



Women and men in decision-making 2007

Analysis of the situation and trends



European Commission

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European Commission

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
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Foreword

Gender equality is a fundamental right, a common value of the EU, and a necessary condition for achieving the EU's objectives of growth, employment and social cohesion. Equal participation of women and men in decision-making symbolises the level of political maturity of societies.

The report *Women and men in decision-making 2007 – analysis of the situation and trends* contributes to the implementation of the Commission's Roadmap for Gender Equality (2006-2010), which has amongst its priorities promoting equal participation of women and men in decision-making. The report aims to raise awareness of the situation. The majority of the data used in the report comes from the database on women and men in decision-making, which is managed and regularly updated by the European Commission.

The report shows that even if the European Union's efforts to increase women's participation in decision-making have been consistent and certain progress has been achieved, women are still under-represented in all spheres of power in most Member States and in the EU Institutions.

This remains a major challenge for our democracies. If we believe in the values of democracy based on the representation and participation of citizens, then we cannot leave half of the population outside the structures of power. Gender equality is also an asset for business. Our economies must reap the potential of all human talent at our disposal if we are to be competitive in the face of globalisation. We must break the glass ceiling once and for all.

As progress in this field has been too slow, a more strategic action involving all stakeholders is needed to improve the situation.

For its part, the European Commission will continue to support Member States' actions, in particular by collecting, analysing and disseminating comparable data on the persistent gender gaps, and by promoting networking between all stakeholders and the exchange of experiences and good practices at European level.

I hope this report will contribute to maintaining this issue high on the political agenda and will inspire all decision-makers to accelerate progress towards gender balance in decision-making.

Vladimír Špidla
*Member of the European Commission
for Employment, Social Affairs
and Equal Opportunities*

Executive summary

As we leave behind 2007, the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All and the 50th anniversary of gender equality policy, the European Commission is pleased to present the report *Women and men in decision-making 2007; analysis of the situation and trends*.

In 2006, the Roadmap for equality between men and women¹ identified six priority areas² for EU action on gender equality over a five year period through to 2010. Alongside active policy measures, one of the actions identified for the Commission was to support activities to raise awareness of equality issues in the decision-making process and promote research based on comparable European data.

This report represents a contribution towards that action and presents an assessment of the current situation of men and women in decision-making across Europe and developments over recent years. There is a particular focus on indicators introduced by the Council of the European Union in 1999 and 2003 as a follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, which was adopted by 189 states and is considered as a milestone for the enforcement of women's rights across the world.

The majority of data used in the report are taken from the Commission's database on women and men in decision-making³, which covers senior positions within the EU institutions, the 27 EU Member States, EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and two candidate countries (Turkey and Croatia). It 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 report presents facts and figures covering decision-making in three main areas: politics, economy and public service. The 2007 data were collected during the fourth quarter of the year but may not always reflect the very latest changes in personnel. Some of the headline figures are:

National parliaments

- At the time the Beijing Platform for Action was launched in 1995, women accounted for only just over 10% of members of parliament worldwide. Since that time, there has been a steady, if slow, improvement so that by July 2007 women accounted for over 17% of members of national parliaments globally.
- The European Union performs better than average with the proportion of women members of parliament (single/lower house) rising from 16% in 1997 to 24% in 2007, though this is still well below the so-called critical mass of 30%, deemed to be the minimum necessary for women to exert meaningful influence on politics.

1 http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/gender_equality/gender_mainstreaming/roadmap_en.html

2 The six priority areas for EU action on gender equality set out in the Roadmap are: equal economic independence for women and men; reconciling professional life with private and family life; equal participation in decision-making; eradication of all forms of gender-based violence and trafficking; elimination of gender stereotypes; promotion of gender equality in external and development policies.

3 The database is hosted on the website of DG-Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and can be consulted free at http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/women_men_stats/index_en.htm

- Of the 20 countries worldwide that have achieved the critical mass of 30%, eight are from within the EU - Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Belgium, Germany, and Austria. The European Parliament (31% women) would also just make it into this select group.
- On the other hand, there remains a further seven EU countries where women account for less than 15% of members of parliament – the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Ireland, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania and Malta.
- Belgium showed the greatest improvement in the parliamentary gender balance over the last ten years (from 12% to 35% women) - a direct result of positive intervention by the government through legislation enforcing parity amongst candidates and equal visibility on ballot papers. International IDEA⁴ notes that most of the countries that have achieved the critical mass have an electoral system based on proportional representation and some form of quota system to proactively reduce the obstacles to women entering politics at national level.

Regional assemblies

- At regional level, women have a stronger political voice than at national level, with an average of 30% representation in regional assemblies. There is, however, significant variation between countries, from 48% women in both Sweden and France to below 15% in Slovakia, Hungary and Italy.

National governments

- On average, men outnumber women in the cabinets of EU governments by around three to one (24% women, 76% men).
- Although a commitment to balanced representation is evident in some countries - Spain (41% women), Sweden (46%), Norway (53%) and Finland (60%) – the cabinets of Slovakia, Greece and Turkey include just one woman each and that of Romania has no women members at all.
- Only eight of the current twenty-seven EU Member States have ever had a woman prime minister (or equivalent position) - the United Kingdom, Portugal, Lithuania (twice), France, Poland, Bulgaria, Finland and Germany (current).

Central Banks

- The central banks of all twenty-seven EU Member States are led by a male governor.
- On average, the highest decision-making bodies of EU central banks include five men for every woman. Sweden and Norway lead the way, but they are the only two European central banks with more than one in three women in such senior positions. In seven EU Member States (Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, and Slovenia) and in Turkey, the highest decision-making body of the central bank is comprised solely of men.

⁴ Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

- It is a similar picture at European level where all three of the financial institutions (European Central Bank, European Investment Bank and European Investment Fund) are led by men and there is an average of just below 16% women in positions of influence.

Business leaders

- Across Europe, women account for just over 44% of all workers but they are more likely to be employed in junior positions such that they comprise only 32% of those considered as heads of businesses (chief executives, directors and managers of small businesses).
- The under-representation of women at the top level is heightened in big business where men account for nearly 90% of the board members of leading companies (constituents of the blue-chip index in each country) and there has been very little improvement over recent years.
- A noteworthy exception is Norway, where the government has taken positive action to redress the imbalance by imposing gender parity on the board membership of both public and private companies (minimum 40% women). With sanctions possible in case of non-compliance, the legislation has already resulted in the level of female representation in the boardroom rising to 34%, which is 10 percentage points ahead of any other European country.

Public administrations

- There has been significant progress in promoting women within the central administrations of EU member states where they currently fill nearly 33% of positions in the top two levels of the hierarchy compared to around 17% in 1999⁵. The proportion of women in similar positions within the European institutions has also improved from 14% to just under 20% over the same period but there remains much room for improvement.

The judiciary

- Across Europe, the groups of judges presiding over each of the national supreme courts comprise an average of 70% men and 30% women but this balance is significantly influenced by high numbers of women in the courts of some of the countries that joined the EU in the last two accessions – in particular Bulgaria (76% women) and Romania (74%). In the EU-15 countries only 18% of judges are female – only a slight improvement from 15% in 1999.

⁵ Note that the values are not fully comparable due to different coverage of countries and possible differences in the positions counted. Nevertheless, the trend is considered representative.

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“Gender equality is a fundamental right, a common value of the EU, and a necessary condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of growth, employment and social cohesion.”

European Commission, Roadmap for equality between men and women, 2006

Introduction

In 2006 the European Commission published a framework for the future development of policies to support and promote gender equality. The "Roadmap for equality between men and women"¹ defined priorities for action and reinforced a long-standing tradition of the Commission to actively support gender equality, not only for the citizens of Europe, but across the world. The Roadmap is supported by the Member States through the European Pact for Gender Equality. Indeed, 2007 is the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All and the 50th anniversary of gender equality policy, which was enshrined in EC policy from the outset when the 1957 Treaty of Rome included a commitment to ensuring equal pay between women and men.

The 2006 Roadmap identified six priority areas² for EU action on gender equality over a five year period through to 2010, each with a series of objectives and actions. One of the priorities specifically relates to promoting the equal participation of women and men in decision-making but other priorities, together with the correct implementation of existing Community legislation, also contribute to this objective. In particular, policies developed within the context of the Lisbon Strategy to encourage a greater participation of women in employment, such as: policies to help reconcile work and family life through flexible working hours; and steps to combat the gender stereotypes that prevent women from making their mark in the higher echelons of business and in politics.

One of the actions identified for the Commission in relation to decision-making is to support activities to raise awareness of equality issues in the decision-making process and promote research based on comparable European data. This report represents a contribution towards that action and presents an assessment of the current situation of men and women in decision-making across Europe and developments over recent years. It presents facts and figures covering decision-making in the political, public and economic domains for the European Union countries, together with some relevant examples of national policies/strategies. As far as possible, the analysis is based on data taken from the Commission's database on women and men in decision-making³, which itself demonstrates the commitment of the Commission to collecting, and providing access to, accurate and pertinent data to monitor gender equality in decision-making across Europe.

Gender equality in decision-making is a world issue

At the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China in 1995, 189 states adopted the Beijing Platform for Action, which is considered as a milestone for the enforcement of women's rights across the world. The Platform for Action outlines twelve critical areas of concern where the violation of women's rights and gender inequality persist, and proposes strategic objectives and actions for each area.

One of the areas of concern identified at Beijing was the under-representation of women in the decision-making process. Despite increased democratisation over the preceding decade, it was recognised that there had been little progress in improving the participation of women in decision-making through the attainment of political power or of achieving the target endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council of having 30%

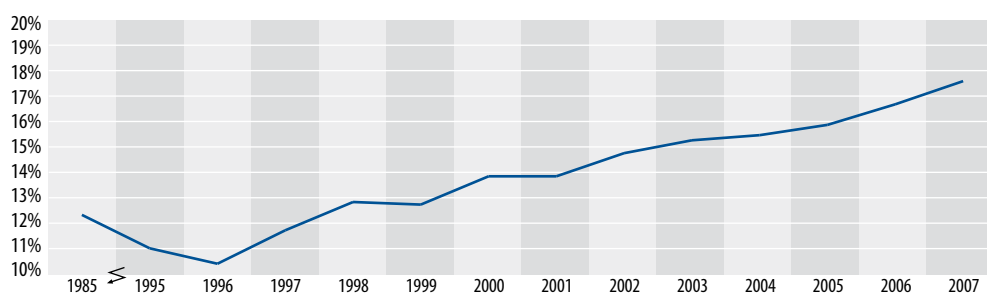
1 http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/gender_equality/gender_mainstreaming/roadmap_en.html

2 The six priority areas for EU action on gender equality set out in the Roadmap are: equal economic independence for women and men; reconciling professional life with private and family life; equal participation in decision-making; eradication of all forms of gender-based violence and trafficking; elimination of gender stereotypes; promotion of gender equality in external and development policies.

3 http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/women_men_stats/index_en.htm

women in decision-making positions by 1995. Indeed, at the time of the conference, the share of women in national parliaments across the world was only just over 10%, slightly lower than it had been eight years earlier (Fig. 1). Since that time, there has been a steady, if slow, improvement so that by July 2007 women accounted for over 17% of members of national parliaments globally.

1. Share of women in national parliaments, world average, 1985-2007

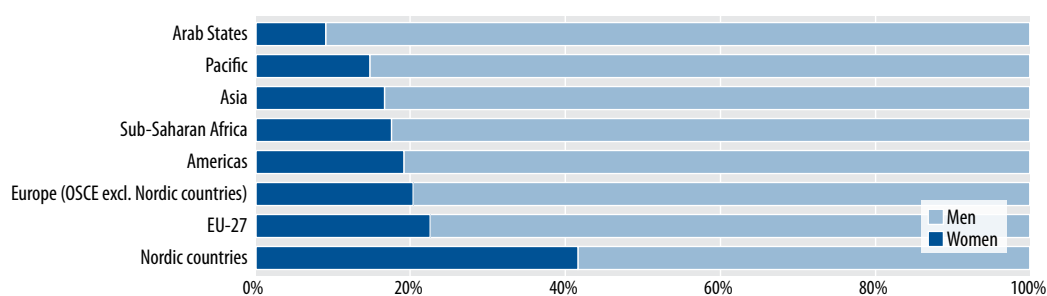


Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

Data cover both houses where relevant

Although there remains much to do, the situation in Europe is better than in most other parts of the world and across the EU in the fourth quarter of 2007 there was an average of nearly 23% women in all houses of the national parliaments (Fig. 2). Strikingly, the Nordic countries lead the way for gender equality in the political arena and now have parliaments comprising an average of over 41% women. At the other extreme, the average level of female participation in politics remains at less than 10% in the arab states, though it should be noted that this represents a three-fold improvement from the level of just over 3% in 1997.

2. Share of women and men in national parliaments around the world, 2007



Source: IPU and European Commission, DG EMPL,

Database on women and men in decision-making for EU-27

Data cover both houses where relevant

Europe is improving the background potential for women to succeed

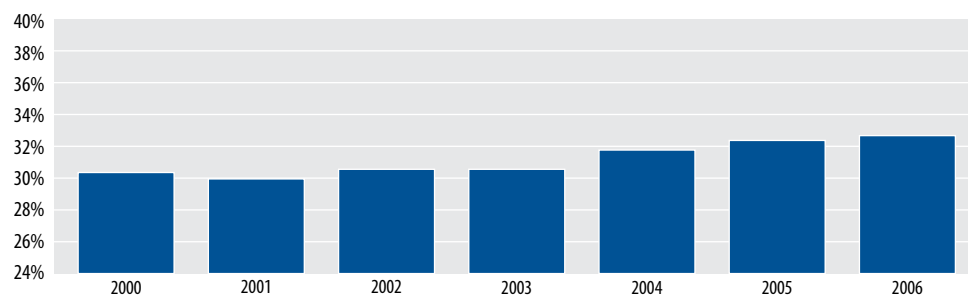
The focus of this report is on the gender balance in senior decision-making positions in the political, public and economic domains. Yet in all cases, these senior people have to come from somewhere – they need to be equipped with the skills and experience, through their education and career, to take on such responsibility. Hence the Beijing Platform for Action identified two key objectives for improving the situation of women in power and decision

making – firstly to ensure equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, but equally to increase women’s capacity to participate in decision making and leadership. The participation of women in higher education and responsible jobs therefore represents a background potential from which some can – given the right opportunities - move forward into key decision-making positions.

In some parts of the world, access to education remains one of the barriers to the promotion of women to senior positions but in the EU this is not the case - in most Member States, more women than men reach a high level of education. In 2005 just over 80% of women aged 20-24 had achieved at least an upper secondary education compared to just under 75% of men, and at first degree level, 59% of graduates are women. However, this pattern is not consistent across all fields of study and women remain under-represented in some technical fields (engineering, mathematics, science and technology) and, therefore, from the pool of prospective decision-makers in these important areas. Moreover, the representation of women declines with further degrees and later through the academic career path such that in 2004, 85% of full professors were men and just 15% women⁴.

In the labour market as a whole this pattern is repeated, though to a lesser extent, with the share of women in top-level positions (legislators, senior officials and managers) failing to reflect the share of women with higher education background. There is some slow progress, with the share rising from 30.5% in 2002 to 32.6% in 2006 (Fig. 3), but it still means that there are more than twice as many men as women in top-level positions across Europe.

3. Share of women in top-level positions* in EU-27, 2000-2006



Source: Eurostat, LFS

* Legislators, senior officials and managers (ISCO1)

The political background to gender issues in the EU

The reasons for the under-representation of women in power and decision-making are structural and multifaceted and policies to deal with them cover a wide range of different themes from child care and parental leave, to business culture or internal structures of parliaments and political parties. Starting from the Treaty of Rome in 1957 through to the Roadmap for equality in 2006, the EU has adopted a policy mix that combines long term political commitment with sound statistics, regular monitoring and exchange of good practices.

Since the 1990s, the European Commission has encouraged exchanges of information, good practices and networking between all actors involved in the promotion of gender balance, in particular through the Community action programmes on equal opportunities

⁴ European Commission, Report on equality between men and women – 2007 COM (2007)49.

between women and men. This takes the form, inter alia, of co-funding transnational projects implemented by the Member States, regional and local public authorities, NGOs, social partners and other relevant stakeholders and European conferences.

The box below gives a brief history of some key milestones in the political process since the Beijing conference that triggered worldwide action.

• **Key political dates relating to women in decision-making**

1995	Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China. Beijing Platform for Action adopted by 189 states, identifying twelve priority areas for action.
1996	Council of the European Union adopts formal recommendation to Member States to introduce legislative, regulatory and incentive measures to tackle the under-representation of women in decision-making (Recommendation 96/694/EC on the Balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process ⁵).
1997	Amsterdam Treaty recognises equality between women and men as a fundamental principle and one of the objectives and tasks of the Community (Article 2); it provides that the mission of the Community includes the mainstreaming of equality between women and men in all its activities (Article 3.2); and empowers the Community to take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation (Article 13).
1999	Council of the European Union reviews the follow-up to Beijing, undertaken annually by the EU Presidency, and adopts a set of nine indicators for monitoring the situation of women in power and decision-making ⁶ .
2000	European Commission report on the implementation of the 1996 recommendation (96/694) concludes that despite an overall positive outcome of policies applied since 1996, the level of improvement did not match expectations and that further action is required. The report ⁷ also comments on the lack of comparable data.
2003	Council of the European Union takes note of the EU Presidency report on the Representation of women and men in economic decision-making centres and adopts a second set of nine indicators for monitoring purposes ⁸ .
2004	European Commission launches its database of comparable data on women and men in decision-making.
2006	European Commission's Roadmap for equality between women and men (2006-2010) includes the promotion of equal representation of women and men in decision-making as one of six priority areas for action.

The Commission's database on women and men in decision-making

Alongside policy actions to tackle the under-representation of women in power and decision-making, the European Commission has recognised in a number of reports the need for reliable and comparable data in order to systematically monitor the current

5 OJ L 319, 10.12.1996

6 Review of the implementation by the Member States and the European Institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action, Council of the European Union, 11829/1/99, November 1999.

7 European Commission, COM(2000)120 final - <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2000:0120:FIN:EN:PDF>.

8 Review of the implementation by the Member States and the EU institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action, Council of the European Union, 15205/03, November 2003.

situation and the progress that is being made. Consequently, in 2002 the Commission initiated the process to establish a regular collection and publication of data on decision-making across Europe. The resulting database is accessible free on-line⁹ and covers decision-making positions within the EU institutions, the 27 EU Member States, EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and two candidate countries (Turkey and Croatia). It is an important source of information for policy makers, researchers, students and all those interested in knowing the state of play in decision-making.

This database defines a decision-making position as a position from which it is possible to take or influence a decision at organisational or hierarchical level. Coverage is limited to organisations having a key influence at European and national level in three different domains (political, public and juridical, social and economic) and to those levels or authority that have a major impact on decision-making within those organisations. Political data are updated quarterly and other data annually. The latest update, exploited in this report, covers data collected in the period August-October 2007.

Whilst every effort is made to ensure comparability of the data between countries and through time, the nature of the subject area means that it is difficult to formulate precise definitions that fit easily and consistently to national circumstances (e.g. definitions of senior/junior ministers or top-level civil servants). This means that the precise coverage (i.e. which positions should be counted in each country) may be open to interpretation in some areas. Moreover, efforts are ongoing to improve the quality of the data by introducing clearer definitions so that there may be changes in the coverage through time. Detailed comparisons between countries and through time should therefore be considered as indicative rather than as hard and absolute fact, though the overall picture is considered reliable.

Throughout the report, figures and tables are labelled using standard codes¹⁰ in place of country names as shown below. Values for EU aggregates are weighted averages based on the total numbers of men/women from constituent Member States.

• *Country codes*

BE	Belgium	CY	Cyprus	SI	Slovenia
BG	Bulgaria	LV	Latvia	SK	Slovakia
CZ	Czech Republic	LT	Lithuania	FI	Finland
DK	Denmark	LU	Luxembourg	SE	Sweden
DE	Germany	HU	Hungary	UK	United Kingdom
EE	Estonia	MT	Malta	HR	Croatia
IE	Ireland	NL	Netherlands	TR	Turkey
EL	Greece	AT	Austria	IS	Iceland
ES	Spain	PL	Poland	LI	Liechtenstein
FR	France	PT	Portugal	NO	Norway
IT	Italy	RO	Romania		

⁹ The database is hosted on the website of DG-Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and can be consulted at http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/women_men_stats/index_en.htm

¹⁰ For further information see <http://publications.europa.eu/code/pdf/370000en.htm#pay>

“Equal participation of women and men is a crucial factor for lasting development and symbolises the level of political maturity of societies: while democracy requires equal rights for women, this in turn guarantees democracy.”

European Commission “Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities” (COM (96) 67 final)

Part 1

Decision-making in politics

The principle of an equal voice for all members of society is the cornerstone of democracy and yet in most countries of the world there remains a significant gender imbalance in the parliaments and governments elected to set and implement the policies that impact the every day lives of the population. This section examines the situation of women in the political domain in Europe, how it has developed over the past decade, and some of the positive actions that may be taken to try and improve the equality of representation.

“While it is true that no definite relationship has been established between the extent of women’s participation in political institutions and their contribution to the advancement of women, a 30 percent membership in political institutions is considered the critical mass that enables women to exert meaningful influence on politics.”

United Nations, Human Development Report, 1995

The Beijing follow-up indicators included in this section were adopted by the Council of the European Union in 1999¹¹. They monitor the representation of women in decision-making in bodies of public power including governments and parliaments at European, national and regional levels.

The representation of women in parliament is improving, but remains below target

The parliamentary system of each country varies – some have a unicameral system, where there is only a single house of representatives, whilst others have a bicameral system with two houses and where the lower house typically develops and sets policy that then has to be ratified by the upper house. Throughout Europe the lower or single house of parliament is a fully elected body whilst the upper house may not be (e.g. the House of Lords in the UK). The participation of women in the freely elected lower/single house of national parliaments and in the European Parliament is therefore an important indicator of efforts to improve the representation of women in the democratic process.

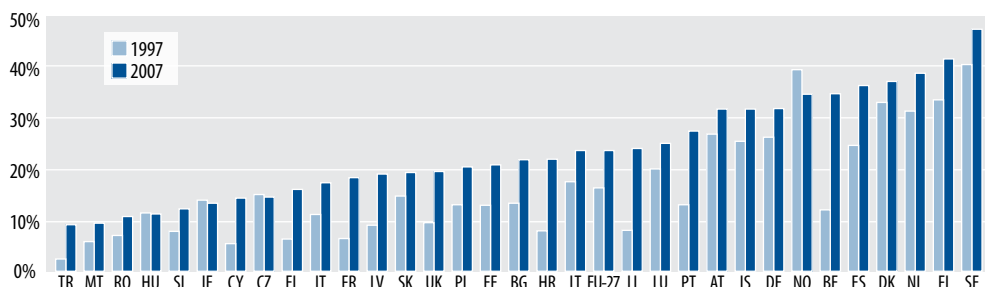
- *Beijing follow-up indicators*

The proportion of women in the single/lower houses of the national/federal parliaments of the Member States and in the European Parliament				
	1984	1997	1999	2007
Single/lower house of national/federal parliaments, EU-27 average	:	16.3%	:	23.6%
European Parliament	17.3%	:	29.6%	31.2%

The share of women amongst members of national parliaments of the EU-27 countries has increased by almost half in the last decade, from 16% in 1997 to 24% in 2007 (Fig. 4) but this is still well below the generally accepted minimum target of 30% and varies considerably between countries. At European level, the proportion of women MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) rose significantly from 17% following the 1984 elections to just under 30% in 2003. Subsequently, the level of female representation broke through the 30% barrier following the 2004 elections and now stands at a little over 31%, still a long way short of parity and well behind some of the more progressive Member States.

¹¹ Review of the implementation by the Member States and the European Institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action, Council of the European Union, 11829/1/99, November 1999

4. Share of women in national parliaments (single/lower house), 1997 and 2007



Source: IPU; European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making
1997=IPU (Jan.1997); 2007=DG EMPL (Q4.2007)

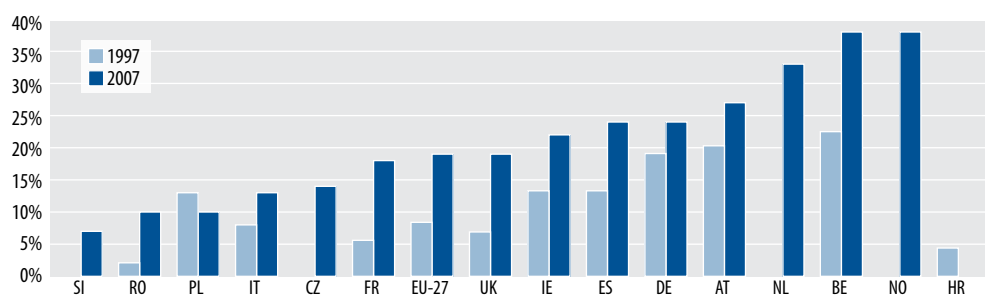
On a national level, following elections in March 2007, the Finnish parliament now includes 42% women representatives (previously 38%) so that it is now second only to Sweden which, with 47% women, has effectively achieved parity. In October 2007, a further six Member States had more than 30% women members in their single/lower house of parliament – the Netherlands (39%), Denmark (37%), Spain (36%), Belgium (35%), Germany and Austria (both 32%). On the other hand, there are still seven EU Member States where women account for less than 15% of members of parliament with levels between 13 and 15% in the Czech Republic, Ireland and Cyprus, 12% in Slovenia, around 11% in Hungary and Romania, and just 9% in Malta where 58 of the 64 current members of parliament are men. Outside of the EU, the representation of women is quite high in Norway (36%) and Iceland (32%). However, men continue to dominate political decision-making in Turkey where they account for 91% of the members of parliament, though the share of women did at least improve from 4% to 9% following the elections in July 2007.

For most countries – including some of those still not performing well - there has been a significant improvement in the gender balance over the last ten years. In seven EU countries - Belgium, Greece, France, Cyprus, Latvia, Portugal and the United Kingdom - the share of women in parliament has more than doubled since 1997 and there is at least a 50% increase in a further seven countries. On the other hand, there has been no improvement or even a slight decline in the Czech Republic, Ireland and Hungary, all three of which are countries with female representation in parliament still below 15%. Outside the EU there were large gains over the same period for women in Liechtenstein and Croatia, but a minor decline in Norway.

The most dramatic change was seen in Belgium, where the share of women in the lower house rose from 12% in 1997 to just below 35% in 2007. This is a direct result of positive intervention by the government, which passed a law in 2002 supporting the representation of women in elections by insisting on parity amongst candidates and equal visibility on ballot papers (the first two names on the list should not be of the same sex). In France the introduction of a formal quota system for electoral candidates in 2000 also had a significant effect on the numbers of women standing for election, though the proportion of women actually elected remains low. The relative failure of the French quota system to date is, at least in part, related to the use of a plurality voting system (i.e. simple majority/winner-takes-all) rather than proportional representation, which is used by all of the countries that have achieved the critical mass of 30% (see box).

A similar pattern is observed for the upper house of national parliaments, with the share of women members across the EU rising from 8% in 1997 to 19% in 2007 – a larger increase than for the lower/single houses, but at a consistently lower level (Fig. 5). Again there are differences between countries with Norway¹², Belgium and the Netherlands all having 33% or more women in the upper house in 2007 whilst in Poland, Romania and Slovenia there are 10% or less. In terms of change, there has been an increase in female representation in all countries except Poland. The most dramatic improvements can be seen in Romania, where the share has risen more than four-fold - albeit from a very low base - and in France and the United Kingdom where the shares have increased more than three-fold and two-fold respectively.

5. Share of women in national parliaments (upper house), 1997 and 2007



Source: 1997=IPU (Jan.1997); 2007=European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making (Q4.2007)

12 In Norway the two houses of parliament – the Odelsting (lower house) and the Lagting (upper house) – will formally merge into one house, the Storting, from 2009. In practice they are already operating this way.

- **Quotas and electoral systems key to getting women into parliament**

According to International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) the two key factors that most influence the number of women in parliament are the electoral system and the use of quotas.

At the end of 2006, just 20 countries across the world (11% of those with parliamentary systems) had achieved the critical mass of 30% - Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Burundi, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Mozambique, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Rwanda, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania and Uganda. Almost all of these have an electoral system based on proportional representation and most have implemented some form of quota system to proactively reduce the obstacles to women entering politics at national level.

Quotas may be voluntarily adopted by political parties (party quotas) or applied through legislation (legal quotas). The most effective combination appears to be proportional representation together with zipper-style lists where members from each political party are elected in proportion to their vote from candidate lists that are obliged to have alternating men and women. The table below shows the system implemented by each of the European countries with over 30% women in parliament.

Country	Electoral system	Positive action
Belgium	Proportional representation (PR), List system	Legal quotas, zipper-style: Legislature guarantees an equal share of women and men on party lists, and that the top two positions be of different sexes.
Denmark	PR, List system	Party quotas, zipper-style (1980s): Party guarantees 40% women candidates. Quotas abandoned in 1996.
Germany	Mixed member PR system	Party quotas, zipper-style (1986): Party guarantees 40-50% of positions on party lists for women.
Spain	PR, List system	Legal quotas (2007): Legislature guarantees a minimum of 40% and a maximum of 60% of each sex among candidates in all elections.
The Netherlands	PR, List system	Party quotas, zipper-style (1987): Labour Party (one of the three major parties in parliament) guarantees 50% women candidates on party lists.
Austria	PR, List system	Party quotas, zipper-style: Green Party has 50% quota (1993); Austrian People's Party has 33.3% (1995); Social Democratic Party has 40% (1985).
Finland	PR, List system	Party quotas, zipper-style: Party guarantees 40% of each sex represented in decision-making bodies.
Sweden	PR, List system	Party quotas, zipper-style: Party guarantees 40-50% women candidates.
Iceland	PR, List system	Party quotas, zipper-style: Party guarantees 40% women candidates on party lists.
Norway	PR, List system	Party quotas, zipper-style (1993): Party guarantees 40% women candidates.

Source: *Getting the balance right in national parliaments*, WEDO (Women's Environment and Development Organisation, www.wedo.org), 2007.

Original data from the *Global Database of Quotas for Women*, International IDEA and Stockholm University, www.quotaproject.org.

Women are still under-represented as parliamentary leaders

Across the world there are 189 countries with parliamentary systems, 73 of which are bicameral giving a total of 262 houses of parliament. Men predominate in parliamentary leadership positions (presiding officer, speaker or similar position) and currently fill 232 of those available so that there are just 30 houses with women leaders¹³. Six of these women are leaders of houses of parliament within the EU - four of the single/lower house: Estonia (Riigikogu), Hungary (Országgyűlés), the Netherlands (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal), and Austria (Nationalrat); and two of the upper house: Netherlands (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal) and United Kingdom (House of Lords). The Netherlands is unique in having a female leader of both houses.

Austria was the first country in the world to have a female parliamentary leader, when Olga Rudel-Zeynek became Chairman of the Bundesrat in 1927 and it was not until 1950 that another country (Denmark) elected a female leader of parliament. Just this century, Estonia, Belgium and Greece have joined the nineteen EU Member States that have had at least one woman in the top position within one or other house of parliament but there remain eight EU countries that have never had a female parliamentary leader (see box). Interestingly, these are not all countries with a low level of female representation – Portugal, Lithuania and Bulgaria all currently have in excess of 20% female parliamentarians but have never had a woman leader of their respective single house of parliament, though it should be noted that all three are in the more exclusive group of EU countries that have had a woman prime-minister (see further below). On a European level, just two women have so far presided over the European Parliament - Simone Veil (1979-1982) and Nicole Fontaine (1999-2002).

• First female leaders of EU parliaments

Year first female leader of parliament was elected	
1927	Austria
1950	Denmark
1963	Hungary
1972	Germany
1979	Italy
1982	Ireland
1989	Luxembourg
1991	Finland, Sweden
1992	United Kingdom
1995	Latvia
1996	Malta
1997	Poland
1998	Czech Republic, Netherlands
1999	Spain
2003	Estonia
2004	Belgium
2004	Greece

*Not yet had a female leader of parliament:
Bulgaria, France, Cyprus, Lithuania, Portugal,
Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia*

Source: IPU

Women are better represented at regional level

An assessment of female representation in regional assemblies (or parliaments or councils) is not straightforward because of the different systems established in each country (different levels of organisation, degree of autonomy from national parliament, etc.). In the 1999 review of the Beijing follow-up by Member States, a region was defined to be one step below the federal or national level in a political-administrative hierarchy, but above the local level, and having its own elective parliament (regional or provincial parliament/assembly). At that time, there was considered to be eleven Member States with a regional

¹³ Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/speakers.htm>, data as at 31 Oct. 2007

level, of which nine had elected regional parliaments. Today, following a review of the definitions and coverage, nineteen of the EU-27 countries are considered to have regional authorities that are endowed with self-government and have a representative assembly that is either directly elected or composed of persons elected at local level¹⁴.

• Beijing follow-up indicators

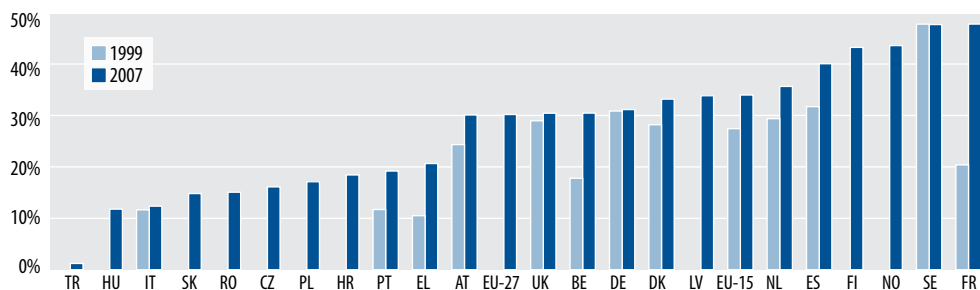
The proportion of women in the regional assemblies of the Member States, where appropriate		
	1999	2007
EU-15 average (11 countries with qualifying regions)	27.4%	34.0%
EU-27 average (19 countries with qualifying regions)	:	30.2%

Within the EU-15 countries, there has been a significant improvement in the level of female participation in regional assemblies such that it has surpassed the so-called critical mass of 30%, rising from 27% in 1999 to reach 34% towards the end of 2007 (Fig.6). Taking all EU-27 countries into account the level is a little lower at just over 30%, but this is still much higher than that observed at national level (average of 24% in the single/lower house of EU-27 national parliaments).

Within the Union, women account for 40% or more of representatives in regional assemblies in Finland and Spain but the share is highest of all in Sweden and France (both 48%). The situation in France is interesting given the relatively low number of women in the national parliament (18% of members of the lower house), which reflects the different electoral systems that are used¹⁵. At national level the two-round, first past the post system fails to elect enough women whilst at regional level the hybrid system in use since 2004 (combination of first past the post and proportional representation) results in successful implementation of the legislation promoting gender equality in elections.

At the other end of the scale, in the regions of Slovakia, Italy and Hungary more than 85% of representatives are men and less than 15% women. Outside of the Union, women are well represented in Norwegian regional assemblies (44%) but are hardly seen at all in Turkish regional assemblies where 99% of representatives are male.

6. Share of women members of regional assemblies, 1999 and 2007



Source: 1999=Council of the European Union, Presidency report on Women in the decision-making process; 2007=European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making

14 Further details on the definitions applied and the coverage of regions for each country are available at http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/women_men_stats/defcon_en.htm

15 For further information about the French electoral system see http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/france_159/discovering-france_2005/france-from-to-z_1978/institutions-and-politics_1985/elections-in-france_5454/index.html

Although the overall situation at regional level is encouraging in terms of the gender balance amongst the elected representatives, there remains a considerable imbalance with respect to the top positions, as is the case at national level. Across the EU, seven out of every eight regional assemblies are led by a man and in four of the nineteen countries that have regions with some degree of self-government, there is not one regional assembly with a woman leader (Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia). However, there are two clear exceptions in Spain and Sweden where 45% or more of regional assemblies are led by a woman.

In some countries executive power at regional level is endowed upon the leader of the assembly but in others there is an executive body akin to the government at national level, with members nominated from amongst the elected representatives. Amongst the thirteen EU countries with regional executives, the gender balance amongst members is broadly similar to that of the assemblies with an average of 71% men and 29% women. Women are well represented in the executives of regions in Finland (46%) and Sweden (45%) but poorly represented in those of Poland (7%) and Portugal (5%). Less than one in ten regional executives has a woman leader.

More women in national and European governments

The ultimate political power in countries with a parliamentary system resides with an executive group comprising a head of government (prime minister or equivalent) and a number of ministers, generally (but not exclusively) selected from the members of parliament belonging to the majority party. This executive is typically referred to as the *government*, though the use and interpretation of this term varies between countries. In some, the term government is synonymous with the cabinet or council of ministers, members of which are referred to as *senior ministers*. In others, the government is a broader group including the cabinet plus a number of other ministers, considered as *junior ministers*.

• Beijing follow-up indicators

The proportion of women members of the national/federal governments and the proportion of women members of the European Commission (Members of the national governments includes senior and junior ministers)				
	1994/ 1995	1999	2004	2007
National governments (EU-15 average)	16.2%	24.2%	23.1%	27.2%
National governments (EU-27 average)	:	:	20.4%	24.1%
European Commission	5.6%	25.0%	28.0%	29.6%

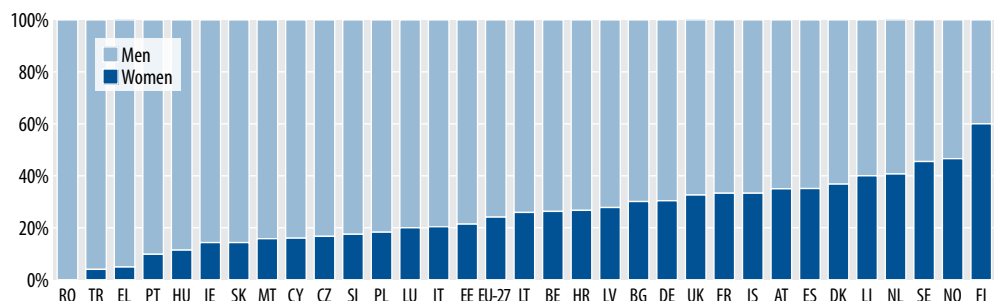
Taking into account all ministers (senior and junior), the share of women amongst the governments of EU-15 Member States increased by half during the second half of the 1990s, rising from 16 to 24%. This improvement was largely due to significant increases in the representation of women in countries such as Germany (16 to 36%), France (12 to 32%) and the United Kingdom (7 to 34%), although not all of these levels were subsequently maintained, and in some other countries the share of women ministers fell over the same period. In the 21st century there was initially a period of stagnation and only more recently a slight improvement in that situation with the average female share in governments of the EU-15 countries rising to just over 27%. A complete EU-27 figure is available only from 2004 when women accounted for 20% of government ministers compared to 24% in the fourth quarter of 2007.

At the present time¹⁶ there are 10 EU countries and 3 European Economic Area countries that have 30% or more women ministers (senior and junior) in government – Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, Netherlands, Austria, Finland, Sweden, United Kingdom, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway (Fig.7a). On the other hand, men still account for over 90% of ministers in Greece, Portugal, Romania and Turkey.

However, in terms of real power, it is the senior (or cabinet) ministers that are of most interest and also offer more comparability between countries. Cabinets comprise between 12 and 33 persons in all 32 countries covered by the Commission database whilst the number of junior ministers counted as part of the “government” ranges from zero in 11 countries to 75 or more in four countries.

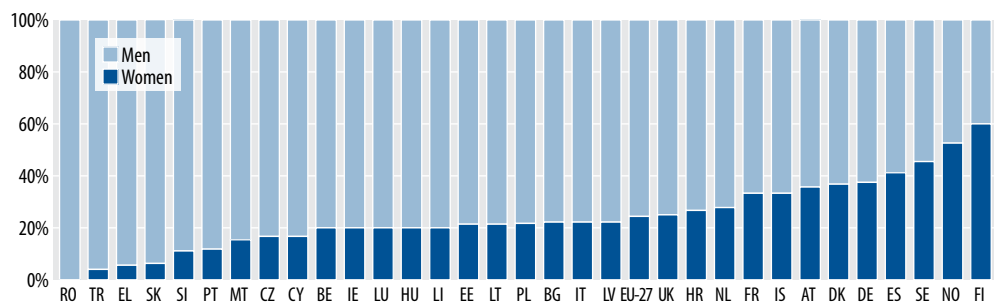
Given that the high-profile senior ministers are normally selected by the prime-minister from amongst the elected members of the majority party, there is clearly scope for ensuring a good gender balance within this group, but the EU-27 average of 24% women and 76% men shows that this opportunity is not widely exploited (Fig. 7b). Nevertheless, some governments have given priority to the issue of gender equality and there are high numbers of female senior ministers in Spain (41%), Sweden (46%), Norway (53%) and, most notably, in Finland, where the government appointed in April 2007 currently includes 12 women (60%) amongst the 20 members. Other significant changes during 2007 include the French government appointed in June, which includes 36% women compared to 20% previously and the government reshuffle implemented in the United Kingdom, which increased the female representation from 28% to 33%.

7.A Share of women and men ministers (senior and junior) in national governments, 2007



Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making

7.B Share of women and men senior ministers in national governments, 2007



Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making

In Spain, legislation was adopted in March 2007 (the Equality Law) enforcing quotas for almost all elected positions, such that there should be a minimum of 40% and a maximum of 60% candidates of either gender. These quotas do not apply to the cabinet but the commitment of the Prime Minister to this issue since his election in 2004 has ensured that Spain is amongst the leaders in this area and provides a good example of what can be done to improve the profile of women in politics.

At the other end of the scale, women are still particularly poorly represented in Slovakia, Greece and Turkey, all of which have just one female senior minister. However, as of October 2007, the extreme case of gender imbalance in the government is Romania where all members of the cabinet are men.

Women ministers are rarely promoted to the top position in government

Although the proportion of female ministers across the EU is now approaching one in four, very few ever reach the very top positions of power within government. Indeed, only eight of the current twenty-seven EU Member States have ever had a woman prime minister (or equivalent position) - the United Kingdom, Portugal, Lithuania (twice), France, Poland, Bulgaria, Finland and Germany (countries listed in chronological order of first female prime minister). Of these, Germany is the only one to have a woman premier at the present time, with Ms Angela Merkel holding the position of Chancellor since 2005.

• Female prime-ministers within the EU

Year of coming to power	
1979	United Kingdom
1979	Portugal
1990	Lithuania
1991	France
1992	Poland
1994	Bulgaria
1999	Lithuania
2003	Finland
2005	Germany

Source: www.guide2womenleaders.com

A similar picture applies to the European level. Despite the proportion of women Commissioners being one in four at the end of the 1990s and now approaching one in three, there has not yet been a female Commission President.

Furthermore, of the 20 EU countries with a president as head of state, just two currently have a woman President – Ms Mary McAleese in Ireland and Ms Tarja Halonen in Finland.

Women ministers tend to be given a portfolio of socio-cultural functions

Within a government, ministers are typically allocated to a particular ministry or given a portfolio of responsibilities by the prime minister and his/her closest advisors. The 1999 Presidency report reviewing the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action analysed the distribution of women ministers according to the BEIS typology, which classifies government functions into four areas: basic functions (B), economy (E), infrastructure (I) and socio-cultural functions (S).

- **BEIS typology of government functions**

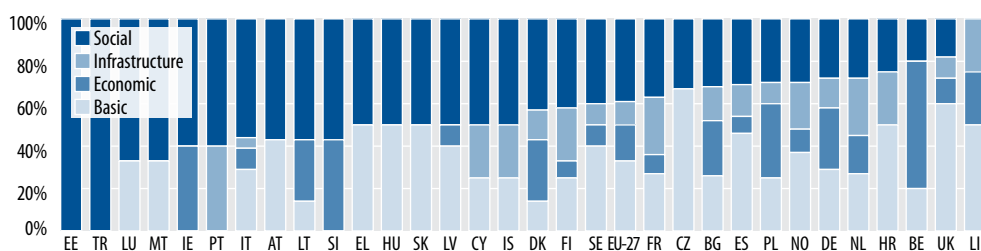
B	Basic functions: foreign and internal affairs, defence, justice etc.
E	Economy: finance, trade, industry, agriculture, etc.
I	Infrastructure: transport, communications, environment etc.
S	Socio-cultural functions: social affairs, health, children, family, youth, older people, education, science, culture, labour, sports, etc.

- **Beijing follow-up indicators**

The proportion of women senior/junior ministers in the different fields of action (portfolios/ministries) of the national/federal governments of the Member States		
National governments (EU-27 average)	2004	2007
Total	20.4%	24.1%
Basic functions	15.6%	20.7%
Economy	15.7%	17.7%
Infrastructure	16.8%	21.0%
Socio-cultural functions	33.3%	36.7%

The review¹⁷ showed that almost half (48%) of all women ministers had responsibility for socio-cultural functions, a quarter for basic functions and less than 15% each for functions related to economy or infrastructure. Indeed in eight¹⁸ of the fifteen countries covered in 1999, at least half of women ministers were responsible for socio-cultural portfolios. In 2007, the proportion of women ministers with a socio-cultural portfolio fell to 36% for the same EU-15 countries (39% for the whole of the EU-27) but still sixteen¹⁹ of the thirty-two countries covered by the Commission database have at least half of their female ministers with responsibilities in this area, and in Estonia and Turkey there are no women ministers with portfolios in any other area (Fig. 8 and Fig. 10).

8. Distribution of women ministers by BEIS category, 2007



Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making
RO: no women ministers

17 Review of the implementation by the Member States and the European Institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action, Council of the European Union, 11829/1/99, November 1999

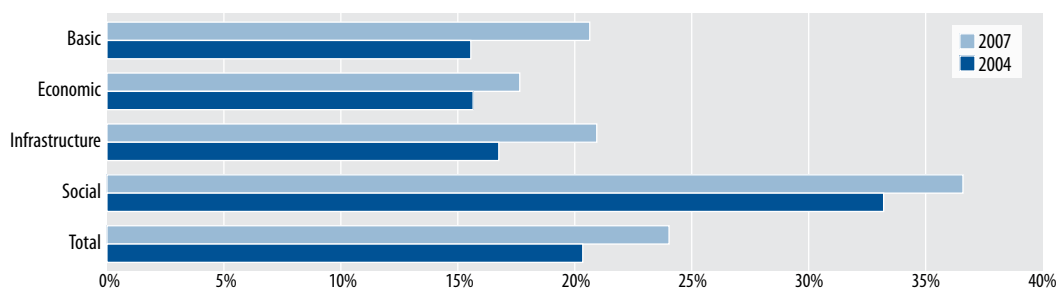
18 Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Portugal and Greece

19 Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Turkey and Iceland

However, these data do not take into account the distribution of male ministers by function so that it is not possible to see clearly if there is any particular gender imbalance – it could be that there are simply more ministers overall in socio-cultural functions. Fig. 9 shows the proportion of EU-27 women ministers for each function compared to the overall level of female representation in government and demonstrates that women ministers tend to be allocated socio-cultural portfolios ahead of other functions. In 2007, women accounted for nearly 37% of ministers responsible for socio-cultural functions compared to an overall share of just under 24% of all government ministers. On the other hand, women accounted for 21% of ministers for both infrastructure and basic functions and only 18% for functions related to the economy. Although there is no formal hierarchy of the different functions, government positions responsible for the national finances and foreign affairs tend to be amongst the most prestigious and these fall into the two categories (Basic functions and Economy) where women are least well represented. However, across the Union there does seem to be a slight improvement since 2004 with the share of women amongst ministers with basic functions rising by a little over 5% compared to the overall increase of below 4% (Fig. 9).

On a country by country basis, the low numbers of ministers in some functions and/or countries gives rise to extreme values that make direct comparison difficult, especially through time since the composition of governments can change very quickly as a result of internal reshuffles. However, the schematic picture below (Fig. 10) shows the under- or over-representation of women in the different BEIS categories compared to the total share of women ministers in each country towards the end of 2007. It further highlights the tendency for women to be given portfolios with socio-cultural functions and the general under-representation, or even complete void, of women ministers for other functions²⁰.

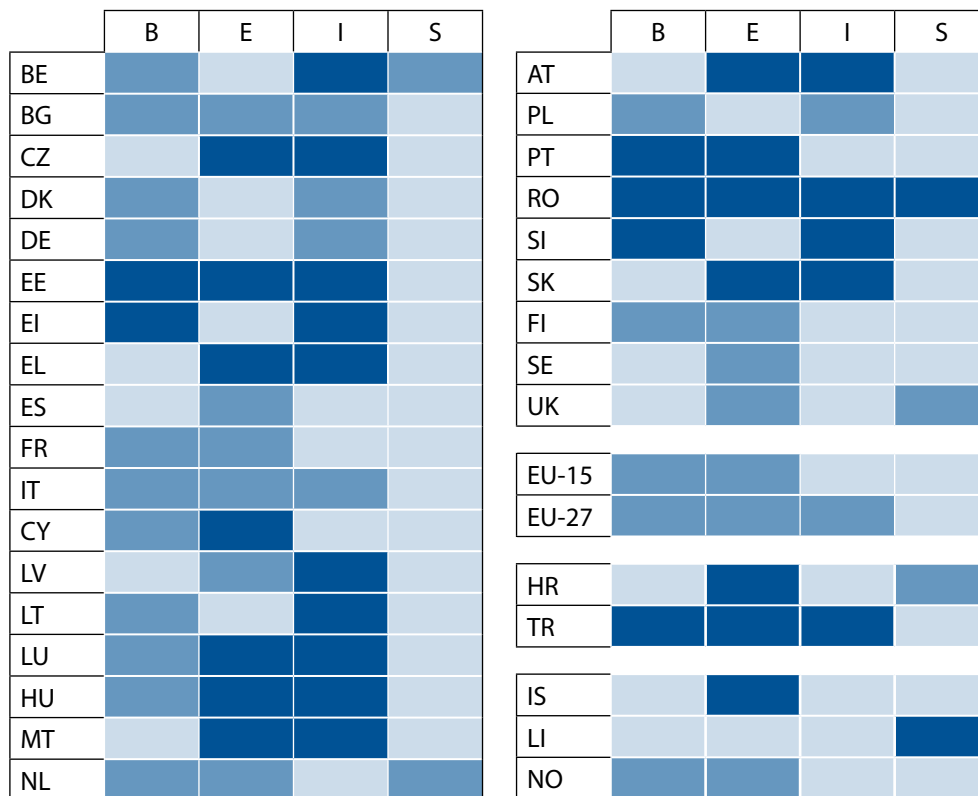
9. Share of women ministers by BEIS category in the EU-27, 2004 and 2007



Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making

²⁰ Note that in the case of a minister with a portfolio covering more than one of the BEIS categories the classification is made on the basis of the first item in the published list of responsibilities. This is only an occasional issue but could lead to apparent under-representation of a particular category in affected countries.

10. Representation of women ministers by BEIS function, 2007



- No women ministers
- Women under-represented (share by function < total share)
- Women equally or over-represented (share by function >= total share)

“Businesses are increasingly recognising the direct and indirect commercial benefits of having a diverse workforce at all levels of the organisation.”

*Women in Leadership Positions, Practitioners Report
CSR Europe, 2006*

Part 2

Decision-making in the economy

European labour markets are characterised by a rising share of women. The female labour force has been the engine of employment growth over recent years and two thirds of the jobs created in the European Union since 2000 were taken by women. In 2006, the female employment rate in the EU rose for the thirteenth consecutive year, to stand at 57.2%, or 3.6 points above its 2000 level. If this favourable trend continues, the Lisbon objective of having 60% of women of working-age in employment by 2010 will be attained. However, this positive trend should not obscure the clearly unfavourable situation of women on the labour market in relation to men. Major gaps remain, and they are always to women's disadvantage. Labour market segregation and inequalities in working arrangements are proving to be persistent, and this is reflected in a significant and stable gender pay gap.

The European Growth and Jobs Strategy takes a comprehensive approach to raising employment and there is a strong emphasis on eliminating inequalities (not just in terms of gender) and promoting alternative models for working-life so that more people can work and follow their chosen career without barriers. This means changes that will impact on the lives of everyone - businesses, workers and their families.

As Part-I shows, there is a slow improvement in the number of women participating in the political decision-making that underpins this process. However, for successful implementation of this strategy it also needs active support from those driving the processes of globalisation and technological change that are transforming the character of the labour market – the leaders of large companies and those responsible for critical decisions in the economy. This section examines the participation of women in such positions.

The Beijing follow-up indicators included in this section were adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2003²¹. They monitor the participation of women in macroeconomic decision-making centres²², in the largest companies across Europe, and amongst the social partners at European level.

Central banks have no women governors and, in some countries, very few women in key positions

• Beijing follow-up indicators

The proportion of women among Governors of the Central Banks		
	2003	2007
National banks, EU-15 average	6.7%	0.0%
National banks, EU-27 average	:	0.0%

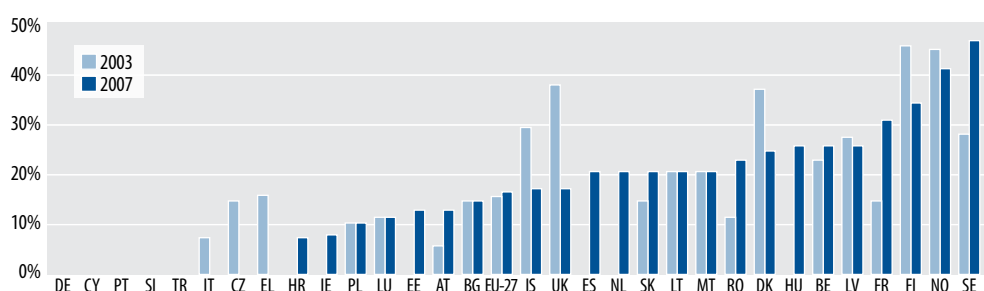
The proportion of women among members of the decision-making bodies of the Central Banks		
	2003	2007
National banks, EU-15 average	17.6%	16.7%
National banks, EU-27 average	15.6%	16.0%

21 Review of the implementation by the Member States and the EU institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action, Council of the European Union, 15205/03, November 2003.

22 Macroeconomic decision-making centres are considered to be institutions involved in the establishment or implementation fiscal, monetary and economic policies, which means primarily the central banks and economic ministries. The social partners (employers and trade union organizations) are also included since these can influence policy through dialogue with government.

Central banks have a vital role to play in setting and implementing monetary policy and the supply of money and therefore have significant influence in the economy of each country. In 2003, the central bank of Denmark (Danmarks Nationalbank) was alone amongst the then fifteen EU countries in having a female governor²³. Today, in November 2007, not one EU country has a woman installed as governor of their central bank. Moreover, the average share of women in the highest decision-making body within the central banks of EU Member States is low at 16%, a marginal increase compared to the situation four years previously (Fig.11).

11. Share of women in the highest decision-making body of central banks, 2003 and 2007



Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making
Blanks are real zeros except for HR 2003 (no data); data for 2003 relate to 2004 in CZ, LT, MT, PL

However, some countries perform well in terms of gender balance - the Parliamentary supervisory council that oversees the central bank of Sweden has five women amongst the eleven members (45.5%) together with one third of the executive board. Similarly in Norway, the supervisory board includes 40% women and the executive board has three out of seven women members. The banks of Finland and France both have around one in three women board members. On the other hand, in 2007 there are still seven Member States and one Candidate country covered by the Commission database where decision-making in the central bank remains a male reserve and there are no female representatives on the highest decision-making body (Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, Slovenia and Turkey).

Moreover, the picture is no better in the financial institutions of the European Union where none of the three main organisations have a women leader and, taking into account all of the main decision-making bodies (see box), just under 16% women and 84% men in positions of influence.

• Women in European financial institutions, 2007

The European Central Bank (ECB), which is the central bank for the Euro, has a male president and vice-president and there is just one woman amongst the four further members of the executive board (17% of all members). The other decision-making bodies of the ECB - the Governing Council and General Council - are both made up of groups from amongst the governors of the national banks, who are currently all men, and the executive board of the ECB so that there are no further women representatives.

23 Review of the implementation by the Member States and the European Institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action, Council of the European Union, 15205/3, November 2003

The European Investment Bank (EIB), which provides long-term lending towards projects that further EU policy objectives, has a male president and a management committee that has two women amongst the total of nine members (22%). It is governed by a Board of Governors that comprises the finance ministers from each Member State, three of which (11%) are currently women (from France, Poland and Finland). However, women are rather better represented on the EIB Board of Directors, which takes decisions over the financing of projects. This group has one further representative from each Member State plus one from the European Commission and at the present time eight of the twenty-eight members are women (29%).

The European Investment Fund (EIF) provides finance for SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) in the EU Member States and in Candidate countries and currently has a male chief executive and no women directors on the board (total of 7 members).

Economic ministries

• Beijing follow-up indicators

The proportion of women among ministers and deputy ministers/vice-ministers of the Economic Ministries		
	2004	2007
EU-15 average	18.0%	18.8%
EU-27 average	15.7%	17.7%

Part-I of this report demonstrated that women generally remain under-represented in government and that when government functions are broken down by type, the representation of women is poor in all areas except socio-cultural functions. Across the Union, less than 18% of all ministers with a portfolio of direct influence on the economy were women (BEIS type E covers finance, trade, industry, agriculture, etc.), a small increase compared to the situation in 2004 (just under 16%). Inevitably, there is much variation between countries – five of the EU Member States have 30% or more women ministers in this area but nine have none at all (Table 1). Overall, it means that women have limited opportunities to impact on national economic policy-making in large parts of Europe.

• Table 1. Share of women amongst ministers with an economic portfolio, 2007

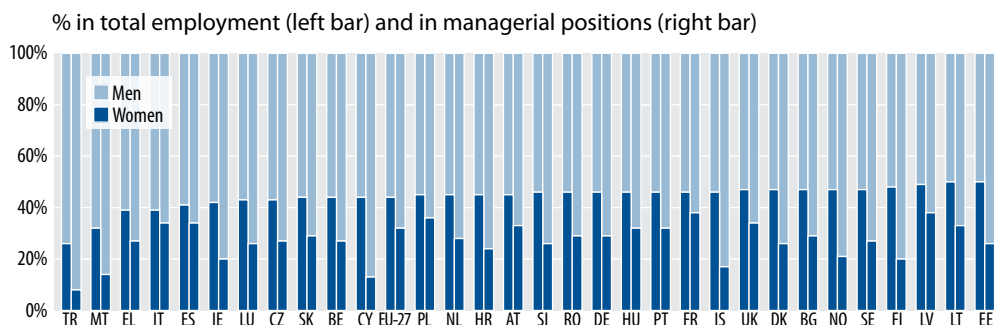
30% or more	Liechtenstein, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, Slovenia
20-30%	Bulgaria, Norway, United Kingdom, Finland, Sweden, Ireland, Poland, France
10-20%	Spain, Latvia
Less than 10%	Italy
None	Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Austria, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Croatia, Turkey, Iceland

Note: within each group countries are ordered by decreasing share. Shares exactly on the border between groups are promoted to the higher group.

Women are under-represented in managerial positions across Europe

According to the European Labour Force Survey (LFS), women accounted for just over 44% of all persons employed across the Union in 2006 (Fig. 12). Interestingly, the five EU countries with the highest share of female workers (between 47 and 50%) all border the Baltic sea – Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland and Sweden. At the other end of the scale, women account for the lowest shares of employment in some of the countries bordering the Mediterranean – Spain (41%), Italy and Greece (both 39%), Malta (32%) and just 26% in Turkey.

12. Share of women and men in total employment and in managerial positions, 2006*



Source: Eurostat, LFS

* ISCO 121 (Directors and chief executives) and ISCO 13 (Managers of small enterprises); IS: 2005

However, of those workers who reported their occupation as being managerial²⁴, just 32% were women – a marginal improvement from the figure of less than 31% five years previously (though this latter figure excludes Bulgaria and Romania), but a significantly lower share than for all workers, indicating a clear imbalance in the distribution of senior positions across the economy. The extent of the imbalance varies between countries – in some countries with low shares of women in employment overall the share of women managers is not so far behind (difference of 5-7 percentage points in Spain and Italy), whilst in other countries with high shares of female workers there is a significant imbalance (difference of 20-30 percentage points in Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden). Overall, however, it is clear that women are under-represented in managerial positions in all of the countries studied and in the majority, significantly so.

The situation is most marked in large corporations

Although women account for nearly one in three managers across the economy, they are still missing out at the top of the business world. On average, the management boards of the largest companies listed on the national stock exchange of EU Member States include just one woman representative for every nine men, the share of women increasing marginally from just under 8% in 2003 to a little over 10% in 2007 (Fig. 13), though it should be noted that there are some differences in the coverage. The Scandinavian countries tend to do better than average - Norway has by far the highest share with more than 34% women in corporate boards, followed by Sweden with just under 24%. On the other hand, fewer than one in twenty board members are women in Italy, Portugal, Luxembourg (all 3%) and Cyprus (2%).

²⁴ Managers = ISCO categories 121 (Directors and chief executives) and 13 (Managers of smaller enterprises);

- *Beijing follow-up indicators*

The proportion of women among the presidents/chairpersons of the highest decision-making body of the largest publicly quoted firms on the national stock exchange	2003*	2007
EU-15 average	1.0%	1.0%
EU-27 average	2.2%	2.9%

The proportion of women among members of the highest decision-making body of the largest publicly quoted firms on the national stock exchange	2003	2007
EU-15 average	7.0%	8.9%
EU-27 average	7.8%	10.3%

* 2003 EU-27 averages include 2004 data for CZ, LT, MT and PL.

Even in the best performing countries, however, it is extremely rare for women to make it to the very top. In Sweden in 2006, only 5 of 291 enterprises listed on the stock exchange had women employed in a permanent position as managing director²⁵. Similarly, also in 2006, Spain had just one women president (3%) amongst the companies making up the IBEX 35 index²⁶. Data for 2007 from the Commission database indicate that less than 3% of the blue-chip companies in each of the 27 EU Member States have a woman leader of the highest decision-making body. Moreover, even this low figure is significantly affected by higher numbers of female business leaders in the new Member States, which account for more than three quarters of the total. Indeed, in the twelve new Member States just over 7% of the leading companies are led by women compared to 1% for the EU-15 countries. More than 10% of blue-chip companies are led by a woman in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia.

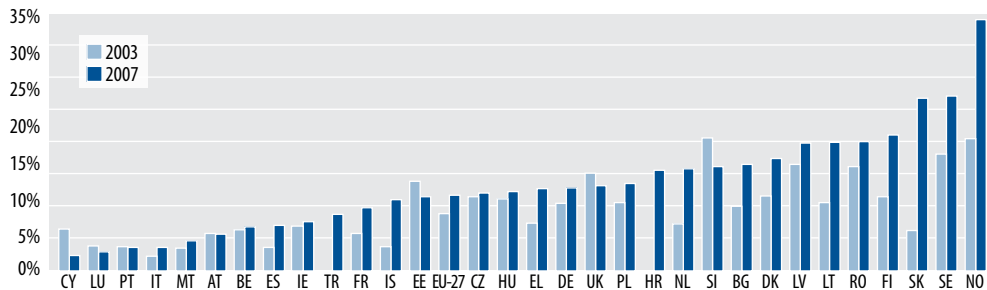
Further, but without negating the good performance of the Scandinavian countries, it is interesting to note that a significant proportion of the women on corporate boards in these countries are employee representatives, nominated by their peers on the work-floor, rather than people who have made their way to power by ascending the career ladder. In Denmark in 2007, women accounted for just over 15% of the boards of leading companies²⁷ but over half of these were employee representatives. Indeed, women accounted for 30% of all employee representatives compared to only just over 9% of regular board members. Across the Union, women accounted for 20% of employee representatives on the boards of blue-chip companies.

25 Women and Men in Sweden: facts and figures 2006, Statistics Sweden: www.scb.se

26 Mujeres y hombres en España 2007: www.ine.es/prodyser/pubweb/myh07/myh07.htm

27 Danish registered members of the OMXC20 index of most traded companies.

13. Share of women members of the highest decision-making body of the largest companies in each country, 2003 and 2007



Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making

Members of the decision-making body includes the chairperson/president.

CZ, LT, MT, PL: 2004 and 2007; HR & TR: no data for 2003.

SK: change between years at least in part due to different sample

(2007: SAX index has only 5 constituent companies).

The case of Norway is particularly interesting since it can be seen that the proportion of female board members has increased rapidly over recent years and this is a direct result of positive action by the Norwegian government. In 2002 the government required that all state-owned companies should have at least 40% women board members within one year and threatened to impose similar requirements on private companies if they failed to improve female representation to satisfactory levels through voluntary measures by mid 2005. At that date, women represented only around a quarter of board members and the government stuck to its word and introduced a system of sanctions (including possible closure) to forcibly tackle the issue. From 1st January 2006, all new companies had to demonstrate parity of board members (minimum 40% women) before they could register and existing companies have until the end of 2007 to comply. Although the data collected in September 2007 for the Commission database indicate that the target has not yet been achieved in full, the fact that Norway stands so far ahead of all other European countries demonstrates what can be achieved in a relatively short time through positive action at national level.

The 2006 edition of the Board Monitor published by the European Professional Women's Network²⁸, which collects data from companies listed in the FTSEurofirst 300 index of top European companies (and therefore has a different coverage than the DG-Employment database), reports an average of below 9% women in corporate boards in Europe compared to over 14% in the USA and around 12% in Canada. It also notes that apart from the Scandinavian countries, where all of the companies covered have at least one female board member compared to around two-thirds of all companies surveyed, the representation of women on boards in Europe is stagnating.

- **Promoting women in business**

Although women now account for more than half of university graduates in Europe, their success is not translated to the workplace, where there remains a significant gender imbalance in positions of responsibility such that nearly nine out of every ten members of the boards of large companies are men. The informal barriers that prevent women from reaching top level positions – the so-called “glass ceiling” – are multifaceted: because of the continuing prevalence of men in top positions, women are often excluded from informal networks and channels of communication and do not benefit from mentoring or female role models; the corporate culture demands ambition and continuous availability while women are too often perceived as passive/timid and limited by their family responsibilities; discriminatory methods of selection, the lack of career planning and the sometimes macho behaviour of male colleagues may also be potential barriers.

Yet there are clear advantages of having a diverse workforce at all levels - ensuring a gender balance provides access to all available talent and not just part of it; mixed groups are more likely to cover all relevant issues before reaching a consensus and to better understand customer needs; a mixed group of leaders can help to enhance a company's reputation amongst key stakeholders both internally and externally thus increasing loyalty and access to top talent.

Some research even indicates that there may be a business case for promoting the inclusion of women in top level positions. A Finnish study²⁹ showed that a firm with a female CEO is on average slightly more profitable than an a similar company with a male CEO and a separate study of the 100 largest companies on the London Stock Exchange found that 18 of the 20 companies with the highest market capitalisation (2003) had at least one woman director³⁰. Of course, such results do not mean that there is a causal relationship between female leadership and profitability but it still helps to strengthen the case.

29 Female leadership and firm profitability. EVA analysis No.3 September 2007. Finnish Business and Policy Forum EVA.

30 <http://www.women2top.net/uk/thatswhy.htm>

Actions to promote gender equality in business may be taken at all levels, from the individual companies through to national legislation. Some examples of good practice at company level include:

- IBM organises top management ‘change leadership’ and diversity training for leaders and managers, to encourage them to act as role models
- Toyota Motor Europe collaborated with the University of Limburg to develop a Work-Life Balance tool to help choose the best options for the company and its workers.
- Vattenfall in Sweden offers its employees one of the best parental leave packages in the market – 90% of salary (no upper-limit) for 270 days.

Public policy has a clear role to play in fostering a society where men and women are equally able to work and have responsibilities, for example by addressing needs for parental leave and child care. However, governments can also take more direct action to promote a better gender balance in the corporate world:

- In Norway, legislation requires all companies (public and private) to have gender balanced boards (at least 40% women).
- In Finland, the Act on Equality gives employers a duty to promote gender equality and requires that companies with public majority ownership have gender-balanced boards.
- In Italy, public employers must draw up a 3-year positive action plan and are obliged to justify hiring a male applicant if an equally qualified woman applied for the same job.
- In Spain, the Equality Law of March 2007 requires companies with more than 250 employees to develop gender equality plans and have at least 40% women board members within eight years.

Sources: (i) European Commission; Women in Industrial Research: good practices in companies across Europe: http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/women/wir/pdf/wir-best-practice_en.pdf, (ii) CSR Europe; Business to business working group, Women in leadership positions – Practitioners report.

European Social Dialogue – women are better represented on the employees side

The term *social dialogue* is used to refer to discussions, consultations, negotiations and joint actions undertaken by the *social partner* organisations representing the two sides of industry – the employers and the workers. At a European level there are a series of employers' organisations and trade union organisations that participate in the European social dialogue, which has a clearly defined basis in the EC Treaty and forms a key component of the European social model. Employers' and trade union organisations exist as cross-industry bodies, but the majority are organised on a sectoral basis, defending the specific interests of their members in a particular branch of the economy.

• Beijing follow-up indicators

The proportion of women among presidents of the trade union organisations (European level only)	2004	2007
Average of European trade union organisations	16.7%	18.8%
The proportion of women among members of governing bodies of the trade union organisations (European level only)	2004	2007
Average of European trade union organisations	19.8%	23.3%
The proportion of women among presidents of the employers' organisations (European level only)	2004	2007
Average of European employers' organisations	5.7%	1.9%
The proportion of women among members of governing bodies of the employers' organisations (European level only)	2004	2007
Average of European employers' organisations	7.7%	8.0%

Note: Follow-up indicator originally referred to social partner organisations at national level but data in this table refer only to European level bodies (cross-industry and sectoral organisations)

In general, data on the members of the highest decision-making body of these organisations show that women are better represented in trade union organisations than in employers' organisations (Fig. 14 and Table 2).

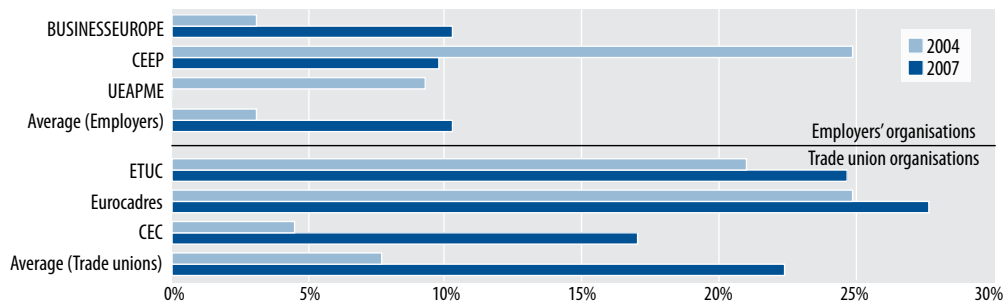
Looking first at the cross-industry bodies, the three trade union organisations (ETUC, EUROCADRES and CEC³¹) currently have an average of just over 24% women in their decision-making bodies, whilst the average for the three employers' organisations is under 9% (Fig. 14). Over the past three years, the gender balance in decision making has improved in all three of the cross-industry trade union organisations (Fig. 14). However, there has been little change in the overall situation for the employers' organisations over the same period and, despite increased numbers of women with influence in BUSINESSEUROPE³² (3% to 10%), there were decreases for the other two cross-industry employers' organisations (CEEP and UAPME³³) and the board of directors of UEAPME is currently all men. The only cross-industry organisation with a woman president is the ETUC, which claims to represent 60 million workers across Europe.

31 ETUC – European Trade Union Confederation; EUROCADRES – Council of European Professional and Managerial Staff; CEC – European Confederation of Executives and Managerial Staff

32 BUSINESSEUROPE – Confederation of European Business

33 CEEP – European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest; UEAPME – European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

14. Share of women members of the highest decision-making bodies in European cross-industry social dialogue, 2004 and 2007



Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making

At a sectoral level the situation is similar amongst the two groups of social partners. On average, the proportion of women in the decision-making bodies of European trade union organisations is almost 24% (up from 17% in 2004), but it is only 8% for the employers' organisations (virtually unchanged since 2004). Three of the trade union organisations have more than 40% women in decision-making positions, with full parity in the presidium of the ETUF:TCL³⁴. On the other hand, 18 of the employers' organisations (or 35% of the total) have no women at all in their highest decision-making body (Table 2). Women chair two of the fourteen trade union organisations (EPSU³⁵, ETUF:TCL) but only one of the fifty-one employers' committees (Eurociett³⁶).

Efforts are being made by the social partners to increase equal participation of women and men - the Framework of Actions on Gender Equality³⁷, signed by the European social partners in 2005, includes the promotion of women in decision-making as one of four priority areas for action. The social partners agreed to promote the framework of actions in Member States and to monitor progress through an annual review of national actions. The second annual follow-up report³⁸, which was adopted by the European Social Dialogue Committee on 7 November 2007, notes two main types of national actions in relation to women in decision-making:

- Measures aimed at developing the competencies of female employees so that they can take up leadership positions (e.g. training, mentoring, networking)
- Actions targeting female managers and aimed at helping them with the work-life balance (e.g. part-time work schemes, coaching after parental leave)

34 ETUF:TCL - European Trade Union Federation Textiles, Clothing and Leather

35 EPSU - European Federation of Public Service Unions

36 Eurociett - European Confederation of Private Employment Agencies

37 http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/news/2005/mar/gender_equality_en.pdf

38 http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_dialogue/docs/fram_actions_gender_2ndreport07_en.pdf

• **Table 2. European sectoral social partner organisations grouped by share of women in the highest decision-making body, 2007**

% women	Employers organisations		Trade union organisations	
	No.	Names	No.	Names
>40%	0		3	EEA*, ETUF:TCL, EPSU
30-40%	2	Pearle, CEC	3	EFFAT, EURO-MEI, FIA
20-30%	5	EFCI, Eurociett, HOSPEEM, EU Coiffure, Hotrec	3	EFJ, UNI-Europa, ETF
10-20%	12	ECEG, Europeche, FIAPF, ESO, CANSO, CEA, AER, Euromines, CoESS, IMA, ETNO, Posteurop	2	EMCEF, EMF
5-10%	7	Eurocommerce, FIEC, CER, ESBG, IACA, Euracoal, ACI-EUROPE		
<5%	4	COPA-COGECA, EUROGAS, ACT, FBE	1	EFBWW
None	18	ACME, AEA, BIPAR, CEFS, CEI-Bois, CEMR, CEPI, CESA, Cotance, EACB, EBU, ECSA, EIM, ERA, Euratex, Eurelectric, IRU, UER/EBU	2	FIM, ECA
No data	3	APEP, EUROFER, UEA	0	
Total	51		14	

* The details for EEA relate to 2006

Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making
For details of acronyms see http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_dialogue/sectoral_en.htm

“Women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace....”

Beijing Declaration, para. 13

Part 3

Decision-making in public administration and the judiciary

Although the politicians take the decisions in setting policy, it is the public administrations that are responsible for the implementation of the resulting legislation. Decisions taken by senior civil servants therefore have an important influence on the way that political decisions actually impact on the population. Moreover, in a democratic society the ability to challenge and test the law of the land is an important right of citizens so that leaders within the judiciary also have an important role to play in establishing the environment within which society operates. This section looks at the extent to which women are integrated within these two key roles.

The Beijing follow-up indicators included in this section were adopted by the Council of the European Union in 1999 and cover senior civil servants working in the central administration (ministries) of Member States and in the European Institutions as well as key members of the judiciary.

Significant progress in promoting women within the civil service

- *Beijing follow-up indicators*

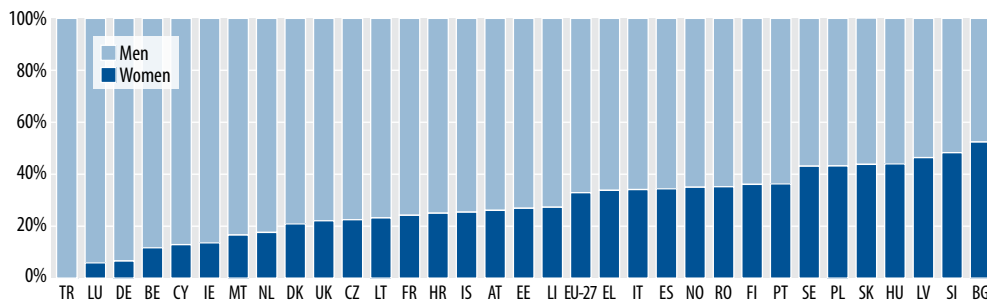
Proportion of the highest ranking women civil servants (levels 1 and 2 combined)			
	1999	2003	2007
EU-15 average (1999 data incomplete for DK, EL, NL, PT)	16.9%	20.7%	30.5%
EU-27 average (2003 figure includes 2004 data for CZ, EL, LT, MT, PL; 2007 figure includes 2006 data for NL)	:	24.8%	32.9%
European institutions	13.6%	13.9%	19.5%

In 1999, when the Council of the European Union reviewed the implementation by the Member States of the Beijing Platform for Action³⁹, there was an average of just under 17% women occupying positions in the top two levels of the civil service in the eleven countries for which data were available, with Sweden the only one to surpass the key 30% level. Since that time, there has been a significant improvement in the gender balance with an average of just under 33% women now occupying senior positions in the current twenty-seven Member States, though it should be noted that part of this difference may relate to different interpretations as to which positions are counted.

Interestingly, all six of the top-performing countries are new Member States from the two most recent rounds of accession to the EU – Bulgaria, Slovenia, Latvia, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland – and, apart from Sweden, these are the only countries with more than 40% female civil servants at senior levels (Fig. 15). At the other end of the scale, men fill more than 85% of senior public positions in Belgium, Cyprus and Ireland and more than 90% in Germany and Luxembourg. However, the most extreme case of gender imbalance is in Turkey, where the data indicate that in the fourth quarter of 2007, all of the civil servants occupying the top two levels of the hierarchy are men.

³⁹ Review of the implementation by the Member States and the European Institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action, Council of the European Union, 11829/1/99, November 1999.

15. Women and men civil servants in the two highest ranking positions, 2007



Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making

TR: zero; NL: 2006

Amongst senior civil servants, as with all other decision-making positions considered so far, there is evidence that women are least well represented at the most senior level. In 2007, women accounted for nearly 29% of the highest ranking positions in the EU but almost 34% of the second tier. Considering the EU-15 countries only, there has been a relatively small improvement in the numbers of women in the top level positions from 14% in 1999 to 18% now and the fact that the EU-15 average is 11 percentage points below the EU-27 average (29%) demonstrates further the impact of the new Member States on the overall situation.

This influence can be seen on a country by country basis in Table 3 below. At the most senior level, six of the nine EU countries with more than 30% women are from the group of 12 most recently acceded countries and, Malta apart, all of the EU countries with less than 10% women at this level are from the EU-15 group. A similar picture can be seen for the second level officials – six of the eight EU countries with more than 40% women acceded since 1999 whilst five of the seven with less than 20% are old Member States. In general, countries with higher shares at level 1 also have higher shares at level 2 but Spain is a slight exception, having the highest share of women at the top level (56%) but a relatively low share (12.5%) at the second level of the hierarchy.

• **Table 3. Representation of women amongst the top-two levels of civil servants, 2007**

	Level 1	Level 2
>50%	Spain, Latvia	Slovakia, Bulgaria
>40%	Slovenia, Poland	Slovenia, Hungary, Poland, Latvia, Sweden, Portugal, Liechtenstein
30-40%	Sweden, Hungary, Romania, Estonia, Greece, Norway	Finland, Norway, Italy, Romania, Greece,
20-30%	Ireland, Portugal, Bulgaria	United Kingdom, Austria, France, Denmark, Croatia, Iceland, Lithuania, Estonia, Czech Republic, Netherlands
10-20%	Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Iceland, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Finland, Slovakia, Austria, France,	Malta, Spain, Belgium, Cyprus, Ireland
<10%	Belgium, Netherlands, Malta, Denmark, United Kingdom	Germany, Luxembourg
None	Germany, Luxembourg, Turkey, Liechtenstein	Turkey

Note: Within each group countries ordered by decreasing share. Shares exactly on the border between groups promoted to the higher group.

Female civil servants more likely to work in ministries with socio-cultural functions

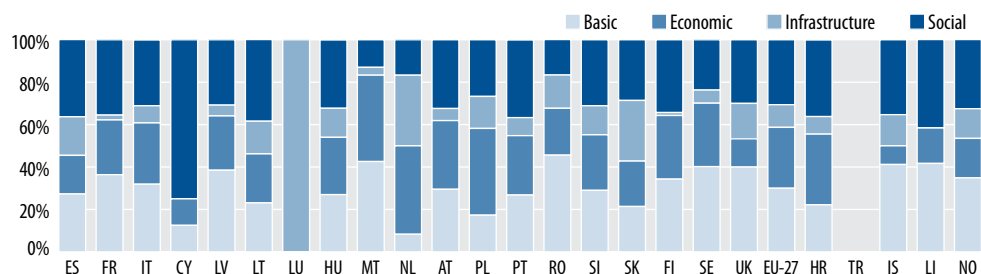
• *Beijing follow-up indicators*

The proportion of the highest ranking women civil servants in different fields of action		
National governments (EU-27 average)	2003	2007
Total	24.8%	32.9%
Basic functions	17.7%	28.8%
Economy	23.9%	31.3%
Infrastructure	25.2%	32.0%
Socio-cultural functions	32.1%	41.3%

As with their political counterparts, women civil servants are more likely to have positions of responsibility in ministries with socio-cultural functions (social affairs, health, children, family, youth, older people, education, science, culture, labour, sports, etc.) than other functions, though the difference is less pronounced. In such ministries, women fill 41% of the positions in the top two levels of the hierarchy compared to the average of 33% across ministries of all types – a difference of around 8 percentage points compared to 12 for their ministerial leaders. They are least well represented in ministries undertaking basic functions (foreign and internal affairs, defence, justice etc.) where they fill 29% of key positions.

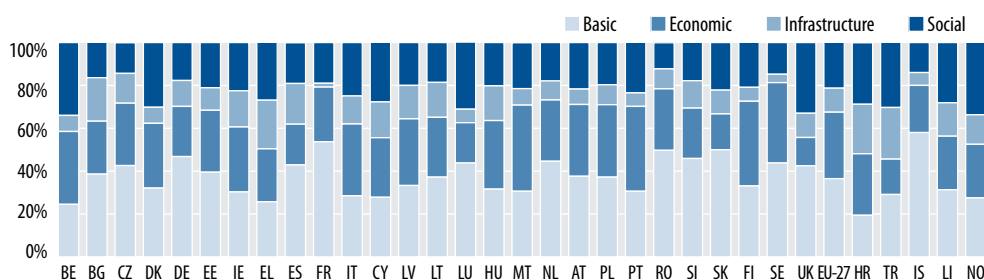
This tendency can be seen on a country by country basis, such that in most cases the proportion of all female civil servants working in ministries with socio-cultural functions (Fig. 16a) is higher than the equivalent proportion of male civil servants (Fig. 16b) whilst the reverse is true for basic functions.

16.A Women civil servants in the two highest ranking administrative positions by field of activity, 2007



Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making
TR: real zero; NL: 2006

16.B Men civil servants in the two highest ranking administrative positions by field of activity, 2007



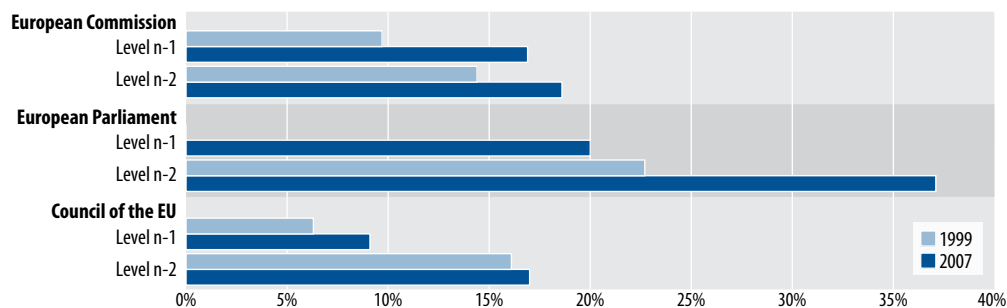
Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making
NL: 2006

Slow progress in the European Institutions generally, but the European Parliament shows the way

The proportion of women amongst senior officials of the three main EU Institutions (European Commission, Council of the European Union, and European Parliament) rose from below 14% in 1999 to nearer 20% in 2007. All three organisations showed an improved performance in terms of female representation in decision-making positions but the Council and Commission (16% and 18% respectively) still lag significantly behind the Parliament (33%). Indeed, whilst the Parliament manages to marginally exceed the EU average for the proportion of women amongst senior civil servants in national administrations, the Commission and Council still lag some way behind and have significant room for improvement.

As with the national administrations, the proportion of women in the very top level of the European hierarchy is lower than that in the next level down, most notably in the European Parliament. Here, in 1999 there were no women at all at the highest level but nearly one in four (23%) at the second level (Fig. 17). Now, in 2007, the situation has improved dramatically so that one in five officials at the top level are women (20%) and more than one in three at the level below (37%) but the difference of 17 percentage points between the two levels is nevertheless striking. In the Council of the European Union there is also a significant difference between the two levels and a clear deficit of women at the most senior level with 10 of 11 posts filled by men.

17. Share of women civil servants in the two highest ranking administrative positions in the three main European institutions, 1999 and 2007



Level n-1 for the European Parliament in 1999: zero

Source: Council of the European Union, Presidency report on Women in the decision-making process, 1999 and European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making

More women judges in the European courts but some national courts do much better

• *Beijing follow-up indicators*

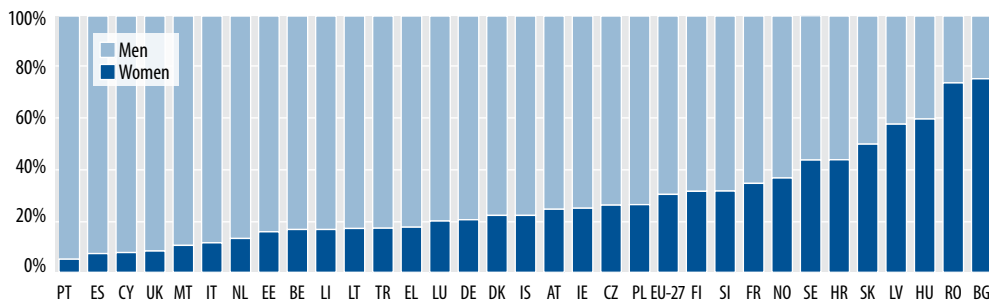
The proportion of women members of the Supreme Courts of the Member States and the proportion of women members of the European Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance.

	1999	2003	2007
National courts, EU-15 average	15.2%	13.2	17.5%
National courts, EU-27 average	:	18.5	30.4%
European courts	7.7%	:	21.0%

Although the actual name of the court varies between countries, membership of the *supreme court* represents the pinnacle of power within the national judiciary. In 1999, just over 15% of judges in the supreme courts of the EU-15 countries were women and by 2007 this figure has risen only slightly to nearer 18%. However, as with civil servants, the influx of new countries to the Union has had a very positive effect on the overall balance within Europe – in this case to such an extent that the EU average counting all 27 Member States, at 30%, is around two-thirds as much again as for the EU-15 countries alone. Indeed, in some of the new countries women are actually in the majority amongst supreme court judges (Fig.18), with the most striking cases being Bulgaria (76%) and Romania (74%), though Hungary, Latvia and Slovakia have also surpassed or reached parity (60%, 58% and 50% women judges respectively). On the other hand, the senior judiciary remains largely a male reserve in the United Kingdom, Cyprus, Spain and Portugal where over 90% of judges are men and less than 10% women.

Despite the strong showing of women in the supreme courts in many of the new countries, the top position is still taken by a man in most cases. The Czech Republic is the only country among this group to currently have a woman leader, with Austria and Finland being the only others contributing to the figure of 11% for the Union overall.

18. Share of women and men judges of the Supreme Courts, 2007

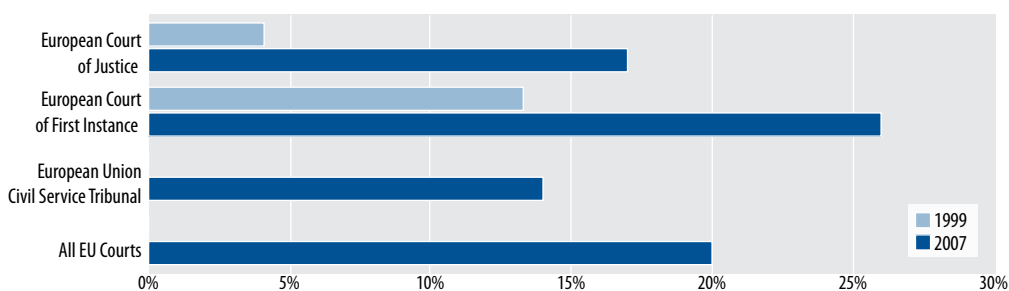


Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making

Amongst relevant European institutions, there has been a significant improvement in the number of women members in both of the two main courts – the European Court of Justice and the European Court of First Instance – with the average level of female representation rising from below 8% in 1999 to 21% in 2007 (Fig.19). Although this is a step forwards, the gender balance is still well behind the level observed in the national supreme courts. Moreover, it is likely that the change is largely a consequence of the two latest enlargements and the nomination of women representatives from the new Member States, where women are well represented in the judiciary, rather than any concerted attempt to improve the gender balance.

Looking at the courts of the European Union individually, women are better represented in the European Court of First Instance (26%) than in the European Court of Justice, where there is only around one in six women members (17%), though this is a substantial improvement from the level of just 4% in 1999 (Fig.19). The European Civil Service Tribunal, which is a specialised court established only in 2005 to settle disputes between the European Union and its civil service, has one woman amongst the team of seven judges (14%).

19. Share of women among the members of the European courts, 1999 and 2007



Source: Council of the European Union, Presidency report on Women in the decision-making process, 1999 and European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making

Conclusions

Twelve years on from the Beijing Platform for Action, the data collated in this report indicate that progress to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions is generally slow and limited and that a much more concerted effort is needed to address the persistent imbalance. There is some evidence that legislative gender quotas (e.g. for electoral candidates or company boards) can help to bring about real and rapid change, though the use of such positive actions remains controversial.

Although men continue to predominate in key positions in all areas, the gender imbalance remains greatest in the corporate world where men still account for almost 90% of the board members of blue-chip companies.

Politics

There has been a slow improvement in the representation of women in national parliaments worldwide, from just over 10% at the time the Beijing Platform for Action was launched in 1995 to over 17% by July 2007. The European Union performs better than average with the proportion of women members of parliament rising from 16% in 1997 to 24% in 2007, though this is still well below the so-called critical mass of 30%, deemed to be the minimum necessary for women to exert a meaningful influence on politics.

Eight of the twenty countries worldwide that have achieved the critical mass of 30% are from within the EU - Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Belgium, Germany, and Austria. The European Parliament (31% women) would also just make it into this select group. On the other hand, there remains a further seven EU countries where women account for less than 15% of members of parliament - the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Ireland, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania and Malta.

The greatest improvement in the parliamentary gender balance over the last ten years was observed in Belgium (from 12% to 35% women) and this is a direct result of positive intervention by the government through legislation enforcing parity amongst candidates and equal visibility on ballot papers. Most of the countries that have achieved the critical mass have an electoral system based on proportional representation and some form of quota system to proactively reduce the obstacles to women entering politics at national level.

At regional level, women have a stronger political voice than at national level, with an average of 30% representation in regional assemblies. There is, however, significant variation between countries, from over 45% women in Sweden and France to below 15% in Hungary and Italy.

In national governments, men outnumber women in the cabinets of EU governments by around three to one (76% men, 24% women) and there has been a reasonable improvement since Beijing (EU-15 average has risen from 16% to 27%). Although a commitment to balanced representation is evident in some countries - Spain (41% women), Sweden (46%), Norway (53%) and Finland (60%) - the cabinets of Slovakia, Greece and Turkey include just one woman each and that of Romania has no women members at all.

Although the proportion of female ministers across the EU is now approaching one in four, very few ever reach the very top positions of power within government. Only eight of the current twenty-seven EU Member States have ever had a woman prime minister (or equivalent position) - the United Kingdom, Portugal, Lithuania (twice), France, Poland, Bulgaria, Finland and Germany (current).

Economy

The central banks of all twenty-seven EU Member State are led by a male governor and include five men for every woman in their highest decision-making bodies. Sweden and Norway lead the way, but they are the only two European central banks with more than one in three women in such senior positions. In seven EU Member States (Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, and Slovenia) and in Turkey, the highest decision-making body of the central bank is comprised solely of men. It is a similar picture at European level where all three of the financial institutions (European Central Bank, European Investment Bank and European Investment Fund) are led by men and there is an average of just below 16% women in positions of influence.

Across Europe, women account for just over 44% of all workers but they are more likely to be employed in junior positions such that they comprise only 32% of those considered as heads of businesses (chief executives, directors and managers of small businesses). The under-representation of women at the top level is heightened in big business where men account for nearly 90% of the board members of leading companies (constituents of the blue-chip index in each country) and there has been very little improvement over recent years with the share of women rising from 8% in 2003 to 10% in 2007. The discrepancy is widest at the very top such that less than 3% of European blue-chip companies have a woman presiding over the highest decision-making body.

A noteworthy exception is Norway, where the government has taken positive action to redress the imbalance by imposing gender parity on the board membership of both public and private companies (minimum 40% women). With sanctions possible in case of non-compliance, the legislation has already resulted in the level of female representation in the boardroom rising to 34%, which is 10 percentage points ahead of any other European country. In March 2007, Spain became the first EU country to introduce a similar quota applicable to private companies and it will be interesting to see how quickly this can help to raise the proportion of women on the boards of the leading Spanish companies from the current low level of 6%.

Amongst the social partners at European level, the trade union organisations have a significantly better gender balance amongst key decision-makers (more than 20% women in the key bodies of both cross-industry and sectoral organisations) than the employers organisations (less than 10%). In both cases there has been only a slight improvement over the past three years.

Public administration and the judiciary

There has been significant progress in promoting women within the central administrations of EU member states where they currently fill nearly 33% of positions in the top two levels of the hierarchy compared to around 17% in 1999. The proportion of women in similar positions within the European institutions has also improved from 14% to just under 20% over the same period but there remains much room for improvement.

In the judiciary, the groups of judges presiding over each of the national supreme courts comprise an average of 70% men and 30% women but this balance is significantly influenced by high numbers of women in the courts of some of the countries that joined the EU in the last two accessions – in particular Bulgaria (76% women) and Romania (74%). In the EU-15 countries only 18% of judges are female, which is only a slight improvement from the level of 15% in 1999.

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