

## Women in managerial positions



## Key points

- Although higher proportions of women in decision-making roles in the private sector has a positive correlation to superior corporate profitability, the proportion of women in managerial positions remains low in both the public and private sectors.
- Globally, women held only 28% of managerial positions in 2019, with some regional variations, and in countries in Northern Africa and Western Asia and Central and Southern Asia the proportion barely reached 13%, a statistic that has not changed significantly over the past 20 years.
- Since 2000, while the proportion of women in managerial positions has increased in most regions, the rate of improvement is slight.
- The underrepresentation of women in management positions is even more visible at the higher levels of decision-making: 48% of companies surveyed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2018<sup>1</sup> had at least one woman in senior management, but only 31% had women in top executive positions.
- Women CEOs or top managers are even more scarce: only 18% of enterprises surveyed by the World Bank had a woman CEO.
- Among Fortune 500 corporations, women accounted for only 7.4%, or 37 out of 500 CEOs. Despite the minor improvement from 1998, when only 1 out of the top 500 corporations had a female CEO, the gender gap at the level of top corporate decision makers remains significant.
- The bigger the enterprise, the lower the chances of it having a woman CEO: over 26% of small enterprises surveyed by ILO in 2018 (employing 2 to 100 workers) had female CEOs, compared with 16% of large enterprises (employing more than 250 workers).
- Enterprises with more women in their workforce are more likely to have a female CEO. Of the enterprises surveyed by ILO in 2018, enterprises with a gender balanced workforce were 15% more likely to have a female CEO, and enterprises with a predominantly female workforce (between 61% and 100%) were 22% more likely to have a female CEO.

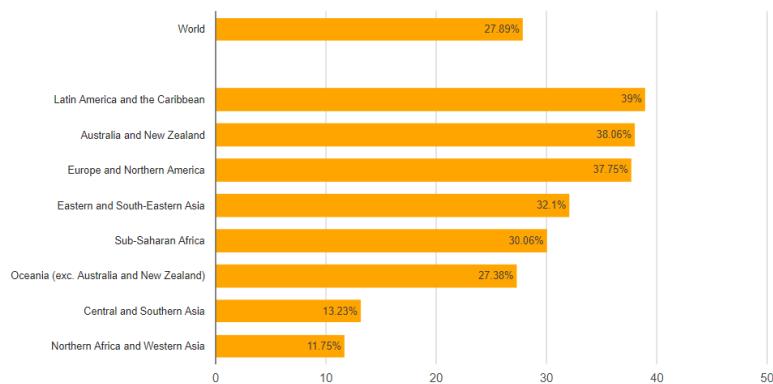
## Background

Gender diversity in managerial positions, as evidenced by greater representation of women in senior roles, as CEOs and senior-level managers, is not just about human rights and social equality. A number of studies have shown that a higher proportion of women in decision-making roles in the private sector has had a positive effect, boosting stock market returns and creating superior corporate profitability.<sup>2</sup>

A global survey of enterprises conducted by ILO in 2018 reaffirmed that company profits increase as a result of gender diversity and equality initiatives.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the proportion of women in managerial positions remains low in both the public and private sectors, and the number of women fall as they move up the corporate ladder towards the top executive positions.

### **Women are less likely than men to be employed and if employed are less likely to hold managerial positions.**

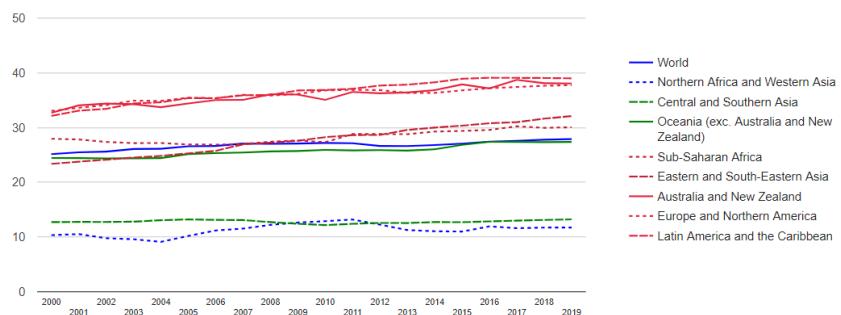
In 2019, on average, women comprised 39% of the [workforce worldwide](#), but held only 28% of managerial positions.<sup>4</sup> In the three regions with the highest proportion of women in managerial positions, Latin America and the Caribbean, Australia and New Zealand and Europe and Northern America, women held 38% of managerial positions; in the two regions with the lowest proportion of women in managerial positions, Northern Africa and Western Asia and Central and Southern Asia, women barely reached 13% of such positions – less than half the global average (see figure I).<sup>5</sup>

**Figure I:** Proportion of women in managerial positions, by region, 2019

**Source:** Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from the SDG database (accessed on 29 June 2020)

**Note:** Data cover managerial positions from the public and private sectors. Data refer to employment under ISCO-08 categories 11 (chief executives, senior officials and legislators) and 12 (administrative and commercial managers) and 13 (production and specialized services managers).

Since 2000, the proportion of women in managerial positions has increased in all regions, although their numbers remain disproportionately low and overall there has only been a slight improvement. In particular, female managers in countries in Central and Southern Asia and Northern Africa and Western Asia have remained in the minority over the last 20 years, with the share of all managerial positions held by women at between only 9% and 13% (see figure II).

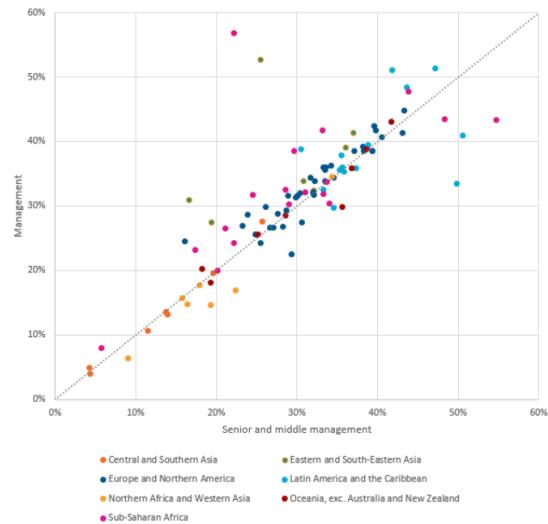
**Figure II:** Proportion of women in managerial positions by region: 2000–2019 (Percentage)

**Source:** Compiled by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, based on data from the Global SDG Indicators Database (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database>) (accessed on 29 June 2020).

### More women are employed in junior management than in senior and middle management positions, and the glass ceiling is more difficult to break through at the top echelons of management

In the majority of countries in the world, more women work in junior managerial positions than at the level of senior and middle management. In countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, however, where the proportion of women managers tends to be the highest, there are some country variations in the proportion of women in top management positions, relative to their overall share in management (see figure III).

**Figure III:** Share of women in any management positions, by the share of women in senior and middle management positions only, 2000-2019 (latest available)

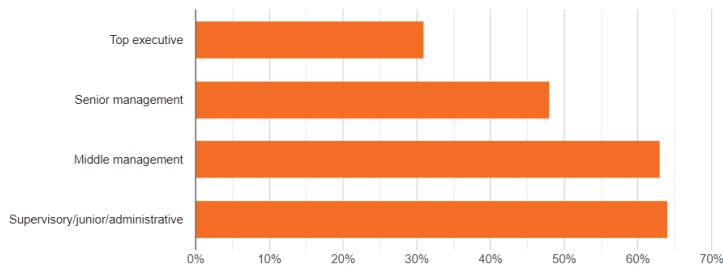


Source: Compiled and calculated by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data obtained from ILO database (accessed on 13 July 2020)

The finding that fewer women than men are represented at the higher levels of management is also supported by an ILO survey conducted in 2018,<sup>5</sup> which collected a sample of almost 13,000 companies in 70 countries across five regions: sub-Saharan Africa; Asia and the Pacific; Europe and Central Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; and the Middle East and Northern Africa.<sup>6</sup>

The survey showed that more than 60% of companies had at least one woman in supervisory, junior or administrative management and middle management. However, at the senior echelons, there were very few women: only 48% of companies had at least one woman in senior management, and less than a third had women in top executive positions (see figure IV).

**Figure IV:** Proportion of companies that have at least one woman in different levels of managerial positions, 2018



Source: Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from a 2018 ILO Survey, which collected a sample of 12,940 companies in 70 countries across five regions.

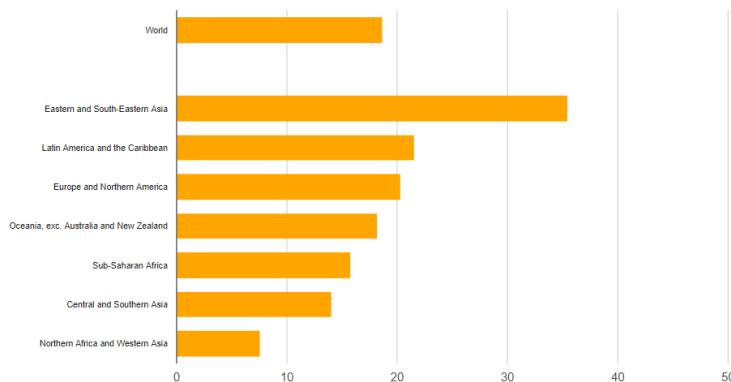
#### Women are better represented in support management functions than in more strategic managerial posts

The glass ceiling at senior managerial levels has created occupational segregation within management functions. As of 2018, even though 63% of surveyed enterprises had at least one female middle manager and close to 50% of surveyed enterprises had at least one female senior manager, when looking at their functional responsibilities, women were over represented in support management functions, such as human resources, finance and administration, while managerial posts in the areas of research and development and profit-and-loss management, which are considered to be more strategic, were generally occupied by men.

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At top managerial positions, among enterprises with a CEO, less than a fifth have a woman in that position.<sup>8</sup> Variations exist across regions, however, with countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia reporting the highest proportion of enterprises with female top managers, at 35.5%, while countries in Northern Africa and Western Asia reported the lowest share, at 6.4% (see figure V).

**Figure V:** Proportion of firms with a woman as top manager by region, 2010-2020 (latest available)



**Source:** Compiled and calculated by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data obtained from [Enterprise Surveys](#), The World Bank accessed on 29 June 2020.

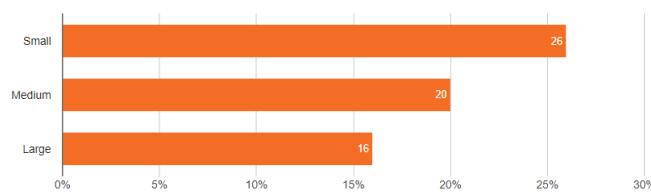
**Note:** Regional and "all countries" averages of indicators are computed by taking a simple average of country-level data. For each economy, only the latest available year of survey data is used in this computation. Only surveys, posted during the years 2011-2018.

### Company size and share of female CEOs: it is unclear how the size of a company affects the chances that a woman will be a CEO

The link between the size of a company and the likelihood that it will have a woman as CEO is not straightforward. While large companies have higher profiles, and may thus be less likely to discriminate against women candidates for top managerial positions, they also tend to be more hierarchical, making it more difficult for women to reach those positions as they may fall behind men in terms of networks, training and relevant job experience.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, recent evidence shows that the proportion of enterprises with a female CEO shrinks as the size of an enterprise grows: over 26% of small enterprises (employing 2–100 workers) have female CEOs, compared with 20% of medium-sized enterprises (employing 101–250 workers) and 16% of large enterprises (employing more than 250 workers)<sup>10</sup> (see figure VI).

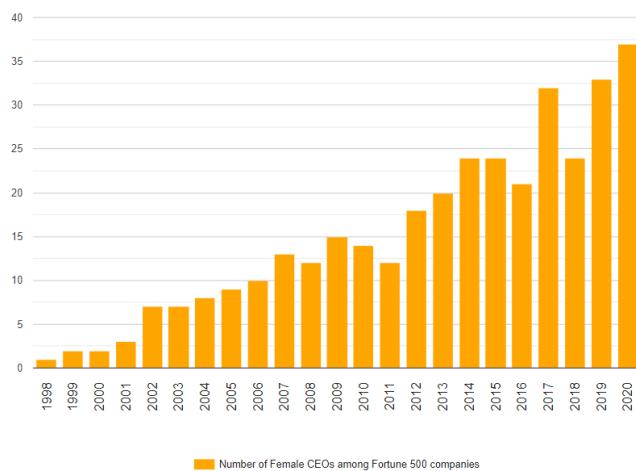
**Figure VI:** Proportion of enterprises with a female CEO, by size of enterprise, 2018



**Source:** Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from a 2018 ILO Survey.

This argument is also supported by the historical data on the number of female CEOs on the list of the Fortune 500,<sup>11</sup> which shows the largest corporations in the United States of America. While the list from 2020 has more female CEOs than ever before, women only account for 7.4% of the total number: only 37 out of 500 CEOs are women (see figure VII).

While this shows an improvement from 1998, when only 1 out of the top 500 corporations had a female CEO, the gender gap remains significant and is even more pronounced than among large enterprises, where in 2018 the share of women CEOs was reported at 16% (figure VII).

**Figure VII:** Number of Female CEOs among Fortune 500 companies: 1998-2020

**Source:** Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from Fortune magazine, as of May 18 2020.

#### Enterprises with more women in their workforce are more likely to have a female CEO

In 2018, enterprises where women accounted for 30% to 39% of the workforce had a 6% higher likelihood of having a female CEO than enterprises where women made up less than 30% of the workforce; when the workforce was gender balanced, enterprises were 15% more likely to have a female CEO; and when the workforce was predominantly female (61% to 100%), enterprises were 22% more likely to have a female CEO.<sup>13</sup>

## About the data

### Proportion of managerial positions held by women

- Definition: Percentage of women in management positions as a measure of total employment in management. Managerial positions correspond to major group 1 of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88 or ISCO-08).
- Data availability: Data are derived from International Labour Organization (ILO) modelled estimates at the regional level

### Proportion of women in senior and middle management positions

- Definition: Senior and middle management correspond to sub-major groups 11, 12 and 13 in ISCO-08 and sub-major groups 11 and 12 in ISCO-88. If disaggregated statistics were not available at the sub-major group level (two-digit level of ISCO), major group 1 of ISCO-88 and ISCO-08 was used as a proxy, and in such cases the indicator refers only to total management (including junior management).
- Data availability: Available data from 63 countries (with 2018 data) and 50 countries (with 2019 data).

### Percentage of firms with a female Chief Executive Officer/top manager

- Definition: The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the top manager in a company, the person who is ultimately responsible for making managerial decisions. The percentage of firms with a female CEO/top manager is calculated as the weighted average of data obtained from businesses in enterprise surveys, using sampling weights.
- Data availability: For the period 2010–2020, latest data on the percentage of firms with a female top manager were available for 134 countries from enterprise surveys conducted by the World Bank in 144 countries covering more than 161,000 companies.

## Related stories and further reading

- [Women in power and decision-making positions in the corporate world](#)

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## Footnotes

1. International Labour Organization (ILO), Women in Business and Management: -A Global Survey of Enterprises, Geneva, 2019.
2. Credit Suisse AG, Research Institute, The CS Gender 3000: The Reward for Change, 2016; ILO, Women in Business and Management: The business case for change, Geneva, 2019; Harvard Business Review, "Research: When Gender Diversity Makes Firms More Productive"; and McKinsey & Company, "Women in the Workplace 2019", October 2019.
3. ILO, Women in Business and Management: The business case for change, Geneva, 2019.
4. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistical Division, Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020.
5. ILO, Women in Business and Management: A global survey of enterprises, Geneva, 2019.
6. The regional groupings shown here are not the same as those used under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
7. ILO, Women in Business and Management: The business case for change, Geneva, 2019.
8. World Bank, "Enterprises surveys".
9. The World Bank Group, "Female Top Managers in Malaysia", Enterprise Note No.36, 2018.
10. ILO, Women in Business and Management: The business case for change, Geneva, 2019.
11. Fortune 500 is an annual list compiled and published by Fortune magazine that ranks the 500 largest corporations in the United States of America by total revenue for the respective fiscal year.
12. Fortune (magazine), "The number of female CEOs in the Fortune 500 hits an all-time record".
13. ILO, Women in Business and Management: The business case for change, Geneva, 2019.

## Mexico: women in the national parliament and in local government



## Key points

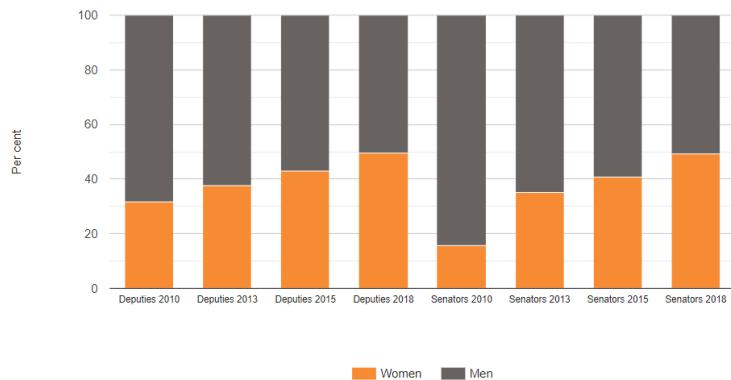
- Achieving the equal political integration of women enables their full and effective participation in decision-making.
- In 2014, the Mexican federal constitution and electoral laws were amended to ensure gender parity in all nominations for federal and local legislative seats; these same requirements have been extended to include nominations to municipal councils.
- By September 2018, gender equality in the national legislation was achieved, with 49.4% of women in the Lower Chamber of Deputies and 49.2% in the Upper Chamber of Senators.
- The current Federal Congress has been named the "Gender-Parity Legislature" because of this important achievement.
- By 2010, women's participation in municipal councils reached 25.5%; by 2018, women's representation was 44.9%.
- At the municipal level, however, the achievement of gender parity has not yet proven possible in some municipalities and municipal councils.<sup>1</sup>
- As of 2018, only 20.9% of municipal governments were led by women.

In Mexico, the political participation of women and men under conditions of equality and equity, without restrictions, is recognized as a human right. Equal political participation promotes democracy and political pluralism, and enables the full and effective participation of women, who have historically faced discrimination in the area of political and policy decision-making.<sup>2</sup>

Mexico has come a long way in breaking down the obstacles that prevented political-electoral equity between women and men. While electoral reforms, aimed at changing the regulation on access to electoral posts were promoted in 2011, it was not until 2014 that constitutional and legal reforms were carried out to guarantee gender parity in electoral nominations for federal and local legislatures.<sup>3</sup> These reforms also included electoral processes for municipal councils.

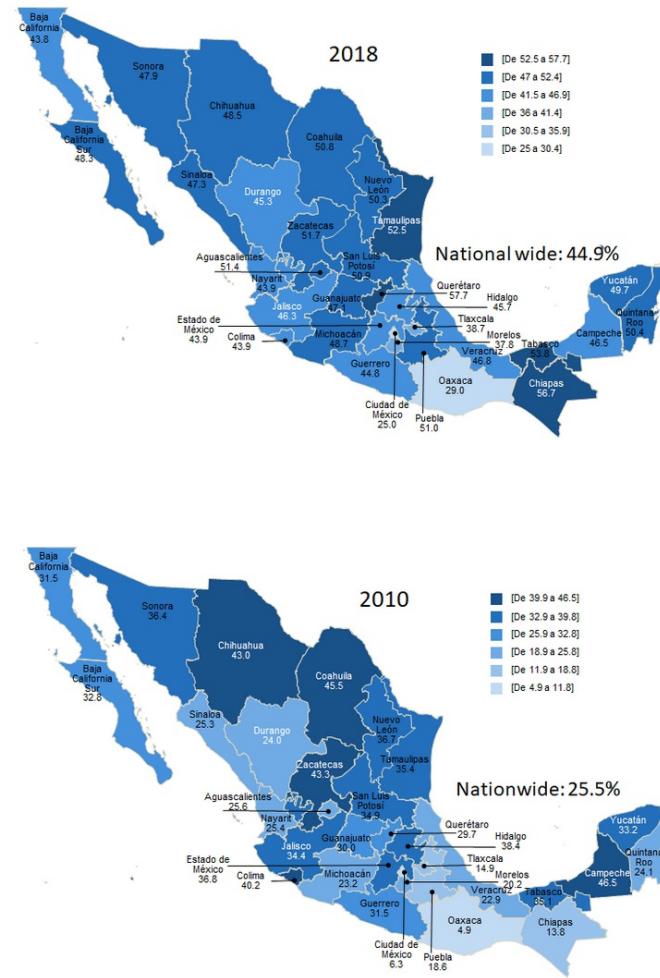
Despite progressive change in electoral legislation and the fact that by September 2015 a trend toward gender parity was already observed, the composition of the Federal Congress was unbalanced: women held 42.8% of seats in the Lower Chamber of Deputies and 40.6% in the Upper Chamber of Senators. Gender equality was achieved in September 2018, with 49.4% of women elected in the Lower Chamber and 49.2% of women in the Upper Chamber (see figure I). As a result of this important achievement, the current Federal Congress has been named the "Gender-Parity Legislature".

**Figure I:** Percentage of seats held by women and men in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate: 2010, 2013, 2015, 2018



**Source:** Senate of the Republic of Mexico (Spanish original website) (<https://www.senado.gob.mx/64/>, <https://www.senado.gob.mx/63/>, [http://www.diputados.gob.mx/sistema\\_legislativo\\_LXI.html](http://www.diputados.gob.mx/sistema_legislativo_LXI.html)); Chamber of Deputies of the Republic of Mexico (Spanish original website) ([http://www.diputados.gob.mx/sistema\\_legislativo\\_LXI.html](http://www.diputados.gob.mx/sistema_legislativo_LXI.html)).

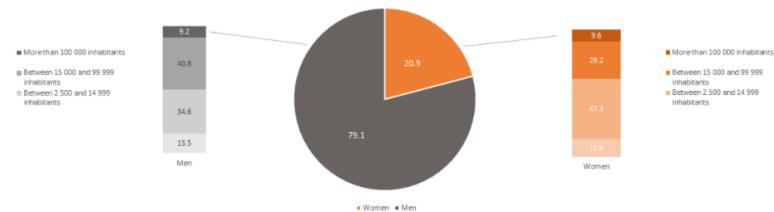
The Government of Mexico is organized at three levels: the Federal Government; state governments; and local municipal governments. The main governing body at the local level is the municipal council, a collegiate body directly elected by the people, comprising councillors and controllers, and headed by a municipal president. In 2010, women's participation in municipal councils was 25.5% (see figure II); by 2018, women's representation was 44.9%. In spite of the fact that women's political participation at the local level has advanced in most of the 32 Mexican states, there are some areas where the share of women's representation in municipal councils has barely reached 29.0%, for example, in the state of Oaxaca, which has the highest indigenous population in the country.

**Figure II:** Percentage of women's representation in municipal councils: 2010 and 2018

**Source:** National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) National Census on Municipal and Borough Governments, 2011, and National Census on Municipal Governments and Territorial Demarcations of Mexico City, 2019.

As of 2018, 45% of members of municipal councils were women, including mayors, aldermen and councilors, although only 21% of mayors were women, and 86.1% of female mayors were in elected in urban areas. Among the proportion of urban municipalities, women were more likely than men to be mayors of communities with 2,500 to 14,999 inhabitants (47.3% compared to 34.6%, respectively) and less likely than men to be mayors of communities with 15,000 to 99,999 inhabitants (29.2% and 40.8%, respectively).

Women and men were equally represented as mayors of municipalities with 100,000 and more inhabitants (9.6% and 9.2%, respectively), while men had a slightly greater chance of being mayors of rural municipalities with less than 2,500 inhabitants (15.5% compared to 13.9%, respectively) (see figure III).

**Figure III:** Percentage of municipalities led by women and men by population of municipalities: 2018

**Source:** INEGI, National Census on Municipal Governments and Territorial Demarcations of Mexico City, 2019, and National Population Council (CONAPO), Population Projections of Mexico, 2015-2020.

## Further reading and related stories

- [Women in national parliaments](#)
- [Women in local government positions](#)
- [Women in politics and decision-making positions in Africa](#)

## About the data

### Definitions

- **Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament and local governments:** Total number of seats occupied by women divided by the total number of seats

### Coverage

Women and men who hold elected seats in federal legislative chambers and local deliberative bodies (municipalities) at national and state levels in Mexico.

### Availability

Data on the political participation of women at the local level have been obtained through the national census on local governments,<sup>4</sup> which has been conducted biennially by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) since 2011.

Footnotes

1. Colección: Equidad de género y democracia (Collection: Gender Equality and Democracy) (Spanish original).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. National Census on Municipal Governments and Territorial Demarcations of Mexico City, 2019, previously called the National Census on Municipal and Borough Governments.

Power and decision making

## Financial decision-making in the household [ECE]



## Key points

- In developed countries with available data, a large majority of women participate in decision-making about household purchases and decisions about occasional more expensive purchases are largely egalitarian (on average, 80% of women and men equally participate in these decisions).
- In most countries, however, decisions about routine or day-to-day household purchases are most frequently taken by women alone.
- Responsibility for deciding how to spend money on food, clothing and items for daily living may reflect obligation rather than autonomy or influence; responsibility to decide how money is spent on more expensive purchases, such as a car, home remodelling or a vacation, may be more indicative of power.

## Background

### **Financial decision-making is a fundamental element among the many dimensions of intra-household power<sup>1</sup>**

Gender inequalities in the public sphere often reflect unequal power relations between women and men within the household. Policies aimed at reducing gender inequality are likely to be more effective if they consider the underlying origins of disparities relating to the balance of power and decision-making within the home.

Realizing goals in nearly all areas of public and private life depends on access to and control over financial resources. Data on household financial decision-making provide valuable information on individual agency and the empowerment of women across societies. This topic has direct policy relevance for social welfare and development programmes aimed at increasing economic well-being through income transfers, the outcomes of which depend on access to income. Information on household financial decision-making can also shed light on the distribution of responsibilities among women and men within households.

## Current situation

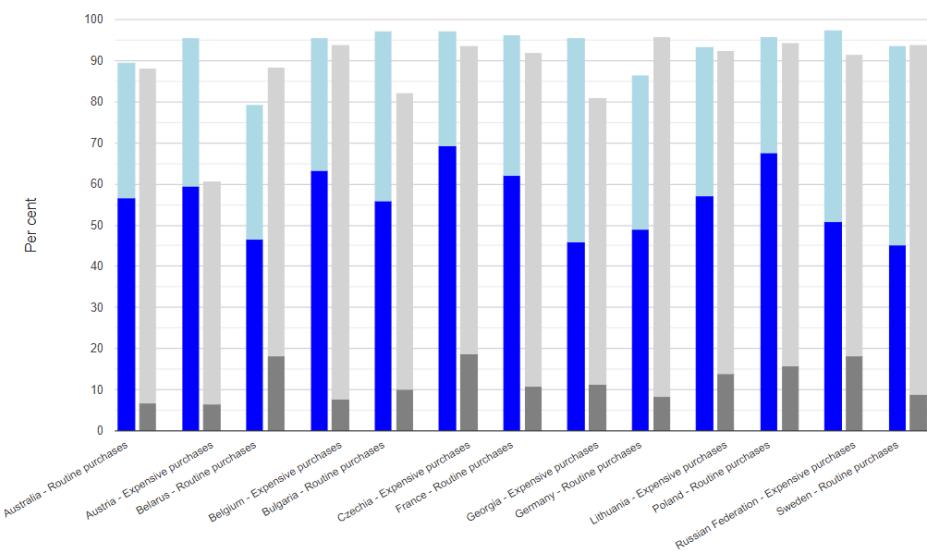
### **Women in Europe manage day-to-day expenses**

In developed countries, a large majority of women participate in decision-making about household purchases. Recent surveys indicate that in Australia and in 12 countries in Europe decisions about occasional more expensive purchases are largely egalitarian. On average, more than 80% of women and men indicated that decisions about expensive purchases are shared equally between partners.<sup>2</sup>

The situation with regard to decision-making on routine purchases for the household is quite different. In most countries with available data, decisions about day-to-day household purchases are most frequently taken by women alone (see figure I). While participation in financial decision-making is an important marker of the empowerment of women, sole responsibility in this area may not be desirable. Sustainable Development Goal 5, target 5.4, of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for "the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family". That women perceive themselves as being principally responsible for decisions about routine purchases may indicate an imbalance in the management of domestic tasks.

Responsibility for deciding how to spend money on food, clothing and items for daily living may reflect obligation rather than autonomy or influence; the responsibility for deciding on how money is spent on a car, home remodelling or a vacation may be more indicative of power.

**Figure I:** Share of female respondents in co-residing couples who are responsible for decisions on household expenses, by type of expenditure in selected countries: 2005—2017 (latest year available) (Percentage)



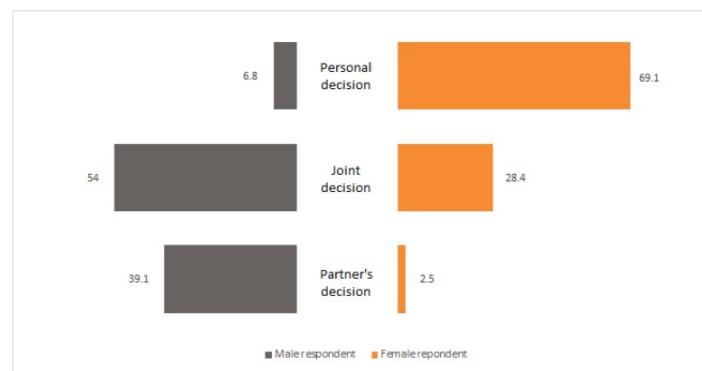
**Source:** Generations and Gender Programme, Generations and Gender Survey, Waves 1 and 2, see website for methodology ([https://www.unece.org/pau/pub/ggp\\_survey\\_instruments.html](https://www.unece.org/pau/pub/ggp_survey_instruments.html)); and Gauthier, A.H., Cabaco, S.L.F. and Emery, T., "Generations and Gender Survey study profile", Longitudinal and Life Course Studies, vol. 9, No. 4, 2018 (<https://www.llcsjournal.org/Index.php?llcs/article/view/500>).

## Gender differences in perceptions of decision-making

Most male respondents agreed that their female partners are more likely to be primarily responsible for decisions about routine purchases, although there are differing perceptions of the degree to which decision-making is mutual. Male respondents were much more likely than female respondents to perceive household decisions on routine purchases as being shared. Across 13 countries with available data, 54% of male respondents indicated that decisions about routine household purchases are made jointly with a partner, however, only 28% of female respondents interpreted the sharing of decision-making in this way (see figure II).

Gender differences in perceptions about decision-making provide support for the methodological recommendation that surveys including questions about intra-household power and decision-making should interview respondents privately, whenever possible.

**Figure II:** Share of respondents in co-residing couples who are responsible for decisions on routine household purchases, by sex of respondent in selected countries: 2005–2017 (latest year available) (Percentage)



**Source:** Generations and Gender Programme, Generations and Gender Survey, Waves 1 and 2 ([https://www.unicef.org/pau/pub/ggp\\_survey\\_instruments.html](https://www.unicef.org/pau/pub/ggp_survey_instruments.html)).

**Note:** Data were pooled across countries identified in Figure I.

## About the data

### About the data

#### Definition

- **Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who are primarily or equally responsible for decisions on household expenses, by type of expenditure and sex:** Calculated as the percentage of individuals in co-residing couples who indicate whether they always, or usually, make decisions about household expenses alone or jointly with their partners, reported separately for females and males and for routine and for occasional more expensive purchases.

#### Coverage

Women and men in co-residing couples in selected countries.

#### Availability

Data related to this indicator are from the Generations and Gender Survey conducted by the Generations and Gender Programme<sup>3</sup> and from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS).<sup>4</sup>

## Footnotes

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1. United Nations, Economic Commission for Europe, Guidance for measuring intra-household power and decision-making (forthcoming) .
2. Unweighted average of countries for which data are available (see figures I and II).
3. Generations and Gender Programme, Generations and Gender Survey .
4. Internationally comparable data for developed regions are limited. In its forthcoming publication, "Guidance for measuring intra-household power and decision-making" the Economic Commission for Europe suggests that this indicator could be more widely produced based on existing survey data or with the addition of a small number of questions to existing surveys .

## Factors affecting women's representation in parliament



## Key points

- In 2020, elections in 118 countries are governed by some type of gender quota in lower or single houses of parliament.
- In 2020, women hold 27% of seats in lower or single houses of parliament in countries implementing some type of gender quota compared to 18% in countries without any quota.
- Among the three types of quotas, reserved seats, voluntary political party quotas and legislated candidate quotas, the latter two appear slightly more effective than the reserved seats quota: in 2020, over 28% of seats were held by women in countries implementing voluntary political party quotas and legislated candidate quotas, compared to 25% in countries with reserved seats quotas.
- High proportions of female candidates in parliamentary elections are correlated with high proportions of seats held by women in parliament.
- During the period 2015–2020, while the Northern America and Europe region continued to rank first in terms of the highest share of female candidates (36%), the largest increase in the number of female candidates in parliamentary elections was recorded in countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the proportion of women candidates rose from 17% to 27% (10 percentage points).

## Gender quotas

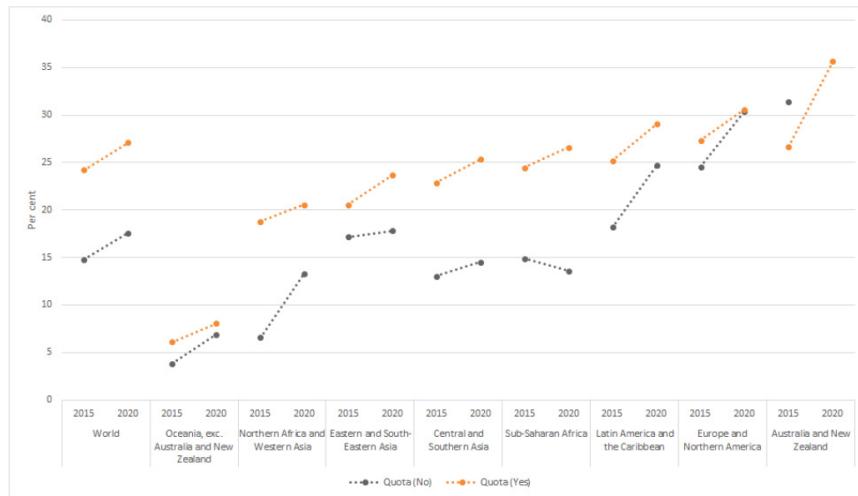
Gender quotas are aimed at reversing discrimination in law and practice and to levelling the playing field for women in politics. Gender quotas may be mandated in the constitution, stipulated in domestic legislation or formulated in the statutes of political parties. Typically, three types of electoral quotas are used: (a) reserved seats quotas, which reserve a number of seats for women in a legislative assembly; (b) legislated candidate quotas, which reserve a number of places on electoral lists for female candidates; and (c) voluntary party quotas, which are targets voluntarily adopted by political parties to include a certain percentage of women as candidates in elections.

## Electoral quotas for women have spread to all regions of the world

Elections in 118 countries are currently governed by some type of gender quota in the lower or single houses of parliament. Across all regions, the **proportion of seats held by women in lower or single houses of parliament** is higher in countries with some type of gender quota compared with those without quotas in the same region (see figure I).<sup>1</sup> In 2020, the global average proportion of seats held by women in lower or single houses of parliament was 27% in countries implementing some type of gender quota compared to 18% in countries without any quota.

Gender quotas tend to play a more important role in improving women's representation in parliament in regions with overall lower representation of women in parliament, with the exception of Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand, where the proportion of seats in parliament held by women remains below 10% even in countries that have adopted gender quotas.

**Figure I:** Proportion of seats held by women in lower or single houses of parliament by region and by use of electoral quotas: 2015 and 2020 (Percentage)

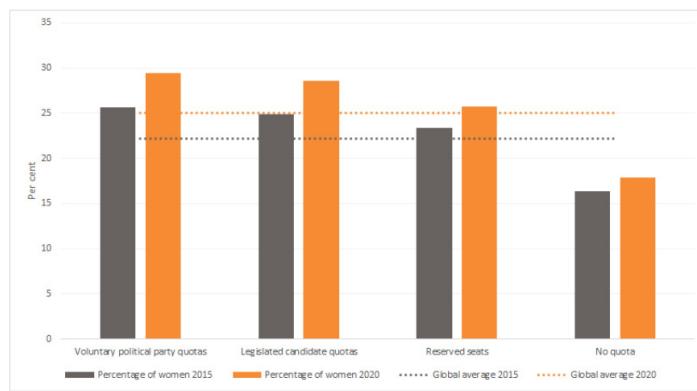


**Source:** Compiled and calculated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division; data for 2015 were obtained from the Sustainable Development Goals database (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs>) (last accessed 10 July 2020) and The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/worldswomen.html>), data for 2020 were obtained from the Sustainable Development Goals database (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs>) (last accessed 10 July 2020) and the Gender Quotas Database (<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas>) (last accessed January 2020).

Among the three types of gender quotas, voluntary political party quotas and legislated candidate quotas continue to appear more effective than reserved seats

Voluntary political party quotas and legislated candidate quotas mandate the number or percentage of women to be included in a candidate list, while reserved seats quotas allocate a number of seats for women in a legislature. In 2020, over 28% of parliamentary seats are currently held by women in countries implementing voluntary political party quotas and legislated candidate quotas. The majority of countries (79%) also tend to apply these two types of quotas (34 implementing voluntary political party quotas and 59 implementing legislated candidate quotas, out of 191 countries with data).

**Figure II:** Proportion of seats held by women in lower or single houses of parliament by type of gender quota: 2015 and 2020



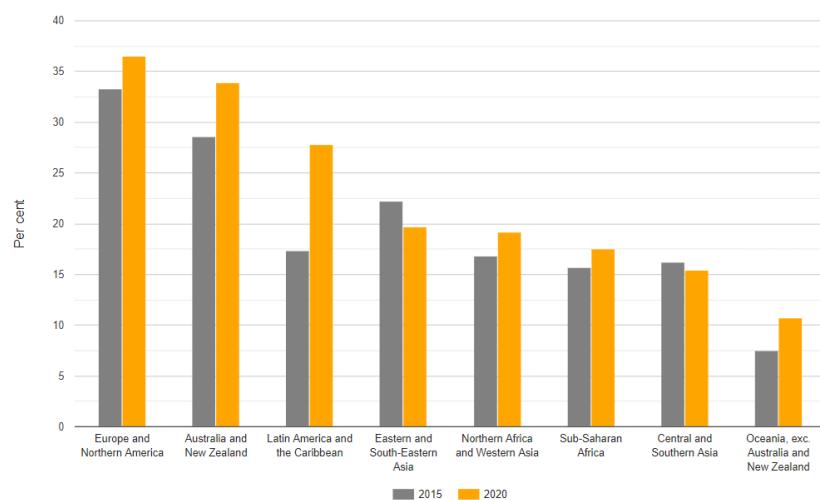
**Source:** Compiled and calculated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division; data for 2015 were obtained from the Sustainable Development Goals database (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs>) (last accessed 10 July 2020) and The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/worldswomen.html>), data for 2020 were obtained from the Sustainable Development Goals database (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs>) (last accessed 10 July 2020) and the Gender Quotas Database (<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas>) (last accessed January 2020).

## High proportions of female candidates standing in parliamentary elections are correlated with high proportions of seats held by women in parliament

As of 2020, the proportion of female candidates in parliamentary elections was higher than 40% in only 18 of 139 countries with available data. With the exception of Chile (see country in focus below), these are also the countries where women's representation in parliament is higher than 24.9%, which is the global average. Cuba stands out as the only country in the world where women hold over 50% (53%) of parliamentary seats.

In most regions of the world, the proportion of female candidates in parliamentary elections increased between 2015 and 2020. In 2020, countries in Northern America and Europe continued to rank first in terms of the highest share of female candidates (36%). The greatest increase was recorded in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the share of female candidates rose from 17% in 2015 to 27% in 2020. Improvement was also recorded in Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand, the region with the lowest share of female candidates, where the proportion of women running for parliament increased from 7% in 2015 to 19% in 2020 (see figure III).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure III:** Share of women among candidates for lower or single houses of parliament: 2015 and 2020



**Source:** Compiled by UNDESA, Statistics Division, from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) PARLINE database on national parliaments, ([www.ipu.org/praline-e-parlinesearch.asp](http://www.ipu.org/praline-e-parlinesearch.asp)) (accessed on 25 March 2015) and the IPU database on parliamentary elections (<https://data.ipu.org/elections>) (accessed on 30 April 2020)

## Country in focus: Chile

After implementing a gender quota in 2015, Chile recorded a 22 percentage point increase in the proportion of female candidates for parliament (from 20% in 2015 to 41% in 2020). Furthermore, there has been a 7 percentage point increase in the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women, reconfirming the positive correlation between women as candidates and women as parliamentarians. Before 2015, although a voluntary political party quota had been implemented in Chile, results in terms of women's representation were not satisfactory. To address the inequality, in 2015 Congress passed a bill on constitutional reform, including a gender quota, as well as legal sanctions for non-compliance. Parties that fail to comply with the mandated gender quota by submitting candidacy lists with more than 60% of men are sanctioned, and all candidates on the list are rejected.<sup>3</sup>

## About the data

### Definitions

- **Proportion of female candidates for parliamentary elections:** The number of women among candidates for lower or single houses of parliament, expressed as a percentage of all candidates in the latest election year and calculated as the total number of female candidates divided by the total number of candidates for parliamentary elections.

### Coverage

This indicator covers the single chamber in unicameral parliaments and the lower chamber in bicameral parliaments but not the upper chamber of bicameral parliaments.

### Availability

As at 1 January 2020, data on the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women were available for 191 countries. Data on the proportion of women among candidates for parliament were available for 139 countries. Data on quota systems were available for 191 countries. Countries are organized by regional groupings under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicator framework.<sup>4</sup>

## Footnotes

1. The exception of Australia and New Zealand shown in figure I is caused by the reclassification of New Zealand from the group of countries without any type of quota in 2015 to the group of countries implementing some type of quota in 2020.
2. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics, New York, 2015 .
3. Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Country Data, Chile .
4. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, regional groupings under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicator framework .

## Women in the civil service



## Key Points

- Women continue to be underrepresented among senior-level civil servants: they represented less than 50% of senior-level civil servants in 60% of the 27 countries with available data for the period 2008–2017.
- As of June 2020, about a quarter (24%) of national statistical offices worldwide were headed by women, close to the proportion observed in 2015.
- Women are underrepresented among senior professionals and managers within the United Nations system. Women occupied 44% of the total number of appointments for a period of one year or more, an improvement compared to 32% of appointments in 1997. However, their representation is higher at the junior professional levels (above 50%) and declines at higher senior professional and management levels (between 30% and 40%).

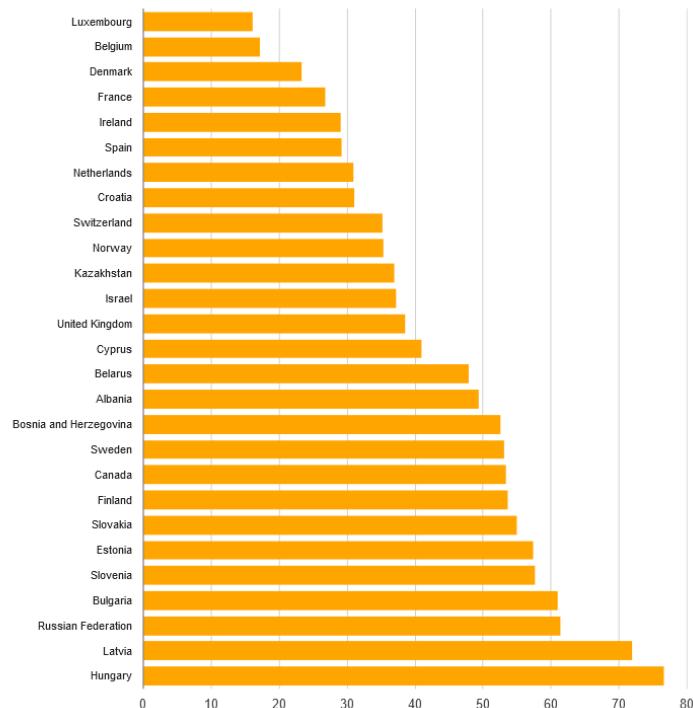
## Current situation

### **Women continue to be underrepresented among senior-level civil servants.**

Women tend to be underrepresented among senior-level civil servants, including government administrators, administrators at intergovernmental organizations, ambassadors and consuls-general. During the period 2008–2017, the representation of women at senior-level civil servant positions was below parity in 60% of the 27 countries with available data (see figure I).

As in the past,<sup>1</sup> rates of representation varied widely across countries, ranging from 16% to 77%. Among the four countries with the highest proportions of women as senior-level civil servants (above 60%), Hungary (76.6%), the Russian Federation (61.5%), Bulgaria (61.1%) and Latvia (72%), only the latter exceeded 60% of female representation for the first time. Women's representation among senior-level civil servants is the lowest, below 20%, in Belgium (17.2%) and Luxembourg (16.1%).

**Figure I:** Proportion of women among senior-level civil servants: 2008–2017 (latest available) (Percentage)



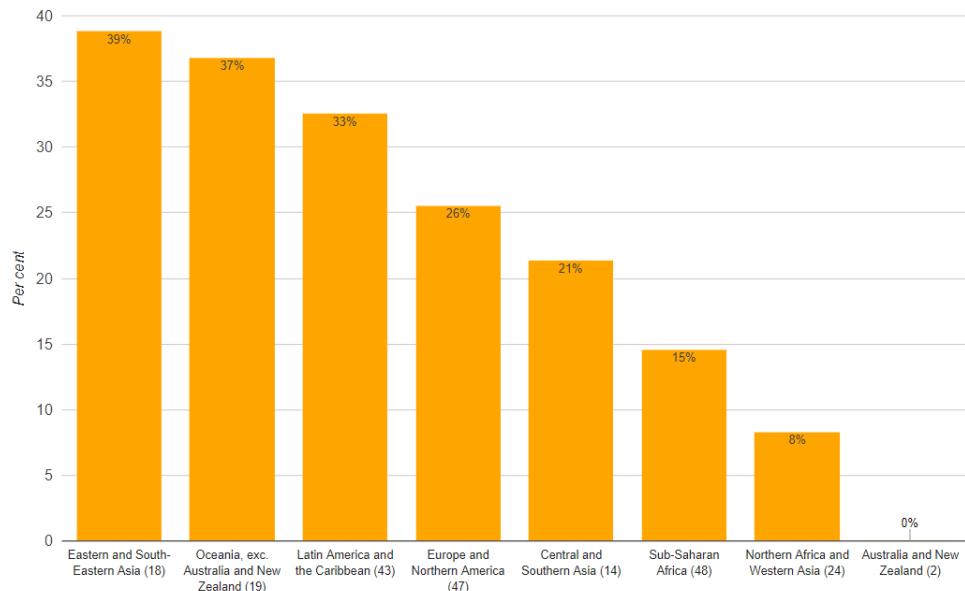
**Source:** Compiled by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, based on data obtained from the UNECE Statistical Database (accessed on 6 June 2020) ([https://w3.unece.org/PXWeb2015/pxweb/en/STAT/STAT\\_30-GE\\_05-PublicAnddecision/](https://w3.unece.org/PXWeb2015/pxweb/en/STAT/STAT_30-GE_05-PublicAnddecision/)).

#### About a quarter of national statistical offices worldwide are headed by women

Chief statisticians are high-ranking administrators in charge of national statistical offices, which are responsible for producing official statistics in countries worldwide. As at 2 June 2020, 24% of national statistical offices (52 out of 215) had a woman as chief statistician, very close to the proportion observed five years ago. As at 2020, in countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, 39% of national statistical offices were headed by a female chief statistician (see figure II).

Over the past five years, there has been significant progress in Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand): in June 2020, national statistical offices in 7 out of 19 countries or areas in the region were headed by a woman, while in 2015 there were none.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, there were no female chief statisticians of national statistical offices in Australia and New Zealand.

**Figure II:** Proportion and list of countries or areas where the national statistical office is headed by a woman by region: 2020



**Source:** Complied and calculated by UNDESA, Statistics Division, Contacts database (accessed on 2 June 2020).

**Note:** Numbers in parentheses indicate the total number of countries and territories in each region.

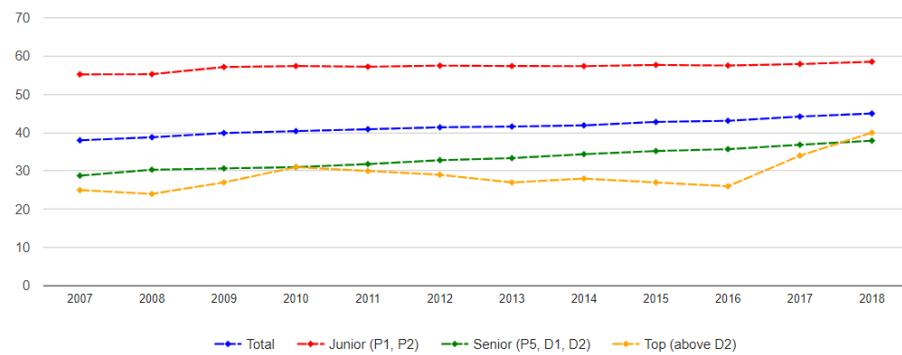
### Women are underrepresented among senior professionals and managers within the United Nations system.

The goal of achieving gender parity at all levels among the staff of the United Nations is a commitment that is now two decades old. During this time, significant progress has been made towards advancing the representation of women in the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system. As at 31 December 2018, the latest available data from across all entities of the common system showed that, among senior professionals and managers, women occupied 44% (out of 109,589 total staff) of the total number of appointments for a period of one year or more, an improvement compared to 32% of appointments (out of 15,192 total staff) in 1997.

The achievement of the goal of gender parity has remained slow and uneven however. The representation of women continues to be higher at the junior professional levels<sup>3</sup> (above 50%) and declines at higher senior professional and management levels<sup>4</sup> (between 30% and 40%). The most significant progress has been achieved at the highest levels of decision-making and responsibility,<sup>5</sup> with a 40% representation of women – a direct result of the commitment of the Secretary-General to reach parity at the highest levels by 2021. At the very top of the hierarchy, however, no woman has been appointed Secretary-General since the establishment of the United Nations in 1945.

As of December 2018, 34.6% of heads and 48% of deputy heads of United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions were women, a record number. In addition, in 2018, the Secretary-General appointed the first female Under Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and three female special envoys.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, despite these appointments, the proportion of female staff in Field Services, who are generally recruited internationally to serve in a civilian capacity at field missions, was significantly lower (27%). Furthermore, in 2019, out of approximately 95,000 peacekeepers, women comprised only 4.7% of military personnel and 10.8% of police personnel at United Nations peacekeeping missions.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure III:** Proportion of women among international professional staff in the United Nations system: 2007–2018 (Percentage)



**Source:** Compiled and calculated by UNDESA, Statistics Division; data for 2007–2017 are drawn from the report of the Secretary-General on improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system (A/74/220) (<https://undocs.org/en/A/74/220>); data for 2018 are drawn from the report of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB/2019/HLCM/HR/17) ([https://unsecb.org/sites/default/files/CEB\\_HR\\_Statistics\\_31\\_12\\_2018\\_0.pdf](https://unsecb.org/sites/default/files/CEB_HR_Statistics_31_12_2018_0.pdf)).

**Note:** Data for 2007–2013 and 2018 reflect staff on contracts of one year or more. Data for 2014–2017 reflect staff on permanent/continuous/fixed-term appointments: junior professional staff include P-1 and P-2 levels; senior professional staff include P-5, D-1 and D-2 levels; and top positions refer to levels above D-2.

## About the data

### Share of women among senior-level civil servants

- Definition: Calculated as the total number of female senior-level civil servants divided by the total number of all senior-level civil servants. Senior-level civil servants are defined according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08, 1120),<sup>8</sup> and include senior government officials (i.e., government administrators, administrators at intergovernmental organizations, ambassadors and consuls-general).
- Coverage: Data are available for 27 developed countries.
- Source: [United Nations Economic Commission for Europe \(UNECE\) Statistical Database](#) (last accessed on 6 June 2020)

### Proportion of countries or areas where the national statistical office is headed by a woman

- Definition: Calculated as the total number of countries or areas where the head of the national statistical office is a woman divided by the total number of countries or areas where there is a national statistical office.
- Coverage: Data cover 215 national statistical offices.
- Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, Contacts database.

## Footnotes

1. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics, New York, 2015 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.XVII.8).
2. UNDESA, Statistics Division, The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics, New York, 2015 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.XVII.8).
3. Including P-1 and P-2 levels.
4. Including P-5 to D-2 levels.
5. Encompasses all levels above D-2, including Assistant Secretary-General, Director General, Deputy Director-General, Assistant Director-General, Under-Secretary-General and Secretary-General.
6. Report of the Secretary-General on improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system (A/74/220), para.1.
7. United Nations Department of Peace Operations, Women in Peacekeeping: A Key to Peace.
8. International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), sub-major group 11, minor group 111, unit group 1120, Managing Directors and Chief Executives.

## Women as decision makers in the corporate world



## Key points

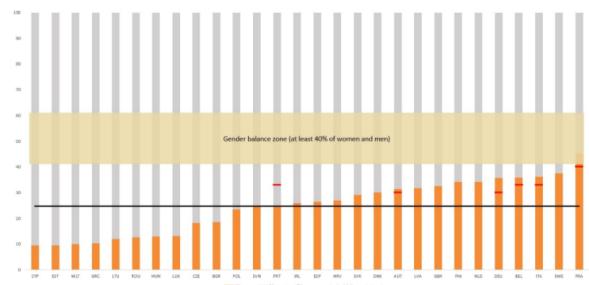
- In 2019, one country in the European Union had surpassed the target of 40% of women on corporate boards recommended by the European Commission, and four other countries in the European Union came close, with shares above 35%.
- Government intervention has proven to be an effective method for improving gender diversity on corporate boards. Since the European Commission recommended the adoption of legislative action to set a gender target for board membership in 2010, the average proportion of women on the boards of the largest listed companies in the European Union has doubled (from 11.9% in 2010 to 28.8% in 2019).
- In those countries in the European Union with legislative quotas, women's representation on boards increased by 20 percentage points more than in countries without quotas or related actions.
- Overall, female representation on corporate boards has been growing, particularly in developed countries, although not fast enough: at the current pace, the goal of 30% of women's representation on boards will not be reached until 2029.
- The representation of women on corporate boards varies across economic sectors. In 2019, the financial sector had the highest proportion of companies with at least three women on their boards (45%) while the industrial sector had the largest proportion of companies without female representation at the board level (25%), as was also the case in the information technology (22%) and communications services sectors (22%).
- The "glass wall" phenomenon, which keeps women in support management positions rather than allowing them access to strategic management functions, still exists at the board level.
- While the share of female participation in the boardroom has increased, boards remain largely chaired by men, and in 2018 the share of female board chairs was less than 10% in almost all regions. Even in Europe, where the majority of legislative quotas on female board membership have been implemented, only 6.9% of board chairs are women.
- Data from 2018 show that, across regions, companies with female rather than male board chairs have a significantly higher number of women on their boards. The same phenomenon was found to apply at companies with a female Chief Executive Officer.

## Current situation

Globally, an increasing number of companies are using 30% as the gender balance target on corporate boards, following initiatives such as the "30% Club", a campaign promoting greater female representation on corporate boards launched in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 2010.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in 2010, the European Commission suggested legislative action to set a gender target on boards, proposing a target of 40% of women's representation on corporate boards in 2012.

In 2019, the highest percentage of female board members in the largest publicly listed companies in the European Union was found in France (45.3%), the only country reaching the 40% target suggested by the European Commission. Four other countries exceeded 35%: Sweden (37.5%), Italy (36.1%), Belgium (35.9%) and Germany (35.6%), with the latter three also surpassing their legislative quota targets. Overall, a total of 11 countries out of the 28 countries in the European Union (39%) had over 30% of women as board members of their largest publicly listed companies. Nevertheless, in 12 countries, women constituted less than a fifth of board members, and in 3 countries they represented less than 10% of board members: Cyprus (9.1%), Estonia (9.4%) and Malta (10%) (see figure I).

**Figure I:** Percentage of women and men on the boards of the largest publicly listed companies in the European Union: 2019



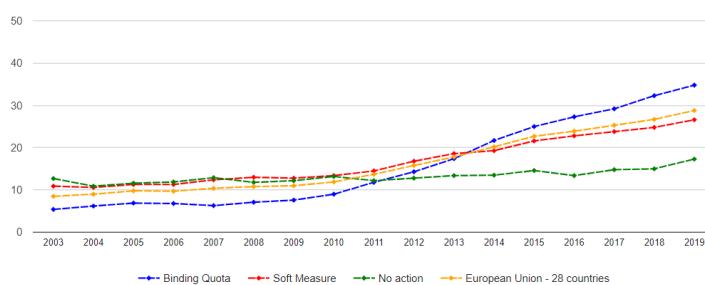
**Source:** Compiled and calculated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, from data obtained from the European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Statistics Database (accessed on 25 June 2020); and European Institute for Gender Equality, Legislative quotas can be strong drivers for gender balance in boardrooms (<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/data-talks/legislative-quotas-can-be-strong-drivers-gender-balance-boardrooms>).

## Legislative quotas can be strong drivers for gender balance in boardrooms

Government intervention has proven to be an effective method for improving gender diversity on corporate boards. Before 2010, the proportion of women on the boards of the largest listed companies in the countries of the European Union was steady. In 2010, the European Commission recommended the adoption of legislative action to set a gender target on boards. Since 2010, the average proportion of women on the boards of the largest listed companies has doubled, from 11.9% in 2010, to 28.8% in 2019.

Of the 11 countries with over 30% of female board members, five had implemented legislative quotas. The proportion of women on boards has gone up by 25.8% in the five countries with legislative quotas compared to a 16.9% overall increase in the 28 countries of the European Union. This difference is striking when compared to countries without quotas or that have taken no action at all, where there was only a 4.1% increase in women's representation over the same nine-year period. Less dramatic improvements have been observed in countries using soft measures, or non-binding quotas, where women's representation on boards increased by 13.2% over the same time period (see figure II).

**Figure II:** Change in the proportion of women on the boards of the largest listed companies in the European Union by type of action taken by governments: 2003 –2019



**Source:** Compiled and calculated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, based on the data obtained from European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Statistics Database (accessed on 25 June 2020).

A 2019 study<sup>2</sup> revealed a similar trend of female representation on corporate boards in 23 out of 49 developed countries with available data (figure III).<sup>3</sup> Overall, female representation on boards has been growing, although not fast enough. Over the last five years, the growth rate was faster in developed countries (9.1%) than in emerging economies (5%). According to another report, at the current pace the goal of 30% of women's representation on boards will not be reached until 2029.<sup>4</sup>

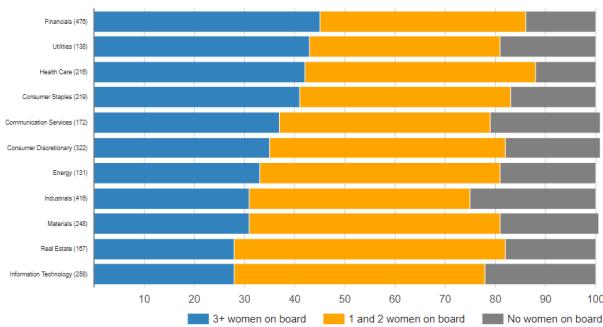
**Figure III:** Trends in the share of women on corporate boards in selected countries: 2014–2019

**Source:** Compiled by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, based on the 2015, 2017, 2018 and 2019 Morgan Stanley Capital International "Women on Boards" progress reports.

**Note:** The Morgan Stanley Capital International "All Country World Index" is comprised of the MSCI World Index, which captures 23 developed economies, and the MSCI Emerging Market Index, which covers 26 emerging economies (numbers in parentheses indicate the number of companies reflected in the analysis in 2019).

Distribution of companies by number of women on their boards are not even across economic sectors

In 2019, the distribution of companies by number of women on their boards were not even across economic sectors (see figure IV). Out of more than 2,700 companies in over 50 countries, the financial sector showed the highest proportion of companies with at least three women on their boards (45%), while the information technology sector remained the sector with the lowest (28%). In all sectors, over 75% of companies had at least one woman on their boards. The industrial sector showed the largest proportion of companies without women on boards (25%), followed by the information technology (22%) and communications services sectors (22%).<sup>5</sup>

**Figure IV :** Distribution of companies by number of women on their boards, by economic sector: 2019

**Source:** Compiled by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, based on Morgan Stanley Capital International, "Women on Boards: 2019 Progress Report".

**Note:** Numbers in parentheses indicate the total number of companies in each economic sector.

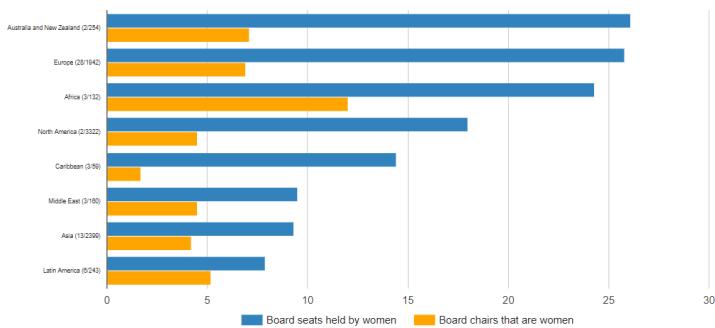
The "glass wall" phenomenon: women are more likely to be non-executive directors on supervisory boards rather than executives on management boards

As highlighted in the 2019 report of the International Labour Organization (ILO),<sup>6</sup> while companies have been making efforts to place more women on boards, the roles of women on boards have not been emphasized enough and the "glass wall" phenomenon, which restricts women to support management positions rather than strategic management functions, is evident still at the board level. This is particularly apparent in companies with a two-tier board structure. Some countries have a mandatory two-tier structure: a management board and a supervisory board. The executive directors on the management board decide about the company's objectives and implement the necessary measures, while the non-executive directors on the supervisory board monitor those decisions.<sup>7</sup> Evidence presented in the above-mentioned report of ILO reveals that women are more likely to be non-executive than executive directors and on supervisory rather than management boards in countries with two-tier board systems (for example, in France and Germany).

## Women as board chairs: gender equality remains elusive

While the share of female participation on corporate boards has increased, boards in all the regions remain largely chaired by men. As noted in the above-mentioned ILO report, in 2018, over 76% of companies reported having a man as the chair of the board (among surveyed companies that have a board), and, when further investigating the presence of women as board chairs of large listed companies in selected countries, the report noted that the share is generally less than 10%. Data compiled by the Deloitte Global Center for Corporate Governance in 2018, covering nearly 7,000 companies in 66 countries, show that the proportion of female board chairs is less than 10% in almost all regions. Even in Europe, where the majority of legislative quotas on female board members have been implemented, only 6.9% of board chairs are women (see figure V).<sup>8</sup>

**Figure V:** Female representation on boards by region: 2018



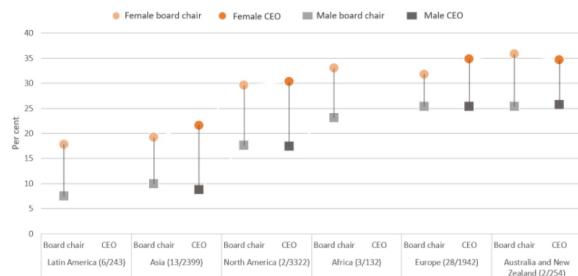
Source: Deloitte Global Center for Corporate Governance, Women in the boardroom: A global perspective, sixth edition, 2019.

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate: first the total number of countries and second the total number of companies (countries/companies) in the region (regional groupings are different from those used under the Sustainable Development Goals). Since the number of countries for selected regions is small, the results presented above should be interpreted with caution.

## Interrelationships between corporate leadership and board diversity

Data from 2018 show that, across regions, companies with female rather than male board chairs have a significantly higher number of women serving on boards. For example, in Asia, the percentage of women on boards was 19.2% when the chair was a woman compared to 9.9% when the chair was a man. The same phenomenon was found in companies with a female Chief Executive Officer. The largest difference was seen in North America, where 30.9% of board members were female when a woman was Chief Executive Officer, compared to only 17.4% when the Chief Executive Officer was a man (see figure VI).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, recent evidence showed that, when there is gender balance on boards, companies are more likely to have women in senior management and in top executive positions.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure VI:** Share of women serving on corporate boards, by sex of board chair and Chief Executive Officer: 2018



Source: Deloitte Global Center for Corporate Governance, Women in the boardroom: A global perspective, sixth edition, 2019.

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the total number of countries and companies in the region: (regional groupings are different from those used under the Sustainable Development Goals).

## About the data

### Coverage

Women's representation on the boards of the largest publicly listed companies in the 28 States members of the European Union;<sup>11</sup> large-cap and mid-cap companies across 23 developed market and 26 emerging market countries;<sup>12</sup> and companies in 66 countries and territories in regions worldwide.<sup>13</sup>

### Definitions

- Percentage of board seats held by women is calculated by dividing the number of board seats held by women by the total number of board seats.
- Percentage of women chairs of corporate boards is calculated by dividing the number of board chair positions held by women by the total number of board chair seats.

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## Footnotes

1. [30% Club: Growth through diversity.](#)
2. [Morgan Stanley Capital International, "Women on Boards: 2019 Progress Report".](#)
3. The Morgan Stanley Capital International "All Country World Index" is comprised of the MSCI World Index, which captures 23 developed economies, and the MSCI Emerging Market Index, which covers 26 emerging economies. Developed-market countries include: Australia; Austria; Belgium; Canada; Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; Hong Kong; China; Ireland; Israel; Italy; Japan; the Netherlands; New Zealand; Norway; Portugal; Singapore; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; the United Kingdom; and the United States. Emerging-market countries include: Argentina; Brazil; Chile; China; Colombia; Czechia; Egypt; Greece; Hungary; India; Indonesia; Malaysia; Mexico; Pakistan; Peru; the Philippines; Poland; Qatar; the Republic of Korea; the Russian Federation; Saudi Arabia; South Africa; Taiwan Province of China; Thailand; Turkey; and the United Arab Emirates.
4. [Deloitte Global Center for Corporate Governance, Women in the boardroom: A global perspective, sixth edition, 2019.](#)
5. [Morgan Stanley Capital International, "Women on Boards: 2019 Progress Report".](#)
6. [International Labour Organization \(ILO\), Women in business and management: The business case for change, Geneva, 2019.](#)
7. [University of Pennsylvania, Carey Law School, Block, D. and Gerstner, A.L., "One-Tier vs. Two-Tier Board Structure: A Comparison Between the United States and Germany United States and Germany"](#)
8. [Deloitte Global Center for Corporate Governance, Women in the boardroom: A global perspective, sixth edition, 2019.](#)
9. [Deloitte Global Center for Corporate Governance, Women in the boardroom: A global perspective, sixth edition, 2019. \( back to text\)](#)
10. [International Labour Organization \(ILO\), Women in business and management: The business case for change, Geneva, 2019.](#)
11. [European Union, 2019 Report on equality between women and men in the EU, Luxembourg, 2019.](#)
12. [Morgan Stanley Capital International, All Country World Index, 2019](#)
13. [Deloitte Global Center for Corporate Governance, Women in the boardroom: A global perspective, sixth edition, 2019: the 66 countries and territories profiled in the report are: Argentina; Australia; Austria; Belgium; Bermuda; Brazil; Canada; Cayman Islands; Chile; China; Colombia; Croatia; Czechia; Denmark; Egypt; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hong Kong; China; Hungary; Iceland; India; Indonesia; Ireland; Israel; Italy; Japan; Jordan; Kazakhstan; Kenya; Latvia; Lebanon; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Malaysia; Mexico; Morocco; the Netherlands; Nigeria; Norway; Peru; the Philippines; Poland; Portugal; Qatar; the Republic of Korea; Romania; the Russian Federation; Saudi Arabia; Singapore; Slovakia; South Africa; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Taiwan Province of China; Trinidad and Tobago; Turkey; Thailand; the United Arab Emirates; the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; the United States of America; Viet Nam; and New Zealand.](#)

## Women in national parliaments



## Key points

- In 2020, women are free under the law to participate in political activity in all countries worldwide, although significant obstacles to their effective access to parliament remain, including: gender stereotypes; unequal access to resources and education; unequal social and legal status; and violence and harassment perpetrated against women in politics and women aspirants to political office.
- Despite these challenges, there has been a continuous improvement in women's access to parliament, with slow but steady progress in representation over the past 25 years. From 1995 to 2020, the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women rose from 11.3% to 24.9%. Improvement appears to have slowed down, however, since 2015 – and currently, in 2020, women hold at least 50% of the seats in only four national parliaments.
- From the regional perspective, major milestones have been achieved in recent years in Australia and New Zealand, Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe and Northern America. However, Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand, continues to lag behind, with only 6% of parliamentary seats being held by women.
- To a large extent such progress is the result of the introduction of targeted policy and legal measures to increase women's representation in national parliaments. Of the 20 countries with the highest percentages of women in parliament, 16 apply some type of gender quota.
- Few women in politics reach the higher echelons of parliamentary hierarchies, particularly at the top levels as president or speaker of the house. Although the percentage of female presiding officers of parliament almost doubled, from 10.5% in 1995 to 20.5% in 2020, it is still too low to influence policymaking effectively.
- Women continue to be underrepresented in key decision-making positions in parliaments, with the exception of gender equality committees, 73% of which are chaired by women.

## Background

Women's representation in national parliaments and in key decision-making positions in parliament is an essential aspect of their participation in political and public life: their representation is a human right and a prerequisite for genuine democracy,<sup>1</sup> sustainable development and peace.<sup>2</sup> The inclusion of the perspectives and interests of women contributes to good governance and gender equality in society.

A stronger presence of women in parliament and in parliamentary leadership allows for the prominent placement of their concerns on political agendas, and for the introduction of fresh priorities through the adoption and implementation of policies and laws relevant to women's issues.<sup>3</sup> The full political participation of women requires that they occupy key positions of influence, as envisioned by the Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2012.<sup>4</sup>

## Current situation

**In 2020, women are free under the law to participate in political activity in all countries worldwide, although significant obstacles to their effective access to parliament remain.**

Women face discrimination within the family, the economy and society, as well as under the law. A male-dominated political culture, persisting gender stereotypes that confine women to the private sphere, unequal access to resources and education, unequal social and legal status and violence and harassment perpetrated against women in politics and as aspirants to political office need to be tackled in order to ensure that women have the same opportunities as men to access political office.<sup>5</sup>

As emphasized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, increasing attention has been paid to instances of sexism, harassment and

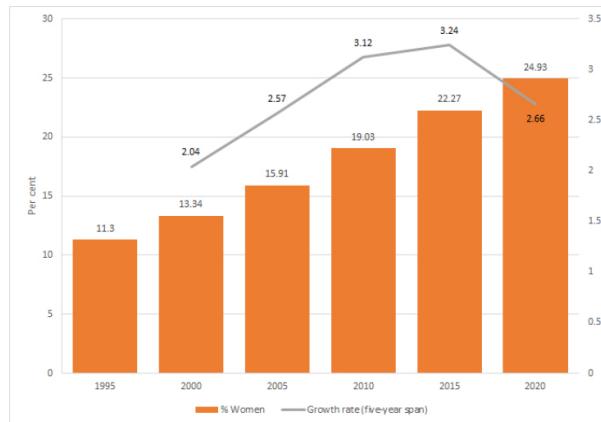
## World's Women 2020

gender-based violence against women parliamentarians that may dissuade other women from pursuing a political career and undermine the full participation of women elected to parliament in decision-making processes.<sup>6</sup>

**Despite these challenges, there has been a continuous improvement in women's access to parliament, with slow but steady progress in representation over the past 25 years.**

From 1995 to 2020, the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women rose from 11.3% to 24.9%, and up until 2015, progress in women's representation was continuous over each successive 5-year span, reaching a growth rate of 3.2% between 2010 and 2015. However, from 2015 and 2020, the rate of increase slowed down to 2.7% (see figure I).

**Figure I: Women in national parliaments, global average and growth rate: 1995 to 2020**



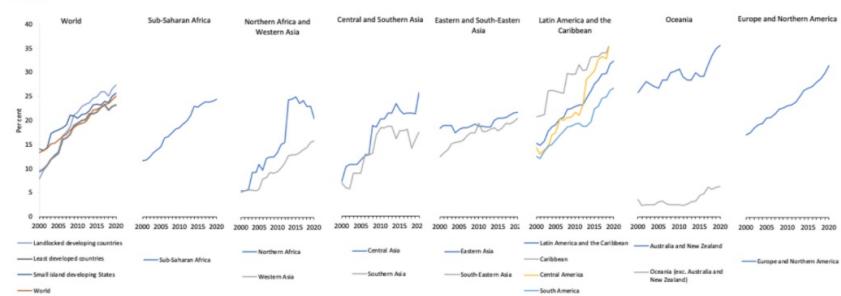
**Source:** Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data provided by IPU for single and lower houses.

**Note:** Data as of 1 February each year, except for 1995 (1 July).

**From the regional perspective, major milestones have been achieved in recent years in Australia and New Zealand, Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe and Northern America.** In 2017, Australia and New Zealand surpassed the 30% mark in the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women for the second time, after first reaching that threshold in 2010. In 2019, Latin America and the Caribbean became the second region to surpass the 30% mark, followed by the Europe and Northern America region in 2020.

In 2020, the share of women in national parliaments was the highest in Australia and New Zealand (35.1%), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (32.1%), Europe and Northern America (31%) and Central Asia (25.4%). The other regions were below the global average, significantly so in Western Asia (15.6%), Southern Asia (17.3%), South-Eastern Asia (20.4%) and Eastern Asia (21.6%). Moreover, although minor improvements have been noted over time, the lowest share of women in parliament, 6.2%, continues to be in the Oceania region, excluding Australia and New Zealand.

**Figure II: Proportion of seats held by women in single or lower houses of parliament, by region: 2000–2020**



**Source:** Compiled and calculated by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data obtained from the Sustainable Development Goals database (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs>) (last accessed 10 July 2020).

**To a large extent such progress is the result of the introduction of targeted policy and legal measures to increase women's representation in national parliaments.** Countries that have adopted special measures generally have higher numbers of women in parliament. While in 1995 only two countries had adopted legislation ensuring genderquotas<sup>7</sup> for parliamentary elections (Argentina and Nepal), by 2020 over 80 countries had done so.<sup>8</sup>

In 2019, overall, women won 25.8% of seats in 68 parliamentary chambers up for renewal in 55 countries.<sup>9</sup> In the 40 chambers that applied quotas – either legislated or voluntarily applied by political parties–women gained, on average, 30.3% of seats. In the remaining 28 chambers, which did not apply any form of quota, only 17.9% of seats were won by women.

Other key factors include policies to promote women's recruitment by political parties, strong women's movements, including women's youth groups, awareness-raising efforts and a more gender-sensitive political culture.

**Over the past 25 years, the top countries in terms of women's participation in parliament have become a much more diverse group.** In 1995, 8 out of the 10 top-ranking countries were located in Europe (the other two being in Africa and Latin America). In 2020, the group included five countries from the Latin America and the Caribbean region, two European countries, two countries from sub-Saharan Africa and one country from the Northern Africa and Western Asia region (see table 1).

In 2020, only four countries have thus far reached or surpassed the parity line of 50% representation by women in parliament: Rwanda (61.3%), Cuba (53.2%), Bolivia (Plurinational State of) (53.1%) and the United Arab Emirates (50.0%). Women's representation in eight countries followed closely: Mexico (48.2%), Nicaragua (47.3%), Sweden (47.0%), Grenada (46.7%), Andorra (46.4%), South Africa (46.3%), Finland (46.0%) and Costa Rica (45.6%).<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1:** Top 10 countries in terms of women's participation in single and lower houses of parliament: 1995 and 2020 (Percentage)

1995		2020	
Country		Country	
Sweden	40.4	Rwanda	61.3
Norway	39.4	Cuba	53.2
Denmark	33.5	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	53.1
Finland	33.5	United Arab Emirates	50.0
Netherlands	32.7	Mexico	48.2
Seychelles	27.3	Nicaragua	47.3
Austria	26.8	Sweden	47.0
Germany	26.3	Grenada	46.7
Iceland	25.4	Andorra	46.4
Argentina	25.3	South Africa	46.4

Source: IPU, Women in Parliament: 1995-2020.

**Few women in politics reach the higher echelons of parliamentary hierarchies, particularly at the top levels as president or speaker of the house.** Once elected, women parliamentarians need to hold positions of power and authority and participate in committee work if they are to influence policy direction. They also need to be positive role models for other women, work to change parliamentary procedures and, ultimately, support women's rights and pursue gender equality (see table 2).

**Table 2:** Countries with a woman presiding over the lower or single house of parliament or upper house or senate: as at 1 January 2020

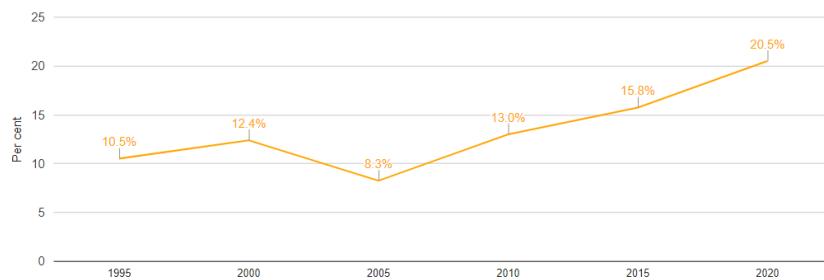
Sub-Saharan Africa		
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Equatorial Guinea	Eswatini
Ethiopia	Gabon	Lesotho
Liberia	Madagascar	Malawi
Mozambique	Republic of the Gambia	Rwanda
South Africa	Suriname	Togo
Uganda	Zimbabwe	
Northern Africa and Western Asia		
Bahrain		
Central and Southern Asia		
Bangladesh	Kazakhstan	Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan		
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia		
Indonesia	Japan	Lao People's Democratic Republic
Viet Nam		
Latin America and the Caribbean		
Antigua and Barbuda	Argentina	Bahamas
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Trinidad and Tobago (2 chambers)	Uruguay (2 chambers)
Europe and Northern America		
Andorra	Belarus	Belgium
Belize	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bulgaria
Dominica	Italy	Latvia
Mexico (2 chambers)	Netherlands	Norway
Poland	Republic of Moldova	Russian Federation
Saint Lucia	San Marino	Serbia
Spain (2 chambers)	Switzerland	United States of America

**Source:** IPU and UN-Women, "Women in Politics: 2020".

**Note:** Out of a total of 271 parliamentary chambers, two chambers have two additional speakers and three chambers have one additional speaker, for a total of 278 speakers.

Between 1995 and 2020, the percentage of female presiding officers of parliament almost doubled, from 10.5% to 20.5%, although this level of representation is still too low to influence policy-making effectively (figure III).

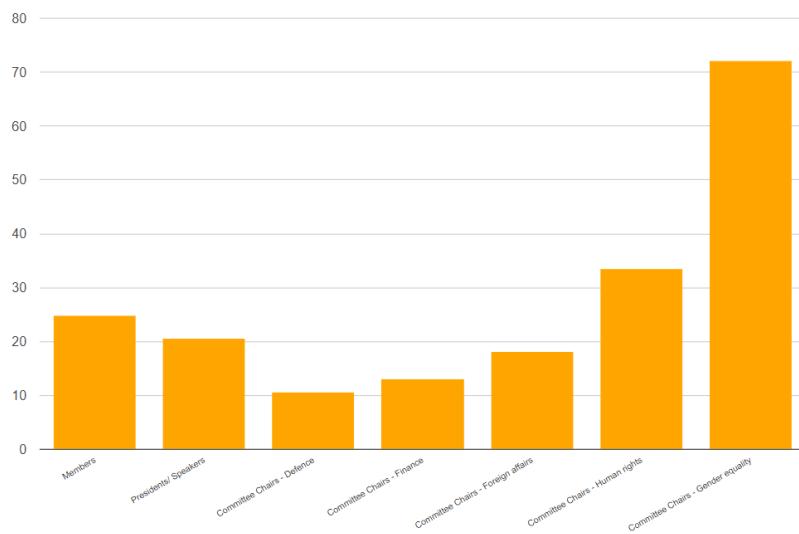
**Figure III:** Progress in the percentage of women among presiding officers in parliament: 1995 to 2020



**Source:** IPU data file.

**Women are acutely underrepresented in key decision-making positions in parliaments in relation to their overall share of nearly 25% of parliamentary seats.** Available data for 2020 shows a contrasting picture of women's leadership of parliamentary committees. Women currently chair 26% of foreign affairs, defence, finance, human rights and gender equality committees combined, but their share varies significantly by committee type, from 73% of gender equality committees to just over 10% of defence committees. Data for the reporting period show that women chair approximately 33% of human rights committees, 20% of foreign affairs committees and 13% of finance committees (see figure IV).

**Figure IV:** Percentage of women occupying key decision-making positions in parliament: as at 1 January 2020



**Source:** Compiled and calculated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, based on data provided by IPU.

**Note:** Data on members, presidents, speakers and committee chairs cover both upper and lower houses

## Legislative environment

Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognizes "the right and opportunity, without distinction of any kind such as (♦) sex (♦) to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives".

Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provides that "States Parties shall (♦) ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government."

## Countries in focus

Over the last 25-year span, from 1995 to 2020, the most significant progress in the achievement of women's equal representation in parliament has been made in Rwanda (+ 57%), the United Arab Emirates (+50%), Andorra (+ 42.8%) and the Plurinational State of Bolivia (+42.3%), respectively, in their lower or single houses. In 1995, the top country (Sweden) had 40% of seats held by women in parliament. In 2020, in the top country (Rwanda), over 60% of seats in the lower house are held by women.

## About the data

### Coverage

**Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.5.1a** covers the single chamber in unicameral parliaments and the lower chamber in bicameral parliaments. It does not cover the upper chamber of bicameral parliaments. Data on the proportion of seats held by women and of female speakers/presiding officers of parliament are available for the period 1995–2020.

### Availability

Data on female chairs of parliamentary committees is only available for 2020.

As at 1 January 2020, data on the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women were available for 191 countries; data on female presiding officers were available for 192 countries; and data on female chairs of parliamentary committees in the above five areas were available for 127 countries.

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

### Definitions

- Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments is calculated as the total number of seats occupied by women divided by the total number of seats in parliament. Seats refer to the number of members of parliament (Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.5.1a).
- Proportion of women in key decision-making positions in national parliaments, all chambers combined, is calculated as the total number of positions held by women as presiding officers/speakers and chairs of parliamentary committees in the following five areas: foreign affairs, defence, finance, gender equality, and human rights. (Sustainable Development Goal indicator 16.7.1a)

## References

- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 2008, Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments ([link](#)).
- IPU, 2010, Is Parliament Open to Women? ([link](#)).
- IPU, 2011, Gender-Sensitive Parliaments. A Global Review of Good Practice ([link](#)).

## Sustainable Development Goals metadata

- [Indicator 5.5.1a](#) [Indicator 16.7.1a](#)

## Web addresses

- <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>
- <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages>
- <https://data.ipu.org/speakers>
- <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/database>

## Footnotes

1. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 1997, Universal Declaration on Democracy, article 4.
2. Mary Caprioli, "Gendered Conflict", Journal of Peace Research, vol. 37, Issue. 1 (2000).
3. Astghik Mavisakalyan and Yashar Tarverdi, "Gender and climate change: Do female parliamentarians make difference?", European Journal of Political Economy, vol. 56 (2019).
4. IPU, 2012, Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments.
5. IPU, 2016, Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament, Issues brief; and IPU, 2019, Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament.
6. IPU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2018, "Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe", Issues Brief.
7. Gender quotas, which aim to reverse discrimination in law and practice and to level the playing field for women in politics, are numerical targets that stipulate the number or percentage of women that must be included in a candidate list or the number of seats to be allocated to women in a legislature. Gender quotas may be mandated in the constitution, stipulated in national legislation or formulated in a political party statute.
8. IPU, Women in Parliament: 1990–2020—25 years in review.
9. Ibid., data includes parliamentary chambers in both lower and upper houses.
10. IPU and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) 2020, "Women in Politics: 2020".

## Women in politics and decision-making positions in Africa [ECA]



## Key points

- The proportion of seats held by women in parliaments in Africa varies across subregions: Southern Africa (35.5%) and Eastern Africa (30.9%) are the two subregions with representation higher than the 30% minimum target recommended in the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2020, in 12 countries in Africa at least 30% of parliamentarians were women in the lower houses of parliament. African Union member States such as Rwanda, Namibia, South Africa and Senegal are among the countries in the world with the highest level of women's representation in their parliaments. Rwanda occupies the first position globally as a country with the highest proportion of women in parliament (61%).
- Countries in Africa that have surpassed the 30% minimum target in representation of women in parliaments have adopted gender quotas.
- Based on data for 33 African countries, the quota systems used include: legislated candidate quotas (39%); reserved seats (39%); and voluntary political party quotas (24%).
- The proportion of women among government ministers in countries in Africa is on the rise. In Ethiopia, women's political representation in the executive branch increased from 6% of women ministers in 2005 to 48% in 2018. Ethiopia also elected its first female president in 2018.
- Overall, the level of women's representation in managerial level positions remains low in Africa.
- Gender stereotypes that view women as having policy expertise in education, gender, health care and social affairs means that women managers are, in general, concentrated in those areas rather than in defence, foreign policy or economics, where men predominate.

## Background

Women's representation in political and public life, especially in high visibility and high-profile positions of power, ensures that a gendered perspective is embraced at the highest levels of decision-making. The enhanced representation of women in positions of authority promotes their rights, voice and agency and is critical for achieving gender equality.

The main obstacles preventing women from engaging in political life are structural barriers and discriminatory attitudes and practices, which reinforce each other and support patriarchal values and stereotypes that promote a negative view of women's roles in all areas of decision-making, including female political leadership; such attitudes may also contribute to the spread of violence against women in the political arena. Furthermore, in some countries unequal laws and institutions and capacity gaps continue to restrict women's ability to run for office. Because of these barriers, women are less likely than men to have the requisite education, opportunities, contacts and resources to attain political power and become effective leaders.

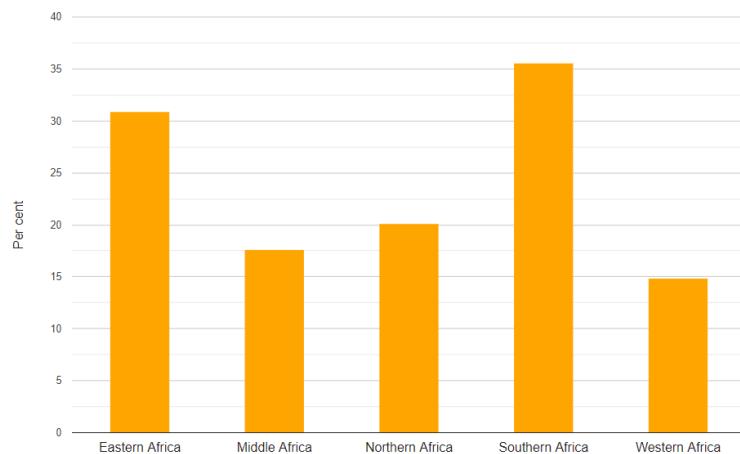
## Women in national parliaments: gender gaps in national parliaments remain significant worldwide despite reductions observed over the period 2000–2020

There has been a steady improvement in women's [representation in parliaments worldwide](#), from 13.3% in 2000 to 24.9% in 2020. Women's representation in parliaments has also increased since 2000 in sub-Saharan Africa (from 11.5% to 23.9%) and in North Africa and Western Asia (from 5.3% to 18.7%).

## In countries in Africa, women's representation in parliaments varies by subregion

In 2020, levels of women's representation in parliaments in Africa differ widely between subregions (see figure I). Southern Africa has the highest representation, with 35.5% of parliamentary seats held by women, followed by Eastern Africa, with women's representation at 30.9%. In Central, Western and Northern Africa, women's representation in parliament is comparatively lower, on average, and is below the 30% minimum threshold recommended in the Beijing Platform for Action.

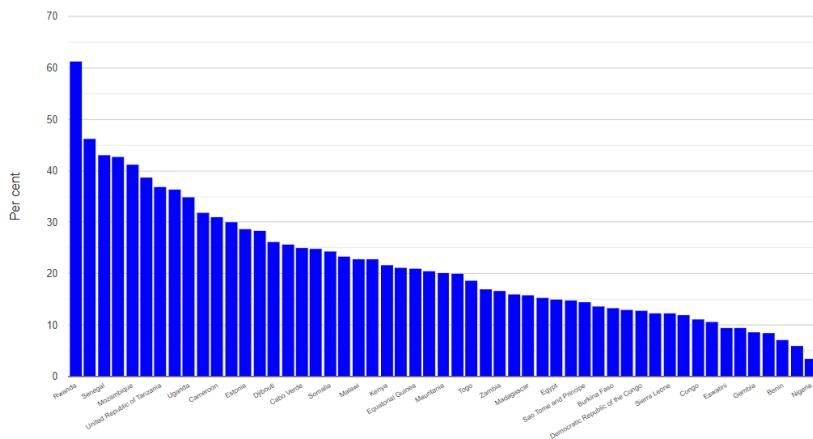
**Figure I:** Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments in Africa by subregion: 2020  
(Percentage)



**Source:** UNDESA, Statistics Division, Global SDG Indicators Database (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>).

Women's representation in parliaments in Africa varies between countries: in 2020, 12 African countries had at least 30% of women parliamentarians in the lower houses of parliament

An African Union report issued in 2019 on the "Status of Gender and Development in Africa"<sup>2</sup> shows that countries have made considerable progress in implementing commitments towards gender equality and women's empowerment. Member States of the African Union, including Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa, are among the countries in the world with the highest levels of women's representation in parliament. As of 2020, Rwanda has the highest proportion of women in parliament (61%) worldwide, and globally Rwanda has had the highest number of women in its national assembly for more than a decade (with a proportion of 63.8% during the period 2013–2016 and 61.3% in 2020). Countries such as Namibia, Senegal and South Africa have also performed well in 2020, with at least 42% of women in their national parliaments (see figure II).

**Figure II:** Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments in Africa: 2020 (Percentage)

Source: UNDESA, Statistics Division, Global SDG Indicators Database (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>).

## Gender quotas contribute to a higher proportion of women in national parliaments

Affirmative action measures to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment, including **quotas**, have contributed to progress in women's representation in parliaments in Africa. Countries that have reached or surpassed the 30% minimum target in representation of women in parliament have all adopted gender quotas: Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Zimbabwe, all countries with more than 30% of parliamentary seats held by women, have quotas and proportional representation as part of their electoral systems.<sup>3</sup>

The quota system differs from one country to another. The main systems used in the continent include legislated candidate quotas, reserved seats and voluntary political party quotas. An assessment made by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)<sup>4</sup> in 33 African countries shows that approximately 40% adopted legislated candidate quota, about 40% reserved seats and just over 24% adopted voluntary political party quotas.

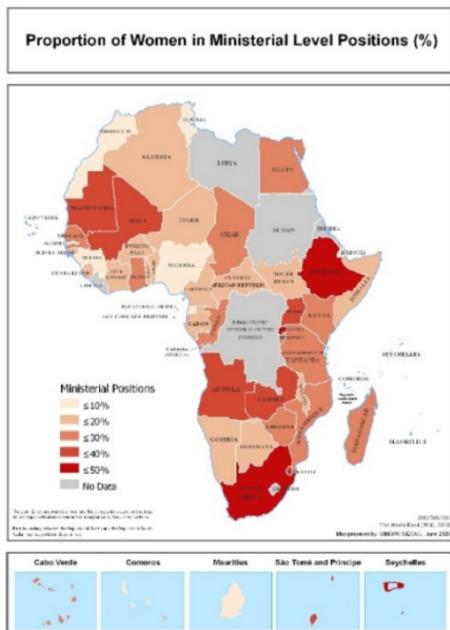
Rwanda, for example, has statutory provisions reserving 30% of seats for women in its bicameral legislature, while South Africa's municipal structures require that political parties ensure "that 50% of the candidates on the party list are women" and that "women must be fairly represented in a constituency committee." However, having a gender quota is no guarantee of an increase in the representation of women in parliaments. Other conditions are necessary. In the Niger, after the adoption of a quota system to ensure the representation of women in elected offices, the Government and public administration, there was a significant increase in the presence of women in parliament (from 1.2% in 1999 to 17% in the 2016 elections); this was not the case, however, in terms of women's representation in local governance. Women's representation in local governing bodies remains below the quotas set by law (25% for the cabinet and senior positions in the public service and 15% for both sexes in parliament for legislative and local elections).<sup>5</sup>

## The proportion of African women among ministers is on the rise

Overall, women's representation as cabinet ministers has increased in Africa over the period 2005–2018. In 2018, the share of **women in ministerial positions** reached or exceeded 30% in the following countries: Rwanda (52%), South Africa (49%), Ethiopia (48%), Seychelles (46%), Angola (34%), Sao Tome and Principe (33%), Uganda (33.3%), Zambia (30%), Mali (34%), Eswatini (32%) and Mauritania (32%) (see figure III). The country with the lowest share of women in ministerial positions is Morocco (6%). Other countries with less than 10% of women cabinet ministers were Equatorial Guinea (7%) and Nigeria (8%). There is a major increase

in women's political representation in the executive branch of Government in Ethiopia, from 6% of women ministers in 2005 to 48% in 2018, and the country elected its first female president in 2018.

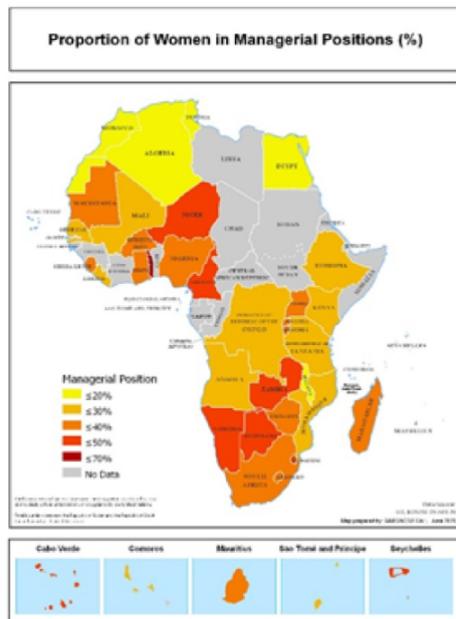
**Figure III:** Proportion of women in ministerial level positions, 2005-2018 (latest available)



Source: World Bank. Data Catalog. Proportion of Women in Ministerial Level Positions (updated September 2020) ([https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/search?search\\_api\\_views\\_fulltext\\_op=AND&query=Proportion+of+women+in+ministerial+level+positions+\(&nid=&sort\\_by=search\\_api\\_relevance&sort\\_order=DESC](https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/search?search_api_views_fulltext_op=AND&query=Proportion+of+women+in+ministerial+level+positions+(&nid=&sort_by=search_api_relevance&sort_order=DESC)).

## Women's representation in managerial positions remains low in countries in Africa

The persistence of data gaps on women's representation in **managerial positions** in Africa makes it difficult to assess progress under this indicator. A review of the situation in Member States during the period 2014–2019 shows that, apart from Togo, where the proportion of women in managerial positions was 70% in 2017, women's representation remains generally low in most countries across Africa (see figure IV). Increased representation of women has been observed, however, in some countries, including Cameroon (49.3% in 2014), the Niger (49.3% in 2017), Seychelles (47.8% in 2018), Namibia (43.6% in 2018), Cape Verde (43.4% in 2018), Eswatini (43.4% in 2016) and Zambia (40.5 in 2018). The gender gap in women's representation is affected by cultural and societal factors, including illiteracy, the burden of unpaid care work on women and discriminatory attitudes and practices that reinforce patriarchal notions about the undesirability of having women in leadership roles.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, gender stereotypes that view women as having policy expertise in fields such as education, gender, health care and social affairs means that women managers are, in general, concentrated in those areas and not in defence, foreign policy and economics where men predominate in managerial roles.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure IV:** Proportion of women in managerial positions, 2014-2019 (latest available)

## Sources

- Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Measuring Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment in Africa: African Gender and Development Index 2018 Regional Synthesis Report III, 2018, Addis Ababa, 2018
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Gender Quotas Database
- UNDESA, Statistics Division, Global SDG Indicators Database
- World Bank, Data Catalog, Proportion of Women in Ministerial Level Positions (updated September 2020)

## About the data

### Definitions

- **Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament:** Calculated as the total number of seats occupied by women divided by the total number of seats. (SDG indicator 5.5.1a). Seats refer to the number of parliamentary mandates, also known as the number of members of parliament. While seats are usually won by members in general parliamentary elections, they may also be filled by nomination, appointment, indirect election, rotation of members and through by-election.
- **Proportion of women in managerial positions:** Percentage of women in management positions as a measure of total employment in management. Managerial positions correspond to major group 1 of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88 or ISCO-08).<sup>8</sup> (SDG indicator 5.5.2)

### Availability

- **Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament:** Time-series data are available for all countries in Africa: information is available for all countries where a national legislature exists and therefore does not include parliaments that have been dissolved or suspended for an indefinite period.
- **Proportion of women in managerial positions:** Data as of 2000 are available in the Global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicators Database;<sup>9</sup> time-series data going back several decades are available through ILOSTAT, the database of the Department of Statistics of the International Labour Organization (ILO).<sup>10</sup>

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Footnotes

1. Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II .
2. African Union, "Status of Gender and Development in Africa": the report was prepared and presented to the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government in February 2020, by Nana Akufo-Addo, President of Ghana and the African Union Leader on Gender and Development Issues in Africa .
3. Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Measuring Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment in Africa: African Gender and Development Index 2018 Regional Synthesis Report III, 2018, Addis Ababa, 2018 .
4. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Gender Quotas Database.
5. Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Measuring Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment in Africa: African Gender and Development Index 2018 Regional Synthesis Report III, 2018, Addis Ababa, 2018 .
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. International Labour Organization, International Standard Classification of Occupations .
9. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Statistics Division, Global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicators Database .
10. ILO, Department of Statistics (ILOSTAT) database .

## Women in local government [UN Women]



## Background

### **Women's access to local government positions is a right and a necessary condition for ensuring the inclusion of women's interests and perspectives in local decision-making**

Women's rights to political participation on equal terms with men and to shared power between women and men in decision-making bodies at all levels of government have been recognized in international normative frameworks<sup>1</sup> and emphasized in the Beijing Platform for Action.<sup>2</sup>

While the majority of research and global data collection on women's representation in decision-making positions has been focused on national parliaments, the inclusion of women in local governments positions in the SDG monitoring framework acknowledges the importance of a whole-of-government approach to sustainable development and of women's voices and leadership at the local as well as the national levels of government.

Women in local government decision-making positions represent a much more numerous and diverse group, and research shows that they redefine local priorities by being more inclusive,<sup>3</sup> prioritizing family-friendly policies<sup>4</sup> and, in some contexts, contributing to increased gender equality in terms of policymaking on income, employment and parental leave.<sup>5</sup>

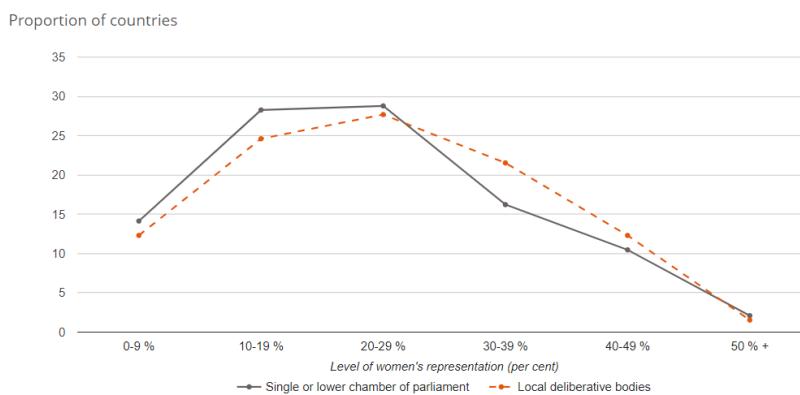
## Current situation

### **Women's representation in local deliberative bodies is higher than in national parliaments, but still not on equal terms with men**

As at 1 January 2020, as shown in the data available for 133 countries and areas worldwide, women held 36% of elected seats in local deliberative bodies. While women's representation at the local level was higher than in national parliaments (25%),<sup>6</sup> it was not yet close to parity.

Women's representation in local deliberative bodies was at 40% or above in only a minority of countries (15%). In the majority of countries (53%), levels of women's representation were reported at levels between 10% and 30%, and in 12% of countries women's representation was less than 10%, a distribution similar to that observed for women's representation in national parliaments (see figure I).

**Figure I:** Proportion of countries by level of women's representation in local deliberative bodies and parliaments: as at 1 January 2020



**Source:** UN-Women, data on women's representation in parliament is based on, "Women in National Parliaments", the statistical archive of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (<http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm>).

### **Women's representation in local deliberative bodies varies widely across and within regions**

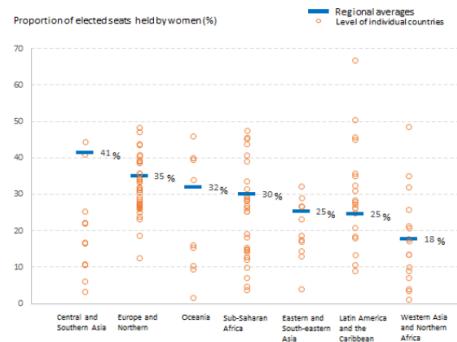
## World's Women 2020

Women's representation is highest in countries in the Central and Southern Asia (41%) and Europe and Northern America (35%) regions, driven, in particular, by high levels of women's representation in countries with large numbers of councillors, such as France and India, while lowest in countries in the Northern Africa and Western Asia (18%) region (see figure II).

Nevertheless, there are countries with gender-balanced local deliberative bodies in almost all regions. Women's representation is over 40%, for example, in: Antigua and Barbuda (67%) and Bolivia (Plurinational State of) (50%) in Latin America and the Caribbean; Belarus (48%) and Iceland (47%) in Europe; Uganda (46%) in Africa; New Caledonia (46%) in Oceania; and India (44%) in Central and Southern Asia.

**Figure II:** Proportion of elected seats held by women in local deliberative bodies by region and country:  
as at 1 January 2020

Proportion of countries



Source: UN-Women

Note: Each circle represents a country; regional averages (weighted by number of local government members) are represented with a blue line.

## High levels of women's representation have been reached, in the majority of cases, by means of legislated quotas

The use of legislated gender quotas has increased women's representation in local governments, particularly in developing regions. Legislated gender quotas are temporary special measures provided for in national legal frameworks for the purpose of correcting historical trends in numerical gender imbalance and fast tracking the increased representation of women.

Worldwide, countries with legislated quotas have higher levels of women's representation in local government (by 7% on average) compared to those without quotas.<sup>7</sup> Increases resulting from the adoption of quotas are higher in countries in developing regions (11%), particularly in countries in sub-Saharan Africa (16%) and Northern Africa and Western Asia (13%).

## About the data

### Coverage

The indicator uses official data on elections results produced by national electoral management bodies and reported to the United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) by national statistical offices. As at 1 January 2020, data were available for 133 countries and areas, including three quarters of all countries with elected local deliberative bodies.<sup>8</sup>

### Definitions

- Proportion of women in local government is measured as the percentage of elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local governments (Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, indicator 5.5.1(b))<sup>9</sup>. The indicator complements SDG indicator 5.5.1(a) on women's representation in national legislative bodies (specifically in the single or lower chambers of parliaments) by focusing on women's representation among the millions of members of local deliberative bodies with decision-making power around the world.
- Local government represents a decentralization of legislative, executive and administrative powers from the national to local levels, which enables improved governance on local matters and the more direct and inclusive participation of different groups of the population in local decision-making.

## Related stories and further reading

- [Women in national parliaments](#)
- [Women in national parliaments and local governments in Mexico](#)
- [Women in politics and decision-making positions in Africa](#)
- See also: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "Women in local government: A data brief" (UN-Women policy brief series (forthcoming)).

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## Footnotes

1. Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1953), General Assembly resolution 640 (VII), art. II and III; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), General Assembly resolution 2200 (XXI), art.2 and 25; and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), General Assembly resolution 34/180, art. 3 and 7.
2. [Beijing Platform for Action, strategic objectives G.1 and G.2](#).
3. Kathlene, L., "Power and influence in state legislative policy-making: The interaction of gender and position in committee hearing debates", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 88, No. 3, 1994; Tilly, L.A. and Gurin, P. (eds.), *Women, Politics and Change*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1992; Weikart, L.A., Chen, G., Williams, D.W. and Hromic, H., "The Democratic Sex: Gender Differences and the Exercise of Power", *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, vol. 28, Issue 1, 2006..
4. Chattopadhyay, R. and Duflo, E., "Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India", *Econometrica*, vol. 72, No.5, 2004; Bratton, K. and Ray, L., "Descriptive Representation, Policy Outcomes, and Municipal Day-Care coverage in Norway", *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 46, No.2, 2002; Holman, M. R., "Sex and the city: Female leaders and spending on social welfare programs in U.S. municipalities", *Journal of Urban Affairs*, vol. 36, Issue 4, 2013; Smith, A., "Cities Where Women Rule: Female Political Incorporation and the Allocation of Community Development Block Grant Funding", *Politics & Gender*, vol. 10, Issue 3, 2014; Svaleryd, H., "Women's representation and public spending", *European Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 25, Issue 2, 2009; Funk, K.D. and Philips, A.Q., "Representative Budgeting: Women Mayors and the Composition of Spending in Local Governments", *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 72, Issue 1, 2018.
5. Wengnerud, L. and Sundell, A., "Do Politics Matter? Women in Swedish Local Elected Assemblies 1970–2010 and Gender Equality in Outcomes", *European Political Science Review*, vol. 4, Issue 1, 2012.
6. [Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in National Parliaments", statistical archive](#).
7. Unweighted averages.
8. [Metadata on indicator 5.5.1 \(b\)](#).
9. [United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(UNDESA\), Statistics Division, "Global SDG Indicators Database"](#).