

Women and men in decision-making

A question of balance



Employment & social affairs



The democratic deficit

Equality between women and men is a founding principle of the EU. A balanced participation by women and men in society's major political and economic decisions is vital to developing real democracy.

Although progress has been made in the last decade, too few women hold key positions in decision-making, despite the high number that have entered the jobs market in the last 20 years.

Their under-representation – and men's over-representation – in the key jobs undermines society's democratic values.

The current unequal share perpetuates attitudes and practices that do not always embrace women's concerns, needs and aspirations.

Wasting women's potential

Women should have the same rights as their male colleagues to advance in work according to their qualifications and abilities.

Although more women are now entering high-level professional and managerial jobs, men are still twice as likely to be in such positions and over three times as likely to be senior managers.

What keeps women out of decision-making?

There are many factors which keep the majority of women at the edge of decision-making. Stereotypes and discrimination, biased recruitment and promotion systems, and gender segregation in work and in education are just some of them.

And then, there is the lopsided division of work and family responsibilities. Today, women remain the main carers. Whether in paid jobs or not, women still do the majority of the work in the home and for the family. This has an impact on their work patterns and eventually their life choices.

Addressing the imbalance

In 1996, EU governments adopted a recommendation on the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making recognising the problem and calling on Member States to take measures to tackle the issue (recommendation 96/694, OJ L 319, 10.12.1996).

Following up on the recommendation, a European Commission report published in 2000 found that government policies implemented since 1996 had had a positive effect but that there was still a long way to go.

The Commission continues to monitor progress in EU Member States outlining some of its findings in its annual reports on equality between women and men.

EU targets set

In February 1999, the EU set a 40% target for the fellowships awarded under its Research and Development programme to promote more women in science and especially in European scientific research.

A year later, in 2000, it set another target - at least 40% of each sex in each of its committees and expert groups (Commission decision 2000/407, OJ L 154, 27.6.2000).

Opening the door

Many companies are taking a fresh look at how they run their businesses and their board rooms. In an increasingly competitive climate, they need to attract the best person for the job and this person could be a woman.

Companies are also looking to attract a wider client base. Women and men often go through different life experiences and follow different educational patterns. Visibly taking on board these differences can be a valuable asset highlighting that their business welcomes and can cater for varied client needs.

Involving men

Any change in the position of women at work affects men. To achieve a balance in decision-making, men must be mobilised and involved.

To make it easier for women to take on jobs with higher responsibilities, more men will have to share more fairly domestic and household ones.

Governments, institutions and companies can encourage this shift by reassessing their internal culture and the message it gives to their staff and to the outside world on the role of women and men.

The counting game

Women at the top are few and far between, but they can be counted. The Commission has done so in a European database launched in 2004. Covering 30 countries, the database is an important source of information for policy-makers, researchers, students and all those interested in knowing the state of play in decision-making. The following pages describe how the database works and what it offers.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/women_men_stats/index_en.htm

A database with facts and figures

This database on decision-making maps progress and creates awareness about the unequal position of women and men in power.

The database defines a decision-making position as one “where it is possible to take or influence a decision” at organisational or hierarchical level.

It gives the numbers and percentage of women and men in decision-making positions in:

- The world of politics, covering the elected members of the European Parliament, regional councils and national parliaments and members of regional and national governments and the European Commission.
- Public administrations and the judiciary covering staff working in European institutions, national administrations and the courts.
- Social and economic society including the top 50 publicly quoted companies, financial institutions including central banks, and the European social partner organisations.

The database also includes an extensive glossary which explains words like ‘indicators’ – important to measure progress – persons in employment, regional government and even junior ministers. It also guides the user through the array of European and national organisations for which data is provided.

How data is collected and updated

Independent experts collect the data using a web survey and official sources of information. They update the data on decision-making in the political field every three months and all other data annually.

The countries covered

The database covers the 25 EU Member States as well as Bulgaria, Romania, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. From 2006, it will also include data from Turkey.

Measuring progress

EU governments agreed in 1995 to annually monitor their country’s progress on the theme of women in power and decision-making – one of the 12 critical areas of the UN Beijing Platform for Action adopted the same year.

Four years later, in 1999, Member States approved a set of indicators to mark progress on women and decision-making. The database holds information for six of these indicators focusing on women in politics, national and European administrations and the judiciary.

Some of the data

Governments, the European Commission and their staff

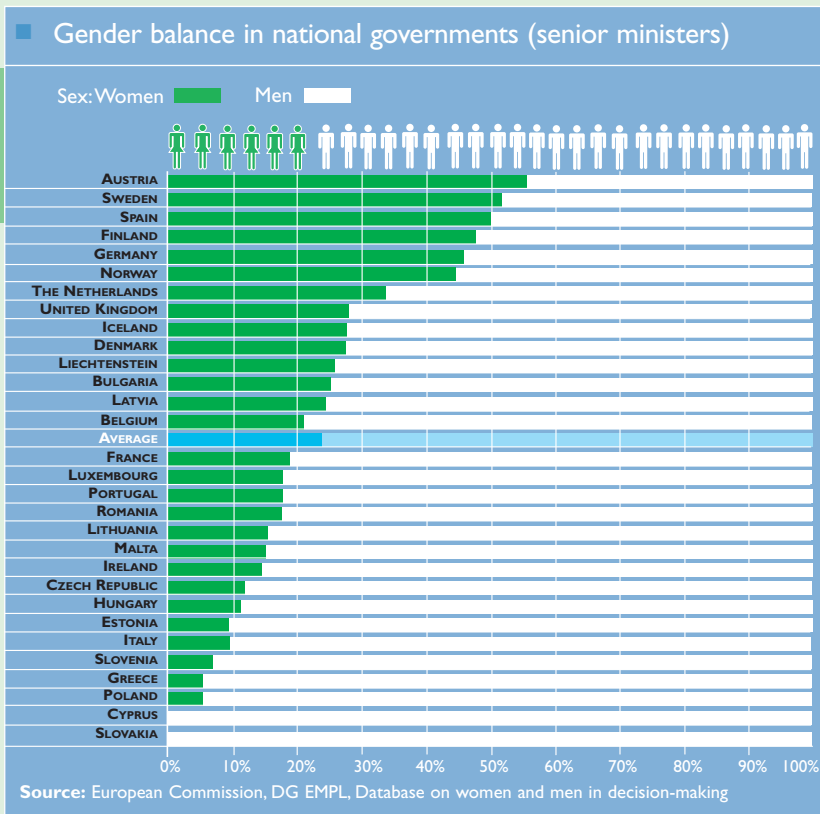
In March 2005, only Finland, Ireland and Latvia had a woman as president, and none of the countries included in the database had a female prime minister.

In national governments, 23% of senior ministers and 22% of junior ministers in the 30 countries included in the database were women.

For the first time, seven of the 24 European Commissioners who took office in November 2004 were women.

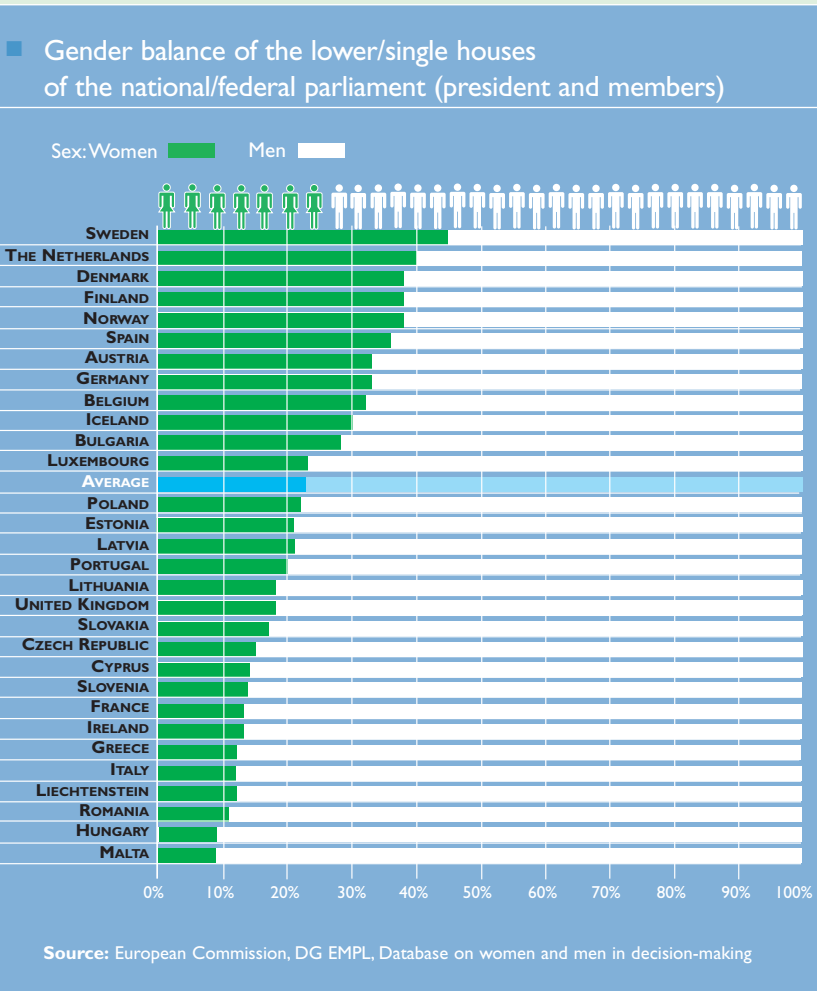
As for the staff of the European Commission and national administrations, there is a clear trend of more women taking up high ranking posts.

In the national administrations, on average, women held 24% of the high ranking jobs and 16% of the top jobs in 2004.



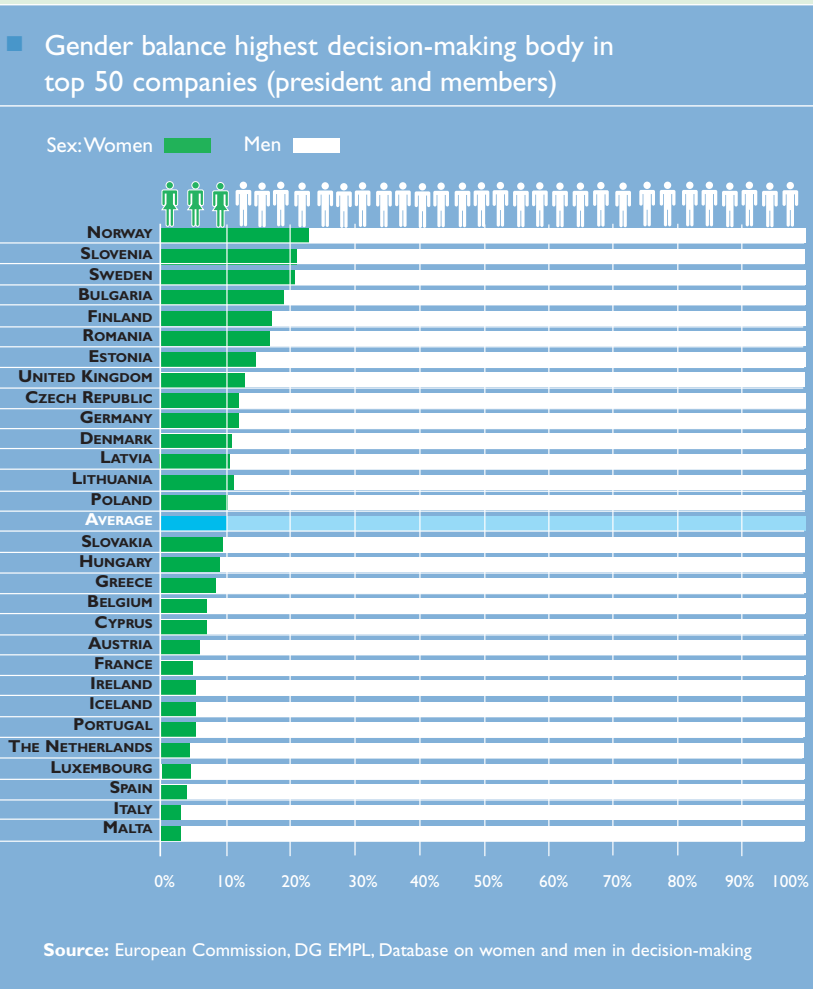
Women and men in the European and national Parliaments

In March 2005, 30% of the 732 European Parliament members and, on average, 23% of all national Parliamentarians were women.



Women and men in the top 50 publicly quoted companies

Women are almost invisible in the top 50 publicly quoted companies. On average, only 3% of the presidents of these key companies are women and 10% of the board members.



The database also shows:

- In 2004, one country had a woman as the president of its Supreme Court. In the other 29 countries for which data is collected, the president was a man. On average, 26% of Supreme Court judges were women and 74% were men.
- In the case of the national central banks, on average, 17% of board members were women and 83% were men.
- 8% of the 56 European employer and trade union organisations covered in the database had a woman head in 2004.
- In 2004, 39% of European NGO heads were women. They also held 41% of the highest decision-making posts.

How you can access the data

Access the women and men in decision-making database via DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities' website on the Europa server.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/women_men_stats/index_en.htm

Contact the European Commission's Equality between Women and Men Unit

European Commission
Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
Unit Equality between Women and Men
B-1049 Brussels, Belgium

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