

Women judges



Key points

- In 2017, the proportion of women among judges was estimated to be 40%, up from 35% in 2008.
- If recent trends continue, the share of female judges will reach parity by 2035.
- The region with the largest proportion of women judges is Europe and Northern America (57%), while in some countries in Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand, less than 5% of judges are women.

Background

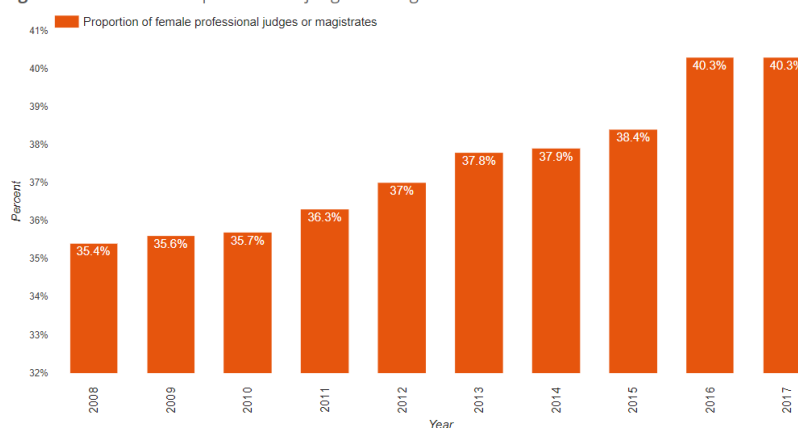
The entry of women judges into judiciary positions from which they have historically been excluded has been a positive step in ensuring that judiciaries are perceived as being more inclusive and representative of the people whose lives they serve and affect. By their mere presence, women judges enhance the legitimacy of courts, sending a powerful signal that they are open and accessible to those who seek recourse to justice.

Women judges contribute much more than improving gender balance within the judiciary, they also contribute significantly to the quality of decision-making, and thus to the quality of justice itself.¹

Current situation

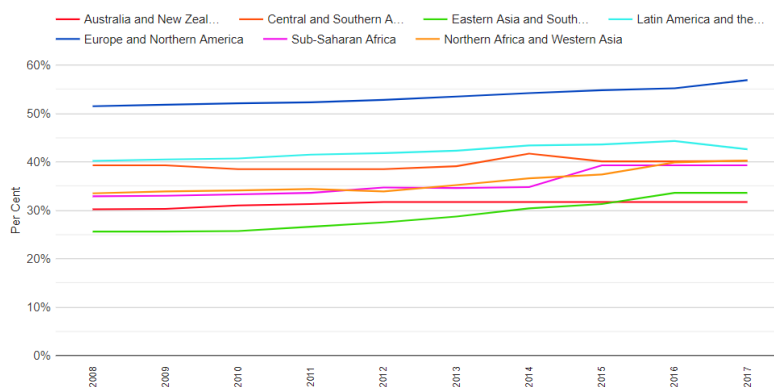
Data on judges and magistrates are collected in the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, which is issued every second year by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Over the past decade, the proportion of women judges or magistrates has increased steadily year after year, at an average of approximately half a percentage point (0.54%). In 2017, the share of women judges was estimated to be 40%, up from 35% in 2008 (figure I). If recent trends continue, the share of female judges will reach parity (50%) by 2035.

Figure I Share of female professional judges or magistrates: 2008-2017



Source: Data provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (correspondence on 21 May 2020).

As evidenced from data at the regional level, there is a significant variation in the share of women professional judges or magistrates in different parts of the world (figure II), although the overall share of women judges and magistrates increased in all regions during the period from 2008 to 2017.

Figure II Share of female professional judges or magistrates: 2008-2017

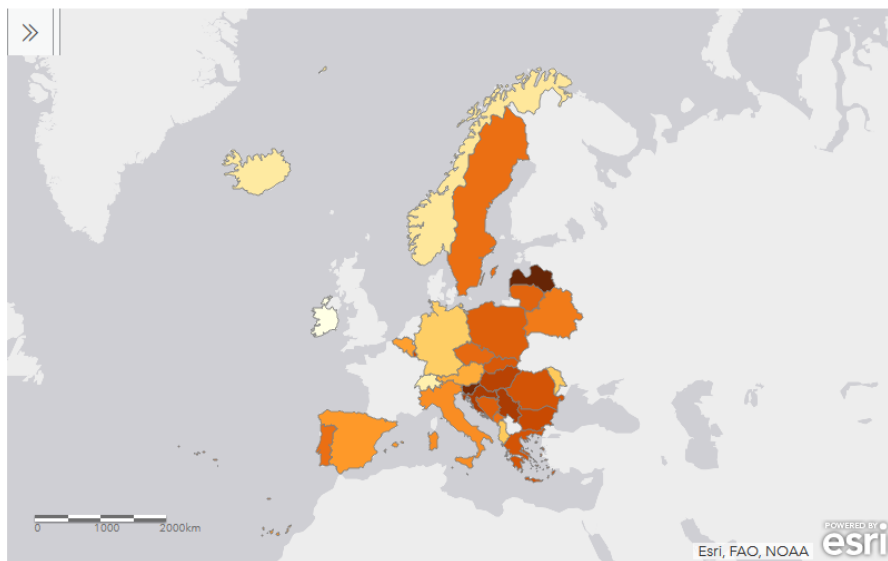
Source: Data provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (correspondence on 21 May 2020).

Based on available data up to 2017, the region with the largest percentage of women judges is Europe and Northern America (57%), largely owing to the fact that the proportion of women in the judiciary in countries in Eastern and Southern Europe has already reached and/or surpassed parity in 16 out of 21 countries.²

In Latin America and the Caribbean, women make up 43% of the judiciary, followed by 40% in sub-Saharan Africa, 40% in Central and Southern Asia, 40% in Northern Africa and Western Asia, 34% in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and 32% in Australia and New Zealand.

In its 2015 report on gender equality, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, while acknowledging the general lack of quantitative data for countries in the Pacific, reported that in some countries in Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand, less than 5% of judges are women.³

Figure III Share of female professional judges or magistrates in European countries: 2019 (Percentage)



Source: [United Nations Minimum Set of Gender Indicators](#) (last accessed in July 2020).

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this and other maps throughout this publication do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

About the data

Coverage

Women professional judges and magistrates worldwide.

Availability

Trend data on professional judges or magistrates by sex are globally available for 85 countries, covering almost half of the world population. In general, it is considered that national capacity to supply such data is adequate.

Oceania (excl) refers to Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand throughout the publication.

Definitions

- Share of female judges is the proportion of women among all judges.
- Professional judges or magistrates means both full-time and part-time officials authorized to hear civil criminal and other cases, including in appeal courts, and to make dispositions in a court of law. It may also include authorized associate judges and magistrates. Data refer to "female professional judges or magistrates at the national level".

References

- [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, regional estimates: data portal.](#)
- [United Nations Minimum Set of Gender Indicators](#) (last accessed July 2020).
- [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The Role of Women Judges and a Gender Perspective in Ensuring Judicial Independence and Integrity", 2019.](#)
- [United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, 2015.](#)

Footnotes

1. See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Doha Declaration: Promoting a Culture of Lawfulness*, 2019.
2. *United Nations Minimum Set of Gender Indicators*. (accessed July 2020)
3. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific*, Bangkok, 2015 .