotas can be an effective method of increasing women's representation within parliament. When effective, quotas can cut through the status quo and mitigate low levels of demand for women candidates among voters and parties, as well as low levels of supply of women candidates, by enforcing demand nationally across parties. However, their efficacy depends on a range of factors. Decisive factors include their scope (whether the quota is legislated and applies at the national level, or voluntary and applied at the party level); their stringency (what proportion of either sex is required and list positioning rules); and repercussions for non-compliance (the presence of legal or financial sanctions and their effective enforcement).

4.2. Capacity-building and gender equality campaigns

While electoral gender quotas can be an effective mechanism to improve women's descriptive representation, they are not a panacea for gendered inequality within politics and should not be pursued in isolation. Further steps must be taken to ensure a diverse range of women are empowered to pursue political careers, including as elected representatives. The international evidence suggests that the best results are seen when parties undertake ambitious, multi-faceted, coordinated programmes of action that seek to change the status quo of internal party practices and cultures.

We suggest there are a number of crucial areas that parties must focus on to improve women's representation. It is widely recognised within the research literature that, as gatekeepers to electoral politics, parties have an important role to play in equipping women with the confidence and skills they need for political success. But, in most cases, parties also need to change themselves – their own structures, processes, practices, and cultures – to create genuine opportunities for women to progress. We urge that all political parties should mainstream gender concerns throughout all levels and areas of the party to attract a diverse range of women, and ensure working practices and cultures are conducive to women's participation and progression, including by creating routes from all levels of the party to the top. Taken together with capacity-building programmes targeted at women to enable them to progress within the party, such measures can work to ensure a steady supply of highly capable women from a wide range of backgrounds from which to select candidates. They can also encourage demand among the party 'selectorate' for women candidates from diverse backgrounds.

In terms of supporting women to develop political skills, confidence, and ambition, a number of initiatives have seen success. In Ireland, for example, the model of the Longford Women's Manifesto Group is being rolled out nationally, after a number of participants gained electoral success. The model builds capacity and interest among women to engage in formal politics at both local and national levels. Recognising that grassroots political activism and engagement is an important route to candidacy, the group supports women to become involved with local government processes, with members being encouraged to attend local Council meetings, engage directly with Councillors, and sit on Council committees. It also held workshops for women candidates and helped first-time candidates to network ahead of the 2014 local elections and the 2016 general election. Similarly, in the

UK, the Fabian Women's Network provides a 'mentoring' scheme to women that goes beyond simple provision of a mentor by delivering a range of capacity-development activities and ongoing support through an alumnae network. Activities include political education and training in debating, public speaking, and media skills, as well as confidence-building activities, and visits to parliament in Westminster and Strasbourg. The scheme has shown promising signs of success, with several mentees having been elected into local government positions and subsequently promoted into cabinet positions, or selected or shortlisted as Parliamentary candidates or candidates for the London or Welsh Assemblies. These examples of good practice show that investments in women's development should focus not only on training and mentoring, but also on building networks and providing direct experience of political processes and activities.

However, campaigns and initiatives to promote gender balance cannot wholly rely on capacity-building focused on women. Holding capacity equal, women still face disadvantages in political life compared to men, and many of these disadvantages are due to the ways political parties function. This means, of course, that parties can act to address them. The case of the Labour Party in Malta (Partit Laburista) is illustrative. Against a background of longstanding and significant gender inequality in politics, after its return to power in 2013 the party initiated a wide-ranging programme to address women's underrepresentation. The party's thinktank, Fondazzjoni IDEAT, launched the LEAP initiative in 2013 to encourage and support more women to enter politics by running a training programme in Brussels that included theoretical political education, practical training in political skills, and mentoring by established politicians. A number of previous participants are now actively involved in the women's section of the party. Crucially, in addition to capacity-building targeted at women, the party engaged in awareness-raising campaigns and introduced changes to the party structure. In particular, the women's section of the party was championed by the party leader, and empowered to play an active role in setting and pursuing the party's agenda. Since its relaunch in 2014, it has actively engaged with policy development, as well as taking a prominent role in representing the party to the press and other media, thereby also helping to dislodge the cultural stereotype of the male politician.

The evidence demonstrates that party leaders and prominent figures clearly and consistently promoting a women's rights and gender equality agenda can make a considerable difference to the experiences and outcomes of potential candidates. An important finding from recently published in-depth research with Members of Parliament, candidates, and aspirants in the UK found that, for many women, 'equality rhetoric, equality promotion and equality guarantees were clear signs that they were wanted by the party and shaped their political aspirations'.⁴⁵ This includes 'oral and written statements identifiable in party speeches, plans and reports', as well as training, mentoring, and equality guarantees such as quotas. Similarly, the direct support and encouragement of other party members had a significant influence on women's decisions to pursue election. Most women Members of Parliament (75%) had only stood for election after being asked to do so by someone in their party, while almost half of men (46%) had decided to stand without being asked. The report draws attention to the importance of actively and directly encouraging women to progress through the party, noting the positive impact of promoting equality discourse through communications campaigns, and in particular the value of communicating the message to all party supporters and members that the party is seeking to promote increased participation by women from all backgrounds with diverse identities and experiences.

Of course, if those messages are to work, parties must actually be accessible to women. Part of any gender balance initiative or campaign at the party level must be to ensure the working practices and culture within the party do not work to the disadvantage of women, including those with caring responsibilities. It is well-established that long hours and inflexible working practices in politics (and other sectors) create barriers to progression for those

⁴⁵ Culhane, L. and Olchawski, J. (2018) *Strategies for Success: Women's Experiences of Selection and Election in UK Parliament*, available from: <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/strategies-for-success>

with caring responsibilities, and that women bear a disproportionate burden of those responsibilities.^{46 47 48} Political parties should work to ensure the demands they make in return for progression are reasonable and fair, following best practice on work-life balance in any sector. This includes normalising flexible working and reduced working hours, ensuring that the times and set up of meetings and other key activities are not geared to those without caring responsibilities, providing childcare, and implementing effective parental leave and return to work policies. Such changes would in themselves communicate a powerful message that the party genuinely welcomes women with caring responsibilities.

In sum, capacity-building targeted at women can only work effectively to redress gender imbalances if capable women are actually enabled to progress through party structures and processes from a range of starting positions. Similarly, communications campaigns promoting gender equality are important but will remain superficial as long as normal party practices work to set women at a disadvantage. The best evidence of the most promising practice points to the importance of implementing multi-faceted, coordinated, well-publicised programmes of action that work not only to build capacity among women, but to foster inclusive party structures, practices, and cultures, clearly and consistently communicating a message of inclusivity and equality.

⁴⁶ Teele, D, Kalla, J., and Rosenbluth F. (2015) 'The Ties That Double Bind: Social Roles and Women's Underrepresentation in Politics', in *American Political Science Review*, 112(3): 525-541

⁴⁷ Britton, D. (2010) 'Engendering the University through policy and practice: Barriers to promotion to full professor for women in the science, engineering, and math disciplines', in Riegraf, B, Aulenbacher, B, Kirsch-Auwärter, E., and Müller, U. (eds.), *Gender Change in Academia: Re-Mapping the Fields of Work, Knowledge, and Politics from a Gender Perspective*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS

⁴⁸ Jones, S., Charles, N., and Davies, C. (2008) 'Transforming masculinist political cultures? Doing politics in new political institutions', in *Sociological Research Online*, 14(2): 1-13

5. GENDER BALANCE IN EU INSTITUTIONS

KEY FINDINGS

- While EU institutions have repeatedly stated their ambition to increase the number of women in senior decision-making positions, progress has been slow, and men still greatly outnumber women in senior positions within a considerable majority of institutions.
- Across 53 Directorate Generals, only 26% of senior positions are held by women.

Key institutions of the EU have repeatedly declared their ambition to increase the number of women in senior decision-making positions. The stated aim of the European Commission is to achieve a rate of 40% women within the Commission's senior and middle management by 2020. A review of gender balance among senior roles in key EU institutions, involving a count of the number of senior roles and the number of women occupying them, was undertaken for this study. An overview of the results is provided in Table 5. As the table shows, there is wide variation in the proportion of women in senior roles in different institutions, though where women are in the majority the number of positions included in the calculation tends to be low. Overall, there remains a far lower number of women compared to men in senior roles in EU institutions. It is particularly striking how low the proportion is of women at Director General or Head of Service level (or equivalent) within the 53 Directorate Generals of the European Commission, at only 26%. Indeed, a considerable majority of the EU institutions included in this analysis have a man in their most senior post. Of the 13 institutions, the majority of senior roles are held by women at only three institutions. Out of a total 246 senior roles counted, just 57 (23.2%) are held by women.

Table 5: Number and percentage of women in senior positions in key EU institutions

EU institution	Number on governing body ⁴⁹	Number of women	% of women
European Council (President of the European Council and President of the European Commission)	2	0	0%
European Council Cabinet (excluding secretariat)	3	0	0%
Council of the European Union	0	n/a	n/a
European Commission (Director Generals or Heads of Service of 53 Directorate Generals)	53	14	26%
Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) (Members - Court of Justice)	40	8	20%
Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) (Members - General Court)	46	10	22%
European Central Bank (ECB) (Governing Council)	25	2	8%
European Court of Auditors (ECA) (Presidency)	28	6	21%
European External Action Service (EEAS) (Senior Staff)	4	3	75%
European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) (Senior Team)	11	9	82%
European Committee of the Regions (CoR) (Executive Body)	3	0	0%

⁴⁹ Only those positions that are limited in number and not available automatically to all Member States' representatives are included.

EU institution	Number on governing body ⁴⁹	Number of women	% of women
European Investment Bank (EIB) (Board of Governors)	28	4	14%
European Ombudsman (The Ombudsman)	1	1	100%
European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS)	2	0	0%

Source: Information sourced from institutions' websites, January 2019.

6. EU INSTITUTIONS' STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR GENDER BALANCE

KEY FINDINGS

- The key document setting out the EU's ambitions concerning equality between women and men is the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019. This states that equality between women and men in decision-making is a central objective of the European Commission.
- While the Strategy and various other instruments, including Opinions and Recommendations, provide guidance to Member States on how to improve gender balance in politics, no recommendations are binding or enforced.
- Thus, in politics and decision-making, as in other areas, the general approach of the major EU institutions is to leave delivery of concrete action and progress to Member States.
- The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) plays an important role in monitoring and gathering evidence on progress toward gender equality in politics, and has made available a range of evidence, toolkits, and other resources to support parity democracy.
- The European Women's Lobby campaign, '50/50: Women for Europe – Europe for Women', also seeks to promote parity democracy, including by providing resources to support member organisations working at the national level to lobby parties and other stakeholders for change.

The Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019 is the key document setting out the EU's ambitions concerning equality between women and men.⁵⁰ It continues the European Commission's priorities from earlier strategic documents, including:

- Increasing female labour-market participation, and promoting the equal economic independence of women and men.
- Reducing the gender pay, earnings, and pension gaps, thus fighting poverty among women.
- Promoting equality between women and men in decision-making.
- Combating gender-based violence, and protecting and supporting victims.
- Promoting gender equality and women's rights across the world.

The third priority is most relevant here. Gender equality in decision-making requires gender balance among positions of influence, both in business and in public life, the latter including the political sphere. The strategy highlights two priority actions in the area of women in politics:

- Continue to collect and disseminate data on the representation of women and men in high decision-making positions, in close cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).
- Consider measures to improve the gender balance in political decision-making and continue to encourage Member States and support national authorities' activities promoting gender balance in political and public decision-making positions.

As well as making direct efforts to support and encourage Member States to achieve gender balance in politics, the Commission also provides funding to a number of agencies conducting work in this area. Two of the most important of these are EIGE and the European Women's Lobby (EWL).

⁵⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic_engagement_en_0.pdf

The European Women's Lobby's (EWL) is a membership organisation with member Women's Lobbies across the EU. Their campaign '50/50: Women for Europe – Europe for Women' aims to achieve gender parity within the European Parliament and other European institutions. It seeks to do this through a range of activities, including lobbying political parties to give priority to women within their electoral lists and to promote the campaigns of women candidates as much as men's. Through a working group on parity democracy and women in politics, the EWL has developed a toolkit on lobbying for gender balance that is available for their members to adapt to their national context.⁵¹ This includes EU-wide statistics on the state of gender balance in national parliaments and the European Parliament; a model letter advocating gender balance that can be adapted and used to reach out to key stakeholders; and a set of questions and answers on parity democracy, including what it is and why it is worth pursuing. A representative of the EWL was interviewed for this study. The representative emphasised that the toolkit is intended to provide member Lobbies with the guidance and resources they need to support their advocacy at the national level. The working group on women in politics is also intended to provide a forum for members to exchange their experiences of lobbying and provide mutual support. The EWL representative noted that, while the EWL is generally supportive of measures such as quotas at either the national or the party level, as a membership organisation their primary purpose is to support their members to lobby for the changes they want, and members set their own agendas. The EWL does not, therefore, have any fixed position on measures such as legislated quotas or linking party funding to gender equality.

In January 2019, the EWL launched a Manifesto for the 2019 European elections, which they are working to promote at the European level, and distributing to MEPs and Europarties. This sets out their vision of gender equality in politics and decision-making, and urges parties to 'ensure equal representation and ranking of women and men on their electoral list'.⁵² The EWL representative reported that, in mid-February, the organisation would launch a '100 day countdown' to the European elections, 'to put the pressure on, in the public space, and remind people about the importance of gender equality ahead of the elections'. The countdown is intended to be a vehicle to promote and explain the EWL's Manifesto on social media and at political events. An EU-wide communication campaign to promote parity democracy provides an important opportunity to raise awareness and garner support for action to achieve gender balance in parliament, but, as we explore later in this report, most respondents interviewed for our case studies were either unaware of or under-impressed by the efficacy of the 50/50 campaign. We would urge that, to get its message heard, the campaign needs to forge stronger links and working relationships with stakeholders at both the national and European levels. In particular, not only member Women's Lobbies across the EU but also Europarties should be called upon to work cooperatively to support and actively promote the campaign and its objectives among their members. The EWL and other NGOs working on gender equality might also commission polls of voters to test attitudes to parity democracy, women in power, and gender balance measures. Findings from such polls could be used to inform the development of campaign priorities and strategies, as well as potentially providing interesting content for distribution to political parties and the media as we work to draw attention to these urgent issues.

The EWL representative raised in interview that the organisation has begun to deliver training on cyberviolence to women in political life. In November 2018, they delivered sessions to women working at the Council of the European Union on what cyberviolence is and how to defend against it while still making use of social media and engaging with online platforms that enable interaction with voters. Following the success of these sessions, the EWL is currently supporting its member organisations to deliver similar training to women MEP candidates in their Member States. Given the findings of a 2018 study cited earlier in this report, which suggest over half of women politicians have been the target of online sexist attacks on social networks, this training is both valuable and timely.⁵³

In addition to EWLs lobbying toolkit, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has made available a number of toolkits and other resources to support parity democracy. EIGE plays an important role in monitoring

⁵¹ <https://www.womenlobby.org/Launch-of-the-50-50-Campaign-Lobbying-Kit>

⁵² https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/european_women_s_lobby_manifesto_2019_final_.pdf

⁵³ IPU and PACE (2018) *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe*, available from: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>

gender equality in politics and decision-making, as well as gathering evidence to inform policy and action to promote gender equality. It provides a range of statistics, publications, and resources to support this, including links to toolkits on gender mainstreaming and achieving 'gender sensitive' parliaments.⁵⁴ EIGE's Gender Statistics Database provides a particularly important source of comparable, pan-EU data on women in decision-making, using standardised indicators.⁵⁵

The European Commission's direct efforts to support and encourage Member States to achieve gender balance in politics are coordinated primarily by the Directorate General for Justice and Consumers. These actions are monitored through specific indicators: first, the proportion of women in the single or lower houses of national or federal governments and European Parliament; and second, the proportion of women in the European Commission. A further indicator concerns the number of women in senior and middle management positions in the European Commission. It is notable that a target (of 40%) is provided only for this latter indicator, and not for the proportion of women in national or federal governments, or in the European Parliament. The European Commission will only 'provide guidance' to Member States on how to improve gender balance in national and federal governments, and in the European Parliament.

An example of such guidance provided to Member States by the Commission is the 2017 Opinion written by the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men concerning 'Gender Balance in Decision-making in Politics'.⁵⁶ The preamble to the document clearly states that the guidance does 'not necessarily reflect the positions of the Member States and does not bind the Member States'. However, the extent to which this and similar policy instruments influence Member States' actions can be evaluated through an examination of Member States' awareness of and support for their recommendations. This is explored through our case studies of three countries in later sections of this report. The 2017 Opinion suggests that Member States should, *inter alia*, promote training programmes for women political candidates; support gender mainstreaming training for all political parties and members of parliament; and promote gender analysis of electoral systems. The Opinion also recommends actions that should be taken at the EU level to support Member States. These include delivering awareness-raising and training programmes; implementing legislative and other policy measures; conducting pan-European networking and data collection on gender balance; and ensuring that EU institutions are a role model to Member States on gender balance in public life.

The Opinion also outlines a number of more concrete actions that have been taken to advance gender balance in public life and politics. However, these are notably limited to the provision of Council of Europe Recommendations, rather than specifically defined, funded, and managed programmes. For example, the Council of Europe adopted a Recommendation in 2017 on gender equality on the audio-visual sector as well as a Recommendation gender equality and media in 2013. These both provide guidance to Member States on how to combat gender stereotypes in the audio-visual and media sector. However, an assessment of these issues conducted by Opcit Research for the FEMM Committee of the European Parliament found that 'while discriminatory media content is prohibited, and European bodies frequently condemn the negative social impact of much contemporary media, sanctions for infringements of rules on media content are limited'.⁵⁷ These examples illustrate that – in politics and decision-making, as in other areas – EU level actions are largely limited to provision of guidance and monitoring, leaving concrete action and progress to Member States to deliver.

⁵⁴ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits>

⁵⁵ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/browse/wmidm>

⁵⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/final_version_5_december.pdf

⁵⁷ Opcit Research (2018) *Gender Equality in the Media Sector*, available from:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/596839/IPOL_STU\(2018\)596839_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/596839/IPOL_STU(2018)596839_EN.pdf)

7. SUMMARY OF CASE STUDIES

KEY FINDINGS

- Political parties have a crucial influence on the chances of women being selected as candidates for the European elections, and also on their eventual chances of being elected to parliament.
- They may therefore act either as facilitators or as barriers to women's engagement in politics.
- Political parties, and particularly those with a long history, have embedded cultures that can reward party loyalty and length of service, rather than talent, which often works to women's detriment.
- Social attitudes and patriarchal cultural norms regarding women, which are often exacerbated by the media, can discourage women from putting themselves forward for consideration as candidates.
- Findings from the three case studies motivate several recommendations. These are:
- National and party-level programmes should be designed and implemented to support and encourage women to seek candidacy. These should be ambitious, multi-faceted, coordinated initiatives that provide not only training in political skills, but also structured networking opportunities and mentoring from senior, established politicians.
- Training should include detailed and practical advice and techniques for combatting patterns of dominance and control which are typically present within traditional, androcentric political cultures.
- Efforts should be made at the grassroots of party politics to reach out to a broader range of women, involving them at all levels of the party in all kinds of roles, and providing routes for progression from these roles to candidacy.
- Political parties, the European Parliament, and EU institutions must work to ensure their standard working practices do not disadvantage mothers (or anyone with caring responsibilities). This should include issuing, implementing, and publicising guidelines on work-life balance.
- Earmarked funding for women candidates' electoral campaigns should be provided until women are no longer under-represented in parliament.

7.1. Introduction

Case studies were conducted in three Member States to explore the experiences of political parties, and women candidates and MEPs, in different contexts. The methodology involved desk research to understand the detail of each case study country's electoral system and its record on gender balance. In depth, confidential, one-to-one interviews were also conducted with a range of stakeholders. Respondents included women MEPs and candidates, political party representatives who were able to comment on candidate selection processes, and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on women's rights and gender equality. The case studies interrogated the factors that influence the supply of and demand for women candidates and MEPs, and the main themes that emerged include the electoral system and party candidate selection processes, party practices and political culture, and awareness-raising and capacity-building.

The three case study countries – Poland, Spain, and Sweden – were selected to represent a range of records on gender equality and gender balance; different electoral systems; different approaches to the use of quotas and other gender balance mechanisms; and a wide geographical region of the EU.

7.2. The electoral system and gender balance among MEPs

Of the three case study Member States, the country with the highest number of women MEPs at the last opening session of the European Parliament in 2014 was Sweden (55%), followed by Spain (41%), and Poland (25%).

Poland is among the worst-performing EU Member States in terms of its proportion of women MEPs. Sweden has among the highest proportion of women MEPs.

In terms of overall performance on gender equality, the European Institute for Gender Equality's Gender Equality Index (GEI) was used to rate each case study country. The GEI provides an aggregated but itemised score for gender equality performance across a range of indicators, including the gender pay gap, women in decision making roles, and employment rates. The latest available data show that Sweden ranks highest (that is, most gender equal) within the EU, with a score of 82.6, in comparison to the EU average of 66.2. Spain scores 68.3, while Poland scores 58.6.⁵⁸ In these cases, then, there is some correlation between general levels of gender equality and gender balance among MEPs.

The case study countries have a variety of systems in place for electing MEPs, though all Member States use proportional representation for elections to the European Parliament, as required by Article 1 of Council Decision 2002/772/EC.⁵⁹ Sweden uses a mixed system of preferential voting, with a single national electoral district, and party lists that are closed but non-blocked so voters may express preferences for certain candidates on their favoured party lists. As such, both parties and voters can determine which candidates take a party's seats. Spain has an electoral system with closed lists and therefore parties select candidates and determine their order on the list. Poland elects MEPs through a preferential voting system with open party lists. Spain and Poland both have national, legislated quotas that require political parties to have a minimum proportion of women on lists for election. In Spain, neither gender should exceed 60% of candidates on each party list, and this requirement applies both to the entire list and to every five names. In Poland, each candidate list must include at least 35% of women and 35% of men in order to be registered. Sweden does not have a legislated quota system in place, though most parties use voluntary gender quotas in candidate selection, and zipping is common. The implications of these different quota systems are explored below.

7.3. Factors affecting gender balance among MEPs

7.3.1. The electoral system and party candidate selection processes

In the most 'closed' systems, parties have the strongest influence on which candidates are elected, as voters are not able to express preferences for particular candidates. However, in systems where voters are able to directly express a preference for particular candidates, those candidates must be able to appeal directly to voters. In these cases, then, overall levels of public support for women's engagement in political life and voters' attitudes towards women as politicians may have a greater degree of influence over levels of gender balance among elected MEPs. However, it is important to emphasise that, in any system, political parties always act as crucial gatekeepers to politics, and have a considerable degree influence over women's chances of becoming an elected MEP.

Case study interview respondents identified a variety of practices and traditions regarding political parties' candidate selection processes, with differences both between and within countries. It is of particular interest that, while Sweden has no legislated quota system that requires political parties to select a specified proportion of women candidates, it has the highest proportion of women MEPs of all the case study countries and among the highest of all EU Member States. Interview respondents in Sweden suggested that the absence of a legislated gender quota is due to the lack of need, as Sweden has sustained a consistently good record on women's descriptive representation in both the national and the European Parliaments. This was largely attributed to the fact that many political parties in Sweden have themselves introduced voluntary gender quotas, thus mitigating the need for national, legislated ones. It was also reported that, among the voting public, these quotas are not predominantly viewed as gender balance measures, but rather as reflecting good sense and basic democratic principles.

⁵⁸ EIGE (2019) *Gender Equality Index*, available from: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2015>

⁵⁹ Council Decision 2002/772/EC, available from: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ftu/pdf/en/FTU_1.3.4.pdf

While Poland and Spain both use legislated quotas, respondents reported that some parties avoid going beyond minimal compliance with legal requirements. A key issue to arise from the case studies is how women's positions on electoral lists influence their chances of being elected, and how party values and cultures affect the determination of women's list positions.

7.3.2. Party practices and political culture

In Poland, it was reported that decisions about candidate selection tend to be taken behind closed doors, by influencers within the party, which typically excludes women or those who may support new talent being championed. In Spain, it was reported that, in determining the composition of their lists, parties use minimal compliance with legislated quotas (which require between 40% and 60% of list position to be taken by women) to deflate the number of women on lists, taking 40% as a maximum proportion for women. Parties can also place women at the bottom of each group of five names to which the quota applies. This supports the claim made earlier in this report that legislated quotas can be ineffective in ensuring women are placed in winnable positions on lists unless accompanied by stringent list positioning rules such as zipping. Case study respondents also reported that some political parties in Poland and Spain operate a system of loyalty and reward, in which long service within a party and demonstrations of political loyalty are forms of currency that can buy rewards in terms of candidate selection and placement on lists.

In each case study country, reported attitudes towards gender equality and gender balance measures differed along ideological lines. To illustrate, respondents from Spanish political parties reported attitudes toward formal strategies to achieve gender balance that varied according to their position on the political spectrum, with those towards the political centre and right disavouring formal quotas and those towards the political left favouring their use. The situation is similar in Poland, where respondents from right-leaning parties were less inclined to support the use of formal measures. Interview respondents who did not favour formal quotas tended to present arguments in support of their views that appealed to the notion of meritocracy. While no respondent argued that achieving gender balance was in itself undesirable, quotas were criticised by some respondents as undermining meritocracy and discriminating against the most talented. They were also viewed as unnecessary on the grounds that anyone, including any woman, with talent would naturally be selected and elected anyway. In parties where such views are dominant, it was reported that candidate selection does not tend to go beyond minimal compliance with legal requirements. However, such arguments can be challenged in several ways. First, 'merit' is an intensely political and contested concept, and its content usually determined by the most powerful to the detriment of the least powerful. Second, even proponents of meritocracy should recognise the evidence that party mechanisms do not, in practice, work seamlessly to provide the talented with routes to the top. Similar positions were expressed by a number of respondents. For example, one interviewee from a Spanish political party, who had previously been a proponent of the argument from meritocracy, reported having developed the view that merit is determined by those in positions of authority, and that the party does not in fact provide open opportunities for talent to rise to the top. Relatedly, supporters of meritocracy should at least support the provision of opportunities that encourage potential candidates to recognise their own merits, and enable others to recognise those merits, for example through mentoring and training schemes. Yet, in Spain, no respondent recalled any such schemes.

However, both Sweden and Spain demonstrate how political parties can also act as a force for positive change toward greater gender balance. In both Member States, respondents described how some political parties are taking a pro-active approach to the identification and promotion of candidates from outside the traditional spheres of influence. Such 'talent spotting' aims to encourage women from different professions and vocations to become political candidates, and so brings an automatic benefit for women who are less likely to be political party 'insiders'. These women have also, in some cases, been provided with support to finesse their political and communication skills. As such, it is clear that political parties can act as barriers but also enablers of women in politics.

Respondents from across the case studies reported that working practices and the political cultures within the EU, the European Parliament itself, and political parties must improve to become more inclusive of women politicians. For example, several MEP respondents reported that poor balance between work and family life can

militate against women politicians and potential aspirants who have children or other caring responsibilities fully engaging in political life. Another reported that the EU must work to improve the number of women who are in senior positions in EU institutions, so that women gain greater genuine influence over political, economic, and social agendas.

In no case study country was it reported that parties were subject to external gender equality or gender balance auditing, or that their gender equality outcomes affected their access to party funding. However, in the case of countries with legislated quotas, parties were reported to respond to the legal requirements imposed on them. In each case study country, there was support expressed by some respondents for provision, at either the party or national level, of earmarked funding to support women's electoral campaigns.

7.3.3. Awareness-raising and capacity-building

There were fewer insights and responses from interviewees regarding strategies and actions to build capacity amongst potential women candidates, or awareness-raising and communications campaigns to change public perceptions of and appetite for gender balance in politics. Respondents across the case study Member States had fairly low levels of awareness of EU-level policy instruments to improve gender balance, and those who were aware of the European Women's Lobby 50/50 campaign for parity democracy had not actively engaged in the campaign. However, respondents for the Swedish case study had more to say on these issues than others.

Some Swedish MEP and candidate respondents reported having received some valuable training organised by their parties. This included training focused on negotiating tactics, public speaking, rhetoric, debating, and how to deal with power and domination techniques. This latter type of training addresses subtle aspects of patriarchal culture that can function to exclude, alienate, and marginalise women in political life. An interesting example of good practice in the area of combatting power and domination techniques is a strategy developed within Sweden that encourages women politicians to read and apply lessons from 'The Power Handbook', a resource developed by Sweden's National Federation of Social Democratic Women. The book provides practical guidance to women on how to obtain, maintain, and use power, and how to combat domination techniques commonly used against women, such as making them 'invisible', ridiculing them, withholding information from them, putting them in a double bind, and blaming and shaming.

In Poland, the Congress of Women Association, which is the main women's lobby organisation in Poland, previously organised some training to counteract male-dominated cultures and practices in politics. However, this was delivered in preparation for national parliamentary elections, and it is not planned that it will be repeated ahead of the upcoming European elections. Several respondents in Poland expressed the view that campaigning and awareness-raising efforts are required to counteract the movement against woman rights and growing anti-equality rhetoric in the country, including 'smear campaigns' in which female candidates are often targets of negative media stories related to their families and private life.

Although intersectional disadvantages were less discussed by respondents in Poland and Spain, respondents in Sweden reflected that gender is only one aspect of diversity and equality. Here, it was raised that women are often discriminated against in multiple, intersecting ways relating to ethnicity, sexuality, disability, age, religion, and class, as well as gender. These respondents emphasised that parties have much more work to do to engage and involve women from a diverse range of backgrounds in political life.

7.4. Conclusions and recommendations

These case studies demonstrate how important political parties are in determining the chances of women being selected as candidates for election and also, eventually, being elected. They are the gatekeepers to party lists and can therefore act as barriers to gender balance, or as enablers. Political parties, and particularly those with a long history, have embedded cultures that can reward party loyalty and length of service over talent, which often works to the detriment of potential women candidates. Patriarchal social attitudes and cultural norms regarding women in power, which are often exacerbated by the media, can also discourage women from putting themselves forward for consideration.

Findings from the three case studies motivate several recommendations. These are:

- National and party level capacity-building and awareness-raising programmes should be designed to support and encourage women to become MEP candidates.
- Such initiatives should include training that provides detailed and practical advice and techniques for combatting patterns of dominance and control that tend to be present within traditional male-dominated political cultures.
- Efforts should be made at the grassroots of party politics to reach out to a broader range of women, involving them at all levels of the party in all kinds of roles, and providing routes for progression from these roles to candidacy.
- Political parties, the European Parliament, and EU institutions must work to ensure their standard working practices do not disadvantage mothers (or anyone with caring responsibilities). This should include issuing, implementing, and publicising guidelines on work-life balance.
- Earmarked funding for women candidates' electoral campaigns should be provided until women are no longer under-represented in parliament.
- Work is needed at the EU level to improve women's access to senior roles within EU Institutions.

8. CASE STUDY: POLAND

KEY FINDINGS

- Poland uses a system of preferential voting with open party lists, together with a 35% gender quota on electoral lists for elections to the European Parliament (EP). Twelve (24%) of Poland's MEPs are women.
- The country has a Gender Equality Index score of 56.8 points (2015). In 2015, Poland was ranked 18th (down from 16th in 2012) out of 28 Member States for gender equality.
- Among the most important factors that influence the chances of female candidates being elected to the European Parliament are party candidate selection processes, campaign financing, and capacity-building and awareness-raising initiatives.
- A number of recommendations arise from this case study, including that gender quotas should be complemented by zipping, which requires that men and women appear alternately on electoral lists.
- Women's sections within parties should organise internal training and workshops focused on capacity-building and improving candidates' skills through continued and direct cooperation with women that have already been elected to hold office in parliament.

8.1. Method

This case study is based on desk-research into Poland's electoral system and levels of gender equality. It also draws on interviews conducted with two Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), two representatives of political parties, and two representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that advocate for gender equality and women's rights.

8.2. The electoral system and gender balance among MEPs

Since Poland joined the EU in 2004, the share of female Polish MEPs has been consistently lower than the EU average. With 13 female representatives currently in the European Parliament (25% of Poland's 51 MEPs), Poland is among the worst-performing countries in terms of women's descriptive representation at the EU level.

Within the Polish electoral system (and in accordance with European regulations), elections to the European Parliament are proportional, popular, and direct, all votes are equal, and the ballot is secret. The country uses a system of preferential voting with open party lists, electing its MEPs through the D'Hondt method.⁶⁰ In 2014, each electoral list comprised between five and 10 candidates in 13 electoral districts. In 2011, legislated gender quotas on electoral lists were introduced to Polish electoral system. According to these provisions, each candidate list must include at least 35% female candidates and 35% male candidates in order to be registered. This quota applies to Poland's elections to the European Parliament, to the Sejm (the lower house of parliament), and to counties (poviats) and regional assemblies.

⁶⁰ Osiński J., Pytlik B., *The 2014 European Parliamentary Election in Poland: The Evaluation of the Challenges to the European Union*, http://kolegia.sgh.waw.pl/pl/KES/czasopisma/kwartalnik_szpp/Documents/numer%204%202016/04_Osinski_Pytlik.pdf

The country had a Gender Equality Index score of 56.8 points in 2015. (Scores by domain were 24 for work, 19 for money, 18 for knowledge, 20 for time, 17 for power, and 23 for health.) In 2015, Poland ranked 18th (down from 16th in 2012) out of 28 Member States for gender equality.⁶¹

8.3. Factors affecting gender balance among MEPs

8.3.1. The electoral system and party candidate selection processes

All respondents interviewed for this case study emphasised that a crucial determinant of women's success in elections is parties' internal candidate selection processes – the processes through which electoral lists are created. Studies carried out in Poland after the introduction of gender quotas demonstrate that the inclusion of women on lists is just a first step to electoral success. What really matters is women's positions on lists, which in practice determine their chances of being elected.⁶² This body of research also shows that political parties tend not to prioritise women for winnable seats.⁶³ The majority of respondents noted that, while this situation seems to be improving, women and men are still far from operating on a level playing field. In the case of the European elections, women's positions on lists are especially important given that there are fewer parliamentary seats to win compared to national or local elections.

Who has real influence over the creation of electoral lists depends on the balance of power inside the political party. That is why gender balance among a party's authorities is so important. Female politicians interviewed for this study, in line with previous research, underlined that a transparent process of candidate selection is crucial, especially in a political environment dominated by 'old boys' networks', where the majority of crucial political decisions are made during unofficial meetings attended primarily by men.⁶⁴ Interviewees from Polish political parties and NGOs noted that the ideal process of candidate selection would establish clear criteria for candidate selection and placement on electoral lists, with a full description of the decision process published in advance.

The female politicians interviewed for this case study confirmed observations from previous studies on women in politics that party ideology has a significant impact on the process of drawing up electoral lists. Left-wing and liberal parties, which focus on women's rights in their programmes, tend to pay attention to women's position on the lists, while conservative parties tend to abide only by the legal requirements imposed on them by gender quotas. At the time of writing this report, political parties' lists for the European elections had not yet been prepared, but parties' policies in previous elections are illuminating. Some left-wing and liberal parties adopted internal rules regarding how electoral lists should be created: as well as 35% gender quotas, which are legally binding, these parties voluntarily applied additional rules, such as zipping, parity among the first places on the list, and an obligation to place at least one woman and one man among the first three positions on the list and at least two women and two men among the first five positions on the list, among other measures. These additional list positioning rules are especially important, given that the process of candidate selection tends to favour (male) incumbents over (female) newcomers.⁶⁵

Within the context of the current political situation in Poland, including the backlash against women's rights since the introduction of the gender quotas on electoral lists, awareness of the importance of women's presence in politics has risen, which is confirmed by both existing studies and our case study respondents. All women interviewed from left-wing or liberal parties strongly supported gender quotas as an efficient mechanism of

⁶¹ *Gender Equality Index 2017: Measuring gender equality in the European Union 2005-2015*, available from:

<https://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications/gender-equality-index-2017-measuring-gender-equality-european-union-2005-2015-report>

⁶² Fuszara M. (ed.) (2013), *Kobiety, wybory, polityka*, Warsaw, Institute of Public Affairs, available from: www.isp.org.pl

⁶³ Druciarek M., Fuszara M., Niżyńska A., Zbieranek J. (2012), *Women on the Polish political scene*, Warsaw, Institute of Public Affairs, available from: www.isp.org.pl

⁶⁴ Chelstowska A., Dunaiski, M. (2014), *Gender equality in the European elections*, Warsaw, Institute of Public Affairs, available from: www.rownoscpłci.pl

⁶⁵ Chelstowska A., Dunaiski, M. (2014), *Gender equality in the European elections*, Warsaw, Institute of Public Affairs, available from: www.rownoscpłci.pl

promoting women in politics. Further, a separate study on women in Polish local elections recently suggested that support for quotas is also high among conservative female politicians.⁶⁶

MEPs interviewed for this case study expressed the view that the Polish legal regulation requiring electoral lists to include a minimum of 35% of each gender in order to be registered should not be replaced by financial penalties for political parties that do not comply with quotas. The respondents expressed strong convictions that conservative political parties in Poland would rather accept a financial penalty than comply with gender quotas (despite the majority of political parties publicly declaring their general support for women's representation). Additionally, it was felt that the introduction of the quota within Polish legal regulations was an important indicator that gender parity in democracy is a key national goal, though of course the country is still yet to see 50% women candidates

8.3.2. Campaign financing

Another important barrier for women running for election is campaign financing. This was highlighted by all women interviewed for this case study. Electoral campaigns for the European Parliament require considerable funds. The MEPs underlined the fact that, while access to financial resources is especially difficult for newcomers, incumbents can use their working hours and administrative staff for campaign activities. They reported that the majority of campaign financing must be provided by candidates themselves (raised from their relatives, friends, networks, and so on). In conservative societies such as Poland, traditional gender roles also exacerbate women's lack of resources for engagement in politics. On the one hand, women earn less than men on average, and on the other, they bear a far greater burden of household duties.^{67 68} As a result, they have less time and money to invest in their political careers than men. The NGO experts interviewed stated that no external gender auditing has been used in Poland to determine funding for political parties, and parties do not conduct their own internal gender audits to support improvements to women's experiences in politics.

8.3.3. Capacity-building and awareness-raising

A third important barrier to women's participation in politics is related to candidates' confidence, ambitions, and attitudes towards engaging in battles for a good position on party lists. Related to this are rational fears of 'smear-campaigning' (in Poland, female candidates are often targets of negative campaigns related to their families and private life), and unwillingness to engage in the 'dirty business' of electoral politics, mentioned by the NGOs representatives who work with women willing to enter politics and run for elections. All such factors relate to the fact that Polish politics is still a space where androcentric rules dominate, as some respondents highlighted.

A common theme that emerged from the majority of interviews is that one important way to help overcome these kinds of hurdles is to provide women with the necessary support and training to run for office. Such training and meetings promoting female participation in politics are carried out by the Razem (Together) Party and, according to its representative, have proved to be effective in engaging women and preparing them for elections. The Congress of Women Association, which is the main women's lobby organisation in Poland, has also organised similar training before previous elections. However, they focus on the national parliamentary elections, and so do not plan to organise training ahead of the upcoming European elections. One of the MEPs interviewed noted that she had organised training for female leaders aged over 50 years. All women interviewed agreed that there is a need for empowerment training for women, training on how to run electoral campaigns, and workshops focused on improving the competences and skills of candidates through continued and direct cooperation with women who have already been elected to hold office in the European Parliament. NGO representatives highlighted the importance of role modelling and mentoring by experienced female party members for women who are running for office for the first time. The representative of the Congress of Women also highlighted the need for training on the use of social media in political campaigns, which would give women independence from official media channels and considerably lower campaign costs. Internal women's caucuses or women's platforms (which are

⁶⁶ Druciarek M., Przybysz D., Przybysz I., *Women in local politics in Poland. Strategies of political parties in the 2018 local government elections*, Institute of Public Affairs [in preparation]

⁶⁷ <http://www.oecd.org/gender/Closing%20the%20Gender%20Gap%20-%20Poland%20FINAL.pdf>

⁶⁸ https://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K_127_18.PDF

present in most left-wing and liberal Polish political parties) could serve as important forums for female politicians to support one another through mentorship and training programmes. With the exception of the Razem Party, political parties in Poland lack any training schemes designed to increase the supply of high quality women candidates.

Almost all women interviewed mentioned that the European Parliament should carry out a communications campaign in all EU countries showing the proportion of female MEPs in all EU Member States and providing examples of how higher female representation in the EP influences European policy. These respondents reported that this should help to increase the level of social awareness of the importance of the presence of women in politics at the European level. It should also, they reported, increase the visibility of female politicians within the media, which – according to all politicians who took part in this study – is still much lower than that of their male counterparts. There was very little awareness among these respondents of the European Women's Lobby's 50/50 campaign for parity democracy. Respondents also suggested that the National Broadcasting Council should regulate to ensure equal media coverage for male and female candidates.

The Congress of Women Association has been a highly effective lobby organisation within Poland, particularly under the previous government. The introduction of gender quotas within the Polish legal regulations is a direct effect of its actions. With the change of government in 2015, its influence on legislation relating to women's rights declined considerably, according to the representative interviewed for this study. However, its ability to introduce and promote new female actors on the political scene, especially in local politics, has increased. This is reportedly due in large part to the current political situation, including a marked backlash against women's rights, which has provoked numerous local female leaders to go into politics. The Congress of Women Association and the Institute of Public Affairs are the main actors responsible for raising public awareness of the importance of women's presence in politics in Poland. The Congress of Women Association organises regional and national Women's Congresses, which are visible and popular events, while the Institute of Public Affairs carries out regular monitoring and prepares reports on women in politics after each election.

8.4. Conclusions and recommendations

Taking into consideration these factors affecting gender balance among Polish MEPs, based on interviews carried out for this study and the literature on women's participation in the Polish and European political arenas, the following recommendations can be made. Some relate specifically to improving gender balance within the European Parliament, but the majority aim to improve the situation of women at all levels of political participation, including within local and national politics.

- Gender quotas should be complemented by zipping to ensure men and women appear alternately on electoral lists (at least for the top positions on the list).
- Regulations regarding parity and zipping on electoral lists should be included in the statutes of parties, together with descriptions of strategies for promoting women's representation.
- Parties should clearly determine in their documents the criteria for candidate selection, to make the process transparent and more accessible for all newcomers including women.
- With the support of NGOs and external experts, political parties should conduct internal audits on gender equality.
- All political parties in Poland should have 'women's sections' to monitor how party practices and policies affect gender equality. They should organise internal training and workshops focused on improving competences and skills of candidates through continued and direct cooperation with women who have already been elected to the European Parliament. Experienced female party members should act as mentors to women who are running for office for the first time.
- Training on the use of social media in political campaigns should be offered by political parties to women standing for elections, as this provides a degree of independence from official media channels and considerably lowers the cost of media campaigning.

- The National Broadcasting Council should initiate the debate on presenting women and men equally in campaign advertisements.
- The National Broadcasting Council should also issue a regulation that would oblige political parties to equally divide time for male and female candidates in free electoral spots broadcast on public television.

9. CASE STUDY: SPAIN

KEY FINDINGS

- Spain uses a system of closed lists for elections to the European Parliament, and 26 (48.15%) of Spain's MEPs are women. The country has a Gender Equality Index score of 68.3.
- A legislated gender quota has been in place since 2007. This stipulates that neither gender should exceed 60% of candidates, and this requirement applies both to the entire list and to every five names.
- Compared with the older, traditional parties, in which candidates tend to be selected on the basis of a demonstrable history of party loyalty, new parties are more likely to recruit talent from outside the party, including women, to run as candidates.
- Some left and centre-left parties implement additional, party-level, voluntary quotas for gender balance, while right and centre-right parties do not tend to do so.
- There is a lack of national or party-level programmes designed to support and encourage women to stand as candidates for election to the European Parliament.

9.1. Method

This case study is based on desk-research into Spain's electoral system and levels of gender equality. It also draws on interviews conducted with two current MEPs, one political party representative, and one representative of a Spanish NGO working on gender equality and women's rights.

9.2. The electoral system and gender balance among MEPs

At the last European elections in 2014, Spain elected 22 women MEPs (41% of Spain's 54 seats), slightly above the EU average for women's representation in the European Parliament (37%). This represented a 5% increase in women elected to parliament compared to the 2009 elections, and a 15% increase from 2004.⁶⁹ Currently, Spain has 26 women MEPs (48%), an increase of 7% compared to the opening session.⁷⁰

In 2007, Spain introduced legislated quotas for putting candidates forward for election.⁷¹ Candidate lists must be presented with a balanced presence of both genders, with neither gender exceeding 60%. This requirement applies both to the entire list and to every five names. However, the quota does not fully determine the order of names on lists, and therefore does not influence the gender composition at the very top of every section of five candidates.

⁶⁹ European Parliament (2014) *Results by country*, available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-results-es-2014.html>

⁷⁰ European Parliament (2018) *European Parliament: Facts and Figures*, available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2018\)614733](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2018)614733)

⁷¹ Ley Orgánica 3/2007, de 22 de marzo, para la igualdad efectiva de mujeres y hombres (2013) BOE núm. 71, de 23 de marzo de 2007 Referencia: BOE-A-2007-6115.

Voting for European Parliament elections in Spain is not compulsory and the turnout for the 2014 elections was 43.8%.⁷² There is only one national constituency for the European elections, unlike national elections for which there are multiple regional constituencies. Spain's electoral system uses closed lists, and parties therefore select candidates and determine the order in which they are placed lists. The selection of candidates varies by party. Some parties choose their candidates with strong influence by their leadership, based on nominal meritocracy (the idea that the best candidates reach the most demanding roles). However, these kinds of approaches have been criticised as being overly hierarchical, and based on clientelism, internal party divisions and loyalties, and competing regional and national interests. Other parties have an internal voting system, through which the base of the party chooses candidates through internal voting.

Spain has a score of 68.3 on the European Institute for Gender Equality's Gender Equality Index 2017, up by 12% since 2010.⁷³

9.3. Factors affecting gender balance among MEPs

9.3.1. The electoral system and party candidate selection processes

Although there are national, legislated quotas in place and this system secures relatively high levels of participation by women in politics – at least 40% of candidates on lists are women – some parties reportedly treat this as the maximum percentage of women to be selected in their lists. Moreover, the legislated quota can represent an obstacle for women in accessing the top of the lists, as men tend to be chosen for the top of every section of five candidates.

Political parties have different approaches to list creation. Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and Podemos have additional internal, voluntary party quotas. PSOE has had a zipping system in place since 2009. Similarly, since 2014 Podemos has been experimenting with different types of requirements such as zipping. However, Podemos has a more flexible approach, on the basis that implementing pure zipping systems can limit the number of women candidates in higher positions. Ciudadanos does not have party quotas. The party advocates for a system of unblocked lists with party members selecting the order of the candidates, though this is not yet in place. It was reported that this system may be detrimental for gender equality as the lists can be rearranged by voters and quotas overturned. Partido Popular (PP) has a notably passive attitude towards gender balance and does not use voluntary quotas.

Minority, regional, and party coalitions use an array of different strategies when running for European elections, with the parties towards the left of the political spectrum being more amenable to using party quotas than those towards the right. As seen in the election results, more right-leaning parties tend to return lower numbers of women MEPs. This is related to the fact that the Spanish electoral quota does not work effectively with lower returns, and especially with figures under five candidates, as parties may place three men at the top of each section of five candidates.⁷⁴

9.3.2. Party practices and political culture

One factor restricting the supply of women candidates in Spanish politics, as one party respondent commented, is that historically traditional parties like PP and PSOE have selected candidates based on their having a history of loyalty to the party, usually demonstrated by a long career within it. By contrast, new parties like Ciudadanos and Podemos are pro-actively recruiting talent from beyond the party, including many women, to lead their programmes. This change in approach has seen, in recent years, an increase in the number of women with

⁷² International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2019) *Spain*, available at: <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/103/40>

⁷³ European Institute for Gender Equality (2015) *Gender equality Index- Spain*, available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2015/ES>

⁷⁴ Opcit Research (2015) *Analysis of political parties' and independent candidates' policies for gender balance in the European Parliament after the elections of 2014*, available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536448/IPOL_STU\(2015\)536448_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536448/IPOL_STU(2015)536448_EN.pdf)

successful careers in the private sector, NGOs, and justice sector standing as politicians. Parties with more *laissez-faire* or hostile attitude towards gender balance are also recruiting women to present counter-feminist arguments on issues such as abortion and gender-based violence.

Arguments stating the incompatibility of gender balance measures with meritocracy were expressed by respondents from parties that are ideologically at the centre-right and right of the political spectrum. These arguments centred on the notion that a system of rules that automatically secures a proportion of candidates from one gender disfavours the most talented. Relatedly, these respondents also argued that talented candidates will always be discovered through a natural process. However, these arguments were questioned by some. As one party respondent pointed out, 'we have actually realised that the system based on meritocracy does not work, because merit is difficult to measure, and in the end merit is determined by the authority and leadership, rather than by their own success. We are looking into it to tackle this'.

At the centre-left and left of the political spectrum, there seems to be more awareness of the importance not only of gender parity in descriptive representation, but also of placing women in higher positions on party lists, as well as in positions on European committees and delegations. As one MEP respondent stated, 'at the end of the day, parity and positive discrimination sound nice, but we need to push forward to achieve more. My experience in Parliament is that women are always given the departments on social affairs and environment, but macroeconomics is always male-dominated. We need to feminise politics, rather than just having more women to do things the way men do'. The same respondent added, 'we need a real feminist commitment from women achieving office'.

Similarly, some respondents argued that the internal functioning of the European Parliament does not help the promotion of women in European politics. One noted that, 'parliament seems designed for men, with long hours and unreasonable schedules, which is why some people, including MEPs and parliament workers, have an unstructured family life, or no family life at all'. In this regard, another respondent commented that 'the way parliament works is extremely masculinised. Still today it is widely spread that being an MEP is a full-time and exclusive job. It is also accepted that the family charge relies on others, mainly because being an MEP used to be a retirement opportunity, or a way to end a political career with great benefits, especially for older men. But currently for women, especially younger ones, work-life balance is hard if something does not change internally'. Most interviewees agreed that there have not been many improvements in this regard in recent years.

9.3.3. Awareness-raising and capacity-building

Respondents did not report any coordinated efforts at the national, regional, or party level to provide training or other public funding to bolster the supply of high quality women candidates in Spain. As one MEP raised, 'there are some party and some parliamentary sessions for specific topics such as sexual abuse, but there is no training that aims to tackle micro-machismo in debates, or workshops to help men and women overcome the glass-ceiling barrier'. Similarly, one NGO respondent pointed out that, 'unfortunately, there are no campaigns to raise awareness amongst voters or change public perceptions of women in politics'.

There are also several external obstacles that diminish women's chances of being selected as candidates. As one respondent claimed, 'men are still perceived as more credible than women, and this can be negative especially in European elections, because when you run for city council or local autonomies voters know you very well. Whereas when you run for European elections, voters in other regions have absolutely no idea who you are. In this sense, being a man can be more productive, because there is still today the belief that men are more fit for politics than women'.

Moreover, it was reported that the media generally express and reinforce inegalitarian views of men and women, and that this may influence parties when selecting candidates, as well as voters at the ballot box. According to a recent study, only one in four people portrayed in the Spanish media are women.⁷⁵ Spanish media also often use

⁷⁵ World Association for Christian Communication (2015) *The Global Media Monitoring Project 2015*, available at: <http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp/gmmp-reports/gmmp-2015-reports>

a paternalistic and domestic tone to portray women, for example using their first name instead of their surname or commenting on their clothing.⁷⁶ As one respondent pointed out, 'men are largely interviewed more than women because they are perceived to have more authority and impact'.

Although there are various Spanish NGOs that advocate for gender balance in general, there is no specific lobby or NGO campaigning exclusively for gender equality in politics. Among MEPs, there was some knowledge of the EU 50/50 campaign for parity democracy. However, as one MEP responded, 'parity would be sterile if politics do not change'. Other respondents were either not familiar with the 50/50 campaign or were under-impressed by it. As the NGO respondent reported, the campaign 'goes in the right direction, but it should emphasise that the political agenda must be gender balanced and inclusive'.

9.4. Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, Spain ranks relatively highly for women's participation in politics, largely due to the implementation of national quotas since 2007. However, interviewees for this case study expressed the view that women do not yet tend to hold high positions on party lists, or many senior decision-making roles. In this case, then, the legislated quota works as an entry-booster but also, in a sense, a glass ceiling, as men tend to be chosen for the top three positions in every section of five candidates.

Parties with internal quotas have more women candidates and politicians than those with a more laissez-faire attitude towards gender balance. Parties to the right of the political spectrum tend to assume that a system of rules that automatically secures a proportion of candidates from one gender disfavours the most talented. However, this is starting to change, as criticisms of the meritocratic ideal continue to expose the highly gendered nature of popular conceptions of merit.

MEPs' work also tends to be based on a traditional, outdated, androcentric model, assuming no caring responsibilities, and little training is provided to women to overturn the way the parliament currently works. Men are still broadly perceived as more fit for politics, as well as having more authority, and the media helps to perpetuate this bias. The European Women Lobby's 50/50 campaign does not seem to have had a large impact at the national level, and while it was perceived promoting gender balance, it was criticised for a lack of focus on the need for feminization of political structures, practices, and cultures.

Recommendations based on findings from this case study include the following:

- Efforts should be made at the grassroots of party politics to reach out to a broader range of women, involving them at all levels of the party in all kinds of roles, and providing routes for progression from these roles to candidacy.
- Parties must also work to ensure their standard working practices do not disadvantage mothers (and, indeed, anyone with caring responsibilities). This should include issuing and publicising guidelines on work-life balance.
- Funding should be earmarked for women candidates to support their campaigns.
- All parties should implement ambitious, multi-faceted, coordinated capacity-building programmes for women that provide not only training in political skills, but also structured networking opportunities and mentoring from senior, established politicians.

⁷⁶ Vela, A. (2017) 'Por qué los medios no hablan de las mujeres en política igual que lo hacen de los hombres', *PR Noticias*, 25 Abril, available at: <https://prnoticias.com/comunicacion/20162058-los-medios-no-hablan-igual-mujeres-politica-hombres#inline-auto1611>

10. CASE STUDY: SWEDEN

KEY FINDINGS

- At the 2014 elections to the European Parliament, Sweden voted in 11 women out of 20 MEPs (55%). The proportion of women among Sweden's MEPs has been within EIGE's recommended 'gender balance zone' for decades, at 41% in 1999, 47% in 2004, and 56% in 2009.
- Sweden uses a mixed system of Preferential Voting for European Parliament elections, with no legislated gender quotas. Most political parties implement voluntary gender quotas with highly effective list positioning rules such as zipping.
- Sweden has relatively high levels of gender equality compared with other nations. It ranks highest within the EU on EIGE's Gender Equality Index, with a score of 82.6 in comparison to the EU average of 66.2. It is the only EU Member State with a score over 90 (93.9) in the area of 'political power'.
- Findings from interviews with stakeholders suggest measures such as zipping are not commonly viewed by voters as 'gender balance' measures but, rather, as basic requirements of democracy.
- Despite relatively high levels of gender equality within Sweden, barriers to women's full participation in political life persist, and there is a lack of diversity among women candidates and MEPs. Barriers include inadequate approaches to assuring work-life balance (both within political parties and within the European Parliament itself), and lack of adequate funding for women candidates.
- To promote full parity democracy, we recommend implementation at the party level of a range of measures to ensure diversity among women candidates, provision of earmarked funding for women candidates, and multi-faceted, coordinated capacity-building programmes for women that provide training, networking, and mentoring.

10.1. Method

This case study is based on desk research into Sweden's electoral system and levels of gender equality within the political arena. It also draws on interviews conducted with three of Sweden's current women MEPs, each of whom will be seeking re-election in the upcoming European Parliament elections in 2019; one woman who is not a current MEP but will stand as a candidate in the upcoming elections; and one representative of the Swedish Women's Lobby (SWL), a national NGO working on gender equality including within politics.

10.2. The electoral system and gender balance among MEPs

At the 2014 elections to the European Parliament, Sweden voted in 11 women out of 20 MEPs (55%).⁷⁷ Currently, Sweden has 10 women MEPs (50%).⁷⁸ The proportion of women among Sweden's MEPs has been within EIGE's recommended 'gender balance zone' for decades, with women representing 41% of the MEPs voted into the European Parliament in 1999, 47% in 2004, and 56% in 2009.⁷⁹ Sweden's national parliament is similarly well-balanced, with 161 out of 349 seats (46%) being held by women.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ European Parliament (2019) *Results of the 2014 European elections: Men and women distribution*, available from: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/gender-balance.html>

⁷⁸ European Parliament (2018) *European Parliament: Facts and Figures*, available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2018\)614733](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2018)614733)

⁷⁹ European Parliament (2019) *Results by Country: Sweden*, available from: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-results-se-2014.html>

⁸⁰ The World Bank (2018) *Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments*, available from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?locations=SE>

This high level of descriptive representation of women has been achieved without the use of legislated gender quotas, or financial penalties or incentives. Most political parties implement voluntary gender quotas in their candidate selection processes, with list positioning rules such as zipping. For European Parliament elections, Sweden uses a mixed system of Preferential Voting, with a single national electoral district, and party lists that are closed but non-blocked so voters may express preferences for certain candidates on their favoured party list. As such, both parties and voters can determine which candidates take a party's seats.

It is well-established that Sweden has relatively high levels of gender equality compared with other nations. EIGE's Gender Equality Index (GEI) provides a score out of 100 for each Member State, based on analysis of data on gender equality in six domains: work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health. Sweden ranks highest (that is, most gender equal) within the EU on the GEI, with a score of 82.6 in comparison to the EU average of 66.2. It is highest or second highest in all domains except 'violence'. Within the domain of 'power', Sweden is the only country within the EU to score over 90 (at 93.9) on the indicator 'political power'.⁸¹ Below, we explore how gender balance among the country's politicians is maintained, how women's political empowerment relates to the wider picture of gender (in)equality, and the remaining priorities for parity democracy in Sweden.

10.3. Factors affecting gender balance among MEPs

10.3.1. The electoral system and party candidate selection processes

Sweden has consistently achieved good gender balance among its MEPs without any legislated quota or financial penalties or incentives. Since the 1990s, most political parties have implemented voluntary gender quotas in their candidate selection processes, with list positioning rules such as zipping, and these have proved highly effective in promoting gender balance among candidates and elected MEPs. All respondents reported that there are generally very high levels of public support for gender balance among the countries' politicians, and for parties taking these specific measures to maintain that balance. In the 1990s, the Social Democratic party was instrumental in popularising the 'every second name' campaign, which promoted zipping on party lists. Three interviewees noted that, following the success of this campaign, party-level quotas and zipping are not widely viewed as quotas among the Swedish public: the principle encapsulated in the phrase 'every second name' is predominantly viewed as a basic tenet of democracy. As one MEP stated, 'this is normal democracy for many, many Swedes. We've had this system for a long time now. Half of humanity are women, so 50/50 is the natural mix when we take political decisions about our future'.

As long as this remains the position within Sweden, there are few incentives to formalise quotas within a legal framework, or to introduce financial penalties for gender imbalance among parties' candidates. Indeed, some interviewees identified risks to changing a system that is currently delivering gender balance. They expressed concern that, while voluntary quotas both symbolise and deliver on a commitment to gender equality, being forced to implement quotas risks creating backlash effects. Further, as with voluntary quotas, parties may simply 'technically comply without giving women any real power'. As these interviewees suggest, quotas may be useful tools for achieving gender balance, but – whether or not they are legislated or have financial implications – parties that are not serious about gender equality can use their compliance with quotas to give the impression of egalitarianism, paying lip service to but not genuinely pursuing equality. As emphasised throughout this report, gender equality within the political sphere cannot be reduced to descriptive representation: genuine parity democracy demands more than gender balance.

While Sweden consistently achieves good gender balance among its MEPs, it is clear that there remains a lack of diversity among the women selected by parties to run as candidates. This was raised as a problem by two of the MEPs, the candidate, and the SWL representative, who identified the need to ensure the party 'selectorate' are not, consciously or unconsciously, unfairly disadvantaging potential candidates who do not fit outdated cultural stereotypes of politicians. One MEP noted her party was working actively on this: 'we're working to encourage

⁸¹ EIGE (2017) *Gender Equality Index 2017: Sweden*, available from: <https://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications/gender-equality-index-2017-sweden>

selection of other ethnicities than Caucasian. The process isn't finished yet but we and I think some other parties are making an effort to educate our selection boards and have a broader range of ethnicities. There is still a view of politicians as a white male either without a family or with a housewife. There's a science behind this. You need representation on the selection board itself, and then you need to be discussing your own prejudices. What is an effective politician, what is professional, what is expert? This supports the view the party 'selectorate' should be as diverse as possible, and – even in the most progressive of countries – educated on the importance of avoiding sexist, racist, ableist, heteronormative, and cisnormative bias in selection.

10.3.2. Party practices and political culture

A key barrier to women's full political participation raised by two MEPs and the parliamentary candidate is the inadequacy of parties' approaches to ensuring work-life balance. As discussed elsewhere in this report, successful progression to candidacy and election, and successful political careers in general, often depend on working long, inflexible, family-unfriendly hours. This is in part to do with party practices (for example, holding important meetings late in the evening) and in part to do with party cultures (in particular expectations that long, inflexible hours are just a normal part of the job, and that deserving politicians should be willing to make the required sacrifices). One MEP reported, 'everyone is stressed out, the work is tremendous, there are no boundaries and so many obligations, and everyone is in constant competition. But there has been zero acceptance that they should adapt their way of working to politicians with family commitments. My male colleagues have housewives. My husband has a career'.

This MEP called for the implementation of work-life balance policies within parties and within the European Parliament itself, while noting that, for such policies to be effective in practice, a change in party cultures is also required. She noted, 'what would really make a huge difference is a strategy for work-life balance. I'm horrified, actually, by how everyone has to adapt to a small number of men who rule the game. It's very patriarchal. If political parties and groups had a structure and way of dealing with women with children, it would be better: 'okay, she can't be here for every meeting'. Most colleagues don't have that kind of understanding. They just think you're lazy. But you're not a better politician because you're still sat in a meeting at 11pm. For any woman with a family, this way of working is broken'. This highlights that an important priority for action to promote parity democracy must be to promote implementation of work-life balance strategies within parties and parliament itself. This should include campaigns to 'normalise' family-friendly working practices, and to address those aspects of political culture that work to legitimise and reinforce expectations that political careers inherently and inevitably require sacrifices to family life.

10.3.3. Awareness-raising and capacity-building

Interviewees identified several priorities for awareness-raising efforts and communications campaigns regarding parity democracy in Sweden. As indicated in the discussion above, one key issue is promoting work-life balance within parties and parliament. This would be to the benefit of all politicians, while helping to level the playing field between men and women.

Another is achieving diversity within gender equality, which will require multi-faceted action at a number of levels. This includes education of the party 'selectorate', but also activities to foster engagement with and provide routes through political parties for women from a diverse range of backgrounds. As one MEP reported, 'parties need to be more inclusive when they go out and attract people, to engage more women in the party in different kinds of work, during campaigning, delivering leaflets, start wherever. You have to get used to how parties function. So parties have to make it more attractive for different people, with routes for progression'. This suggests that, in designing membership drives and drives for volunteers at election time, parties should think specifically about how to target women from a wide range of backgrounds in their local areas.

Relatedly, one of the MEPs argued that specific funding should be made available at some level (perhaps by political parties or national bodies) for candidates from under-represented groups, to support their campaigns. This was related to the observation that in Sweden and across the EU women candidates and politicians still often find it harder than men to gain media coverage, and particularly favourable coverage that focuses on the issues

at hand: 'most media coverage is given to men, so we face real obstacles coming out with our messages'. Making targeted funding available to candidates from under-represented groups may help them to redress these disadvantages. Indeed, this is a campaigning priority for organisations such as the European Women's Lobby: their 50/50 campaign recommends provision of 'earmarked funding for women candidates until equal representation is reached'.⁸²

In terms of capacity-building efforts, one of the MEPs noted that provision of a budget for training, education, and capacity-building had made a significant difference to her career progression. She noted that of particular value was training focused on 'negotiating tactics, public speaking, rhetoric, debating, how to deal with power and domination techniques – particularly responding to put downs, recognising what kind of put-down it is and having a useful strategy to respond to it – as well as budgeting, preparing for meetings, and launching ideas'. In light of research cited earlier in this report on androcentric conceptions of leadership and the ways in which men can dominate decision-making processes, training focused on developing strategies and techniques for navigating interpersonal interactions in the context of a male-dominated culture is particularly apt and valuable.

Indeed, strategies developed within Sweden to combat 'domination techniques' have been highlighted by EIGE in their work on good practice in gender equality.⁸³ The Power Handbook, developed by Sweden's National Federation of Social Democratic Women, provides practical guidance to women on how to obtain, maintain and use power, and how to combat domination techniques such as making 'invisible', ridiculing, withholding information, placing in a double bind, and blaming and shaming.⁸⁴

One MEP also expressed that she had benefited significantly from having a mentor within the party. This was a senior, established, and experienced politician, who provided a range of advice and support (including on activities such as drafting speaking points), and was a useful role-model. This experience was echoed by the parliamentary candidate. She had not had formal training but reported that she had benefitted from meetings and workshops organised by women in the party to share experiences of political life. The candidate also had a mentor, noting that, 'I've learned a lot from her, looking at how she speaks, how she approaches policy issues, how she negotiates with others'. This supports our recommendation that parties should implement multi-faceted capacity-building programmes, including training, mentoring, and opportunities for women to build supportive networks. The more established politicians interviewed for this case study reported that specific training had not been a significant feature of their political careers, suggesting that capacity-building programmes may be of most use to less experienced women coming up through the party.

10.4. Conclusions and recommendations

In sum, while Sweden has had consistently good gender balance among its MEPs for decades, there is still further to go to achieve genuine parity democracy. Most parties use voluntary quotas and highly effective list positioning rules, such as zipping, to ensure high proportions of women candidates, but there remains a marked lack of diversity among women candidates and MEPs, particularly with regard to ethnicity, disability, and sexuality. Key barriers to women's full political participation reported by interviewees include parties' and the European Parliament's inadequate approaches to assuring an acceptable work-life balance for party members and politicians, and their failure to address family-unfriendly working practices and cultures. Further, interviewees emphasised that women should be provided with structured opportunities to develop capacity, skills, and networks, and with funding to support their candidacy and campaigning.

To address ongoing gender inequality in political life in Sweden, particularly in relation to gender balance among the country's MEPs, we recommend the following.

⁸² <https://www.womenlobby.org/-Women-in-Politics-507-?lang=en>

⁸³ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/sweden/tools-combat-domination-techniques>

⁸⁴ <https://s-kvinnor.se/var-politik/political-program/the-power-handbook/>

- To promote parity democracy in Sweden, political parties should continue to use voluntary quotas and effective list positioning rules such as zipping, but also work to improve diversity among the women selected as candidates.
- This should include taking steps to ensure selection boards are themselves diverse, and that the 'selectorate' receive training and education on the value and importance of selecting a diverse range of women candidates.
- Efforts should be made at the grassroots of party politics to reach out to a broader range of women, involving them at all levels of the party in all kinds of roles, and providing routes for progression from these roles to candidacy.
- Parties must also work to ensure their standard working practices do not disadvantage mothers (or, indeed, anyone with caring responsibilities). This should include issuing and publicising guidelines on work-life balance (for example, one clear, effective measure would be to require that key meetings are held during the day rather than late in the evening).
- Funding should be earmarked for women candidates to support their campaigns.
- All parties should implement ambitious, multi-faceted, coordinated capacity-building programmes for women that provide not only training in political skills, but also structured networking opportunities and mentoring from senior, established politicians.

11. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Political parties have considerable influence over the degree of gender balance among a country's MEPs, and should act to implement ambitious, multi-faceted, coordinated programmes of action that seek to change the status quo of internal party practices and cultures as well as building women's capacity.
- Specifically, political parties should introduce quotas with zipping throughout party lists; ensure candidate selection boards are diverse and trained in the benefits of diversity in equality; provide earmarked funding for women candidates' campaigns; provide wide-ranging capacity-building programmes for women to develop their skills, experience, and networks; ensure membership recruitment drives are designed to attract women to the party in a range of roles, and provide routes of progression from these roles to candidacy; ensure internal working practices and cultures are respectful toward women and support a good work-life balance; and ensure communication campaigns clearly and consistently communicate parties' commitments to a women's rights and gender equality agenda.
- Member States that have low levels of gender balance among their MEPs should consider the introduction of legislated quotas with zipping throughout party lists and legal sanctions for non-compliance in the form of rejection of party lists. Member States should also provide, or expand provision of, earmarked funding for women candidates' campaigns, and for women's capacity development.
- EU institutions should continue to promote parity democracy across the EU, to closely monitor progress toward equality, and to gather and disseminate evidence on what works in increasing women's political participation and empowerment. EU institutions must also act to implement and normalise family-friendly working practices, and deliver on commitments to becoming gender balance role models by recruiting more women into senior positions. Further, funding for women's capacity development, networking, and organising – and particularly for concrete, evidence-based programmes that can be evaluated – should be expanded. A capacity needs assessment of all political parties represented in the European Parliament should be conducted to inform the development of bespoke, evaluated programmes for women's capacity development at the national level. EU institutions might also consider coordinating an international mentoring scheme to champion and spread good practice in achieving gender balance in politics.
- Ahead of the upcoming elections, as parties are finalising their candidate lists, there are opportunities for immediate action to improve gender balance among electoral candidates. Such action includes making direct appeals to political parties to ensure they offer gender balanced lists, and raising the profile of the issue of gender balance among the wider public, through media and communication drives.

11.1. Conclusions

Achieving gender balance in decision-making positions is a crucial element of parity democracy and a key objective of the European Union. However, while the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) recommends that representation of women and of men in bodies such as the EP should not fall below 40%, at the last European elections only 11 Member States out of 28 achieved this level of balance among their MEPs. By April 2018, this had reduced to just seven Member States.

A key conclusion of this report is that political parties have considerable influence over the degree of gender balance among a country's MEPs. This is most obviously the case in strict closed list systems, where parties

determine which candidates are placed in prime position to take the party's seats. But even in more open systems, parties' recruitment strategies, selection processes, and other aspects of practice and culture significantly effect both supply of and demand for women candidates. While the evidence suggests that fewer women than men put themselves up for election, political parties, as well as Member States and EU institutions, must respond by asking themselves what they can do to change that, including by increasing the appeal of a political career.

Importantly, gender balance measures such as quotas applied to candidate selection, and in particular zipping, can cut through much of the bias and disadvantage faced by women in political life by maintaining a high level of demand for women candidates. However, quotas are not a panacea for gendered inequality within politics and should not be pursued in isolation. Further steps must be taken to ensure a diverse range of women are empowered to pursue political careers. The international evidence suggests that the best results are seen when parties undertake ambitious, multi-faceted, coordinated programmes of action that seek to change the status quo of internal party practices and cultures as well as building women's capacity.

As we look ahead to the forthcoming European elections in May, we urge parties to do what they can to redress the persistent gender imbalance of the European Parliament, even in the absence of these kinds of measures and initiatives. As candidate lists are prepared and finalised over the coming weeks, we call on all party members involved in candidate selection to acknowledge the importance and urgency of achieving parity democracy and diversity within equality, and to allow their choices to be informed by that goal.

11.1.1. A note on 'Brexit'

On the assumption the UK leaves the European Union, the composition of the next session of parliament will be significantly changed. The total number of seats will reduce from 751 to 705, with 27 of the UK's 73 seats being redistributed to other Member States.⁸⁵ No EU country will lose any seats, while some will gain between one and five seats each, providing opportunities to send more women to parliament. The UK is currently one of a small minority EU Member States to have over 40% women and over 40% men MEPs, though the two countries set to gain the largest numbers of seats (France and Spain, which are due to gain five seats each) also both occupy ELGE's 'gender balance zone'. Of the other 12 Member States that are set to gain at least one seat, eight placed women in at least 40% of their seats following the last election, though by April 2018 only four of these still had at least 40% women MEPs. Thus, it remains to be seen whether and how changes in the distribution of seats among Member States following the UK's departure from the EU will affect the gender balance of parliament.

11.2. Recommendations

11.2.1. Immediate-term recommendations

Given that, at the time of writing, parties are finalising their candidates lists for the upcoming European elections, there are still opportunities for immediate action to improve the gender balance of the next parliament. Drawing on our research findings, we suggest these actions should focus on making direct appeals to political parties to construct gender balanced lists, and raising the profile of gender balance among the wider public, through media and information drives.

National political parties should:

- consider the findings of this report and compose candidate lists that will improve gender balance among their elected representatives.

National women's advocacy groups should:

- consider commissioning national polls to explore the voting public's understanding of and appetite for gender balance in European politics. The results of such polls can be newsworthy, support lobbying

⁸⁵ European Parliament (2019) *European Elections in 2019: How many seats will each country have?*, available from: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/images/20180702PHT07008/20180702PHT07008_original.jpg

and campaigning, and help to galvanise political parties to make more equitable choices in their list selections.

European political groups (Europarties) should:

- exert influence now on national parties and their 'selectorate' to encourage them as far as possible to consider the importance of gender balance as they finalise their candidate lists.

European women's advocacy groups should:

- maximise media coverage of the issue of gender balance through the provision of press packs including key statistics on Member States' and political parties' records on gender balance;
- coordinate closely with women's lobbies and advocacy groups at the national level to ensure that key messages about the necessity of gender balance, statistics on gender imbalance in the European Parliament, and opportunities to promote gender balance are consistently communicated to target audiences, including political parties and voters.

11.2.2. Short to medium-term recommendations

In addition to immediate-term action to improve gender balance outcomes at the forthcoming election, our research findings motivate a range of recommendations for national political parties, Member States, and EU institutions to act to improve gender balance over the short to medium term.

11.2.2.1. Recommendations for national political parties

National political parties should implement gender quotas for their candidates, with positioning rules applied to party lists. The most effective quotas employ zipping throughout the whole of party lists to ensure an equal gender balance (plus or minus one name) among candidates, and we strongly recommend the use of this rule. Quotas should ideally require 50% of candidates to be women, but should at minimum require no less than 40% women and 40% men, reflecting EIGE's recommendation on gender balance.

To increase diversity among women candidates, party selection boards should themselves be diverse, and receive training and education on the value of diversity in equality.

Parties should address the financial disadvantages faced by women seeking election by providing earmarked funding to support women's electoral campaigns.

Parties have an important role to play in providing capacity-development for women pursuing a political career. They should deliver capacity-building initiatives targeted at women that focus not only on training and mentoring, but also on building networks and providing direct experience of political processes and activities. Training should work to develop a wide range of political skills including media engagement, public speaking, negotiating tactics, rhetoric, debating, combatting power and domination techniques, budgeting, preparing for meetings, and launching ideas.

Parties should also work to expand the ways in which women can become involved in party politics, considering how best to target local recruitment drives at women and providing routes of progression from all levels of the party to candidacy.

Parties must work to improve inadequate approaches to work-life balance. This should involve creating and launching work-life balance strategies that reflect established best practice, and ensuring senior party members fully support the implementation of such strategies in practice.

Communications campaigns, as well as messaging from party leaders and prominent figures, should clearly and consistently communicate parties' commitments to a women's rights and gender equality agenda, and (where applicable) to increasing the proportion of women among the parties' elected representatives. It is crucial,

however, that such campaigns are part of a wider, multi-faceted, coordinated programme of action. Fine words about gender equality will ring hollow unless the recommendations outlined above are also followed.

11.2.2.2. Recommendations for Member States

Member States that have low levels of gender balance among their MEPs should consider the introduction of legislated quotas. As with voluntary quotas, these should require an equal number of women and men candidates, and mandate zipping throughout party lists.

National electoral authorities should be empowered and required by governments to impose sanctions for non-compliance with gender quotas. Restricting access to state funding for political parties that do not comply has proved to be an ineffective deterrent to larger parties that can afford to pay a penalty or forgo a financial benefit. The most effective sanction is rejection of party lists that do not comply with legal requirements.

Member States should also provide, or expand provision of, earmarked funding for women candidates' campaigns, and for women's capacity development. Such funds might be distributed via a national funding body with a remit to fund a range of activities to promote women's political participation.

11.2.2.3. Recommendations for EU institutions

EU institutions should continue to promote parity democracy across the EU, to closely monitor progress toward equality, and to gather and disseminate evidence on what works in increasing women's political participation and empowerment.

While the EU has made a number of recommendations on work-life balance within a range of policy instruments, the European Parliament and other EU institutions must themselves act to implement and normalise family-friendly working practices.

Relatedly, while EU institutions have repeatedly stated commitments to becoming role models on gender balance in public life, these commitments must be translated into practice and more women recruited to senior roles.

EU institutions should also expand provision of funding for women's capacity development, networking, and organising. Relatedly, while guidance and recommendations on parity democracy provided by EU institutions to Member States are useful, support in the form of funding for concrete programmes that can be evaluated and assessed for effectiveness should be increased.

We recommend that EU funding is provided to deliver a capacity needs assessment of all political parties represented in the European Parliament. This baseline evidence should then be used to inform the development of bespoke, evaluated programmes for women's capacity development at the national level.

EU institutions might also consider coordinating an international mentoring scheme, encouraging partnerships between well-performing and poorly-performing Member States that enable improvements to be achieved and championed.

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This study was commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the FEMM Committee. It provides analysis of women's representation within the European Parliament and European Union institutions, key factors affecting gender balance among elected representatives, and strategies and actions to promote gender balance. It also presents case studies of three Member States conducted through the lens of parity democracy, and issues recommendations for political parties, Member States, and EU institutions.

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