

Women Heads of State or Government and Government Ministers



Key points

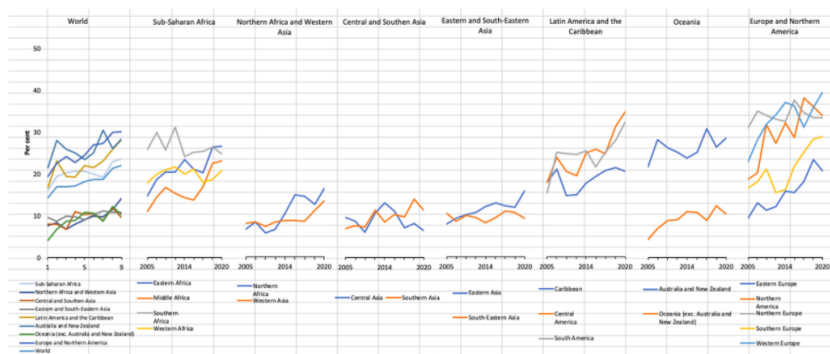
- Women's representation among cabinet ministers has increased almost four-fold over the last 25 years, although in 2020, on average, only one in five ministers (22%) is a woman.
- Progress in women's representation among regions over the past 15 years has been uneven, reaching 39% in Western Europe but only 6% to 16% in Northern Africa, Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) and Asia.
- While progress in selected countries since 1994 has been significant, and the number of countries with at least 30% of women among ministers increased from 5 to 51, in 2020 gender parity (around 50%) among cabinet ministers has been reached or surpassed in only 14 countries.
- In 2020, female ministers continued to be concentrated in ministries related to family and social issues.
- Very few women get to the top position of power within government. As of 2020, the total number of countries with a female Head of State or Government was 20, a slight improvement over the 12 countries with female Heads of State in 1995; as of 2020, most countries headed by women were in Europe.

Women continue to be underrepresented in cabinet appointments in all regions of the world.

In 2020, the share of women among cabinet ministers was 22%.¹ Although this figure is low, it shows important progress since 1994, when the average share was only 6%.²

Progress among regions over the past 15 years has been uneven: by 2020, the highest level of representation of women among ministers, at 39%, was reached in countries in Western Europe. The share of women among ministers remained low, at 16% or less, in Northern Africa and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand), and only between 6% and 16% of ministers were women in Asia (all regions) (see figure I).

Figure I: Share of women among ministers by region: 2005–2020 (Percentage)



Source: Compiled and calculated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development (UNDESA), Statistics Division, from information available from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, Women in Politics (2005, 2008, 2010 editions) and from IPU and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Women in Politics (2012, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2020 editions).

Note: Data as at 1 January of corresponding year.

Progress in selected countries since 1994 has been significant

Between 1994 and 2020, the number of countries with no female minister declined notably, from 59 countries³ to 9.⁴ Over the same period, the number of countries with 30% or more women ministers increased from 5 to 51.

By 2020, gender parity (around 50%) among cabinet ministers has been reached or surpassed in only 14 countries however: Spain (66.7%), Finland (61.1%), Nicaragua (58.8%), Colombia (57.9%), Austria (57.1%), Peru (55.0%), Sweden (54.5%), Rwanda (53.6%), Albania (53.3%), France (52.9%), Andorra (50%), Costa Rica (50%), Canada (50%) and Guinea-Bissau (50%) (closely followed by South Africa (48.3%), Ethiopia (47.6%) and El Salvador (47.1%)).

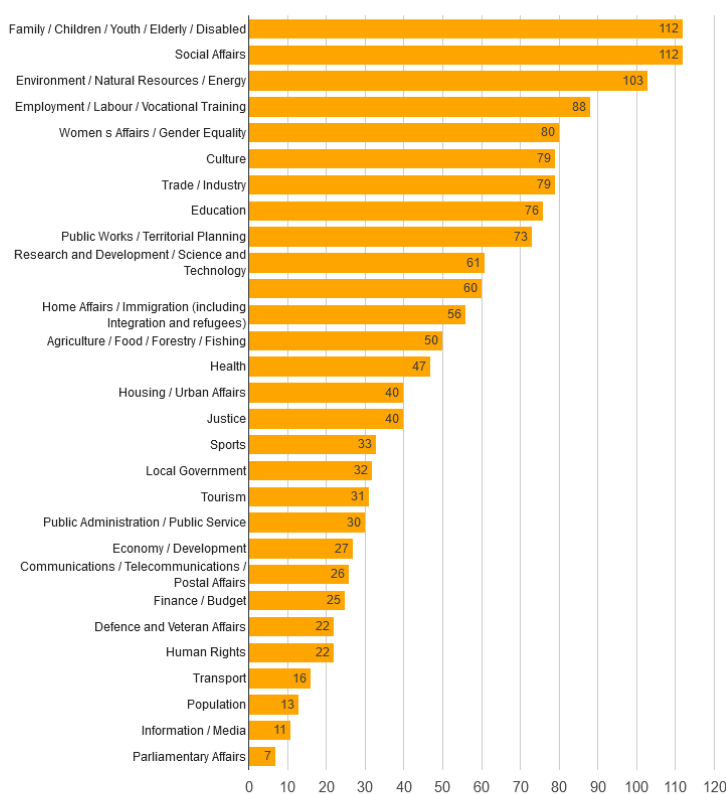
Looking at recent progress, the largest increase in the proportion of women among ministers was in Ethiopia, where the share of women in top positions rose from 10% in 2017 to 47.6% in 2020. At the other end of the spectrum, the greatest decrease in the share of female ministers took place in Slovenia during the same time period, where the proportion fell from 50% to 23.5%.

In 2020, portfolios held by female ministers continued to be those related to family and social issues

In general, women continue to be assigned to portfolios related to social issues, including those related to the family, children, youth, older persons and persons with disabilities and social affairs. Portfolios related to the environment, national resources and energy, employment and labour and vocational training are among the top four ministries led by women. Women's affairs, which includes the gender-equality portfolio, occupy the fifth position. In 2020, fewer female ministers held portfolios related to transport, population, information and the media, and parliamentary affairs (see figure II).

More detailed data available for selected countries⁵ show that, in 2017, the only countries with a 50% representation of women among core ministers of State⁶ were Canada, Norway and Slovenia; women occupy 40% of cabinet positions in Iceland and Sweden.

Figure II: Number of portfolios held by female ministers: 2020



Source: Compiled by UNDESA, Statistics Division, based on data obtained from IPU and UN-Women, Women in Politics (2020 edition) (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/women-in-politics-map-2020>). Women held a total of 1,451 portfolios in 190 countries.

Heads of State or Government

By holding the highest positions in the political sphere, women can also influence social norms and attitudes towards gender equality. However, very few women get to the top position of power within their government.

As of 1 January 2020, only 10 out of 152 elected Heads of State worldwide were women, and only 12 of 193 Governments were headed by women (see table). The total number of countries with a female Head of State or Government was 20, a slight improvement over the 12 countries with a female Head of State in 1995. In 2020, most countries with female Heads of State were in Europe, which is a change from 2015, when women led Governments in several countries both in Europe and in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁷

Table : Countries with a female Head of State and/or Government by region: as at 1 January 2020

<i>Head of State</i>	<i>Head of Government</i>
Sub-Saharan Africa	
Ethiopia	
Northern African and Western Asia	
Georgia	
Central and Southern Asia	
Nepal	Bangladesh
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	
Singapore	
Latin America and the Caribbean	
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Barbados
Trinidad and Tobago	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)
Oceania	
	New Zealand
Northern America and Europe	
Estonia	Belgium
San Marino	Denmark
Slovakia	Finland
Switzerland	Germany
	Iceland
	Norway
	Serbia
	Switzerland

Source: IPU and UN-Women, Women in Politics (2020 edition) (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/women-in-politics-map-2020>).

Note: Only elected Heads of State have been considered: countries with Kings/Queens/Governors-General or Sultans are excluded in the count of Heads of State.

About the data

Definitions

- **Share of women among ministers:** Percentage of women in the total number of ministers or cabinet appointments. The cabinet, also called the council of government, government or council of ministers, is a group of senior officials who provide executive advice to the Head of State and/or Government.
- **Heads of State or Government:** Number of Heads of State or Government who are women

Coverage

- **Share of women among ministers:** 190 countries with data available for 2020 (all 193 United Nations Member States except the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Haiti and Libya) organized by regional groupings under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicator framework.
- **Heads of State or Government:** All countries worldwide.

Footnotes

1. Calculated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, based on information from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *Women in Politics* (2020 online edition).
2. UNDESA, Statistics Division, *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics*, New York, 1995.
3. Ibid.
4. Countries with no female minister in 2020: Brunei Darussalam, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, Tuvalu, Thailand, Vanuatu and Viet Nam.
5. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) (Statistical Database accessed on 13 June 2020).
6. Core ministries include: Cabinet of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Justice.
7. UNDESA, Statistics Division, *The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics*, New York, 2015.