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

Women in the EP and EU national parliaments

Top 10 national parliaments
1. Rwanda
2. Cuba
3. Bolivia
4. United Arab Emirates
5. Mexico
6. Nicaragua
7. Sweden
8. Grenada
9. Andorra
10. South Africa

Women Members in the EP

39.5%*

*As of February 2020 plenary session, after UK withdrawal.

Women in parliaments

Female Members in the EP by Member State

FI SE LU LV MT SI DK FR NL PT IE ES AT HR IT EU BE HU DE PL CZ BG EE LT EL SK RO CY

Percentage of women Members in the EP (February 2020 session)

Total seats in 2020

14 21 6 8 6 14 79 29 21 13 58* 19 12 76 704* 21 21 96 52 21 17 7 11 21 14 33 6

Gender quotas in 2019 elections

Electoral system

Closed lists Preferential voting Single transferable vote Compulsory voting ≥ 39.5% < 39.5%

* One seat (Spain) is currently vacant.

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Author: Martina Prpic, Giulio Sabbati, Samy Chahri
Members’ Research Service
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Women in national parliaments compared with the European Parliament

The map shows those national parliaments across the world that have a percentage of women members equal to or above the 39.5% share of women Members in the European Parliament (EP). Worldwide, 26 countries have 39.5% or more women members in their national parliament. Source: Women in national parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (information for January 2020). Please note that the term ‘parliament’ here covers the range of legislative and representative bodies that exist throughout the world.

Women in EP and national parliaments

The graph illustrates the average representation of women in national parliaments in Member States and in the EP. The line for national parliaments up to 1996 is illustrative only, as data are only available for some Member States. A notable increase in the percentage of women in national parliaments can be seen in the mid-2000s, which could be the consequence of the introduction of electoral gender quotas in several Member States around this time (Belgium, France, Portugal, Spain).


Women in EP by political group

The graph shows the distribution of women Members among the EP political groups, showing in which political groups the proportion of women is higher than the EP average (39.5%) and in which it is lower. Source: based on information from the Members’ Administration Unit, for the February 2020 plenary session.

Female representatives in the EP by Member State

The graph shows the total number of seats in each Member State and the percentage of those currently held by women. For the 2014 European elections, eight Member States had gender quotas that concerned the make-up of electoral lists. Member States’ gender quotas are gender-neutral, aiming to avoid the under-representation of both women and men. Only two Member States required lists in parity (50%/50%) – Belgium and France. Slovenia and Spain required gender balanced electoral lists, with each gender represented by at least 40% of the candidates on the list. Croatia also had a 40% gender balanced list, but the requirement will be legally enforceable only at the third regular European elections, i.e. in 2024. The gender-balanced lists in Portugal required at least 33% (1/3) of each gender. Poland’s gender quota for the European elections was first applied in the 2014 elections, with at least 35% of candidates of each gender. Romania’s electoral rules establish that no all-women or all-men lists are possible. To ensure that candidates from both sexes are placed in positions on an electoral list with a good chance of winning a seat, some Member States required the alternate ordering of men and women on the list (‘zipping’). This is the case in Belgium (only the first two positions on the list), France and Portugal (not more than two consecutive candidates of the same sex on the list). Slovenian electoral law required at least one candidate of each gender in the upper half of the list. In Spain, the 40% 60% ratio applied within each five-candidate cluster on the list. Some Member States had gender clauses for national elections but not for the European elections, for instance Greece and Ireland. Whilst in some Member States electoral lists that did not meet the requirements of the gender clause were invalid (e.g. Romania, Slovenia and Spain), in others such lists were admitted to the elections but the party or coalition submitting them was punished with a fine and/or a cut in electoral campaign subsidies (e.g. Portugal). Italy had gender-balanced lists (1/3 for each gender) for the 2004 and 2009 EP elections. It introduced a new system in 2014, whereby third preference votes would not be counted if the voter did not vote for at least one candidate of each gender.

Gender quotas applicable to the 2019 EP elections

Eleven Member States had gender quotas in the 2019 European elections. Along with the above-mentioned eight countries, Greece also required at least 40% of each gender on the lists for the European Parliament, with the list considered invalid in case of non-compliance. Luxembourg required 50% for each gender on the list, with financial sanctions for non-compliance. Parties, Italy applied parity lists whereby candidates of the same gender may not exceed half of the candidates on the list, and where the first two candidates must not be of the same gender. In addition, second and third preference votes were not to be counted if voters chose only candidates of one gender.

Voluntary party quotas

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


Electoral systems and women’s representation

Analysts have sought to establish a relationship between electoral systems and the percentage of women elected. Whilst there is agreement that proportional representation systems are more favourable for female candidates than majoritarian systems, the link between open electoral lists (preferential voting, cross-list preferential voting) and the number of women elected has recently been challenged. Compulsory voting has also been explored as one of the factors that may have an effect on the percentage of women being elected.


This is an updated version of an infographic published in December 2019.

Country codes: Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Germany (DE), Estonia (EE), Ireland (IE), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), France (FR), Croatia (HR), Italy (IT), Cyprus (CY), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Hungary (HU), Malta (MT), Netherlands (NL), Austria (AT), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), Finland (FI), Sweden (SE), United Kingdom (UK)

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