

## Women in local and regional government

Local and regional institutions are vital for women's empowerment, being both the level of governance responsible for service delivery and a potential stepping-stone to a public office career at national and European level. Nevertheless, data show that it is not always easy for women to participate in local or regional government structures. The European Union has been a staunch advocate of women's participation in decision-making at all levels of governance.

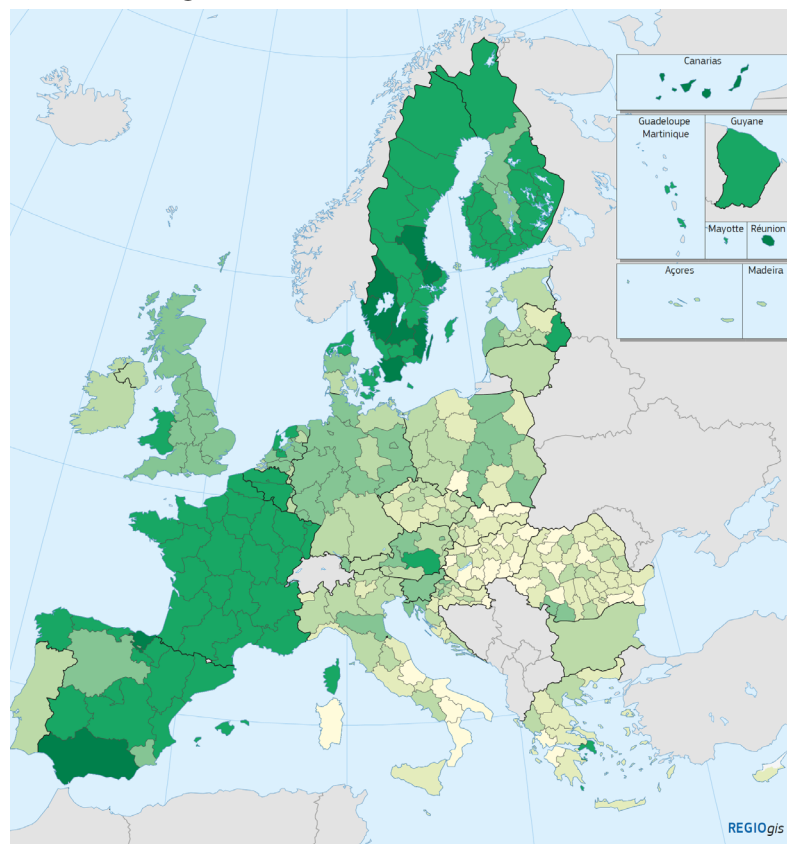
### State of play

The representation of women in regional assemblies across the EU continues to improve, albeit at a slow rate. However, a number of social, political and institutional obstacles hinder the involvement of women in regional and local government structures.

According to 2017 [data](#) published by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the proportion of women members of regional assemblies reached one-third (33.3 %) for the first time that year, an improvement of 0.5 percentage points compared to the previous year. The proportion of women leading regional assemblies also increased to a new high of 21.5 %. Regional assemblies included at least 40 % of women in five Member States (Belgium, Spain, France, Finland and Sweden), but in four Member States (Italy, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary) men continued to occupy more than four out of every five seats. Women made up half or more of the members of regional assemblies in only 17 out of 297 cases across the EU. As for the representation of women among regional executives, statistics showed steady yet slow improvement. In November 2017, women accounted for 36.0 % of the members of regional executives and 14.4 % of their leaders, both figures being new highs.

Nevertheless, this upward trend was not witnessed across the board in the EU-28, with a drop in the number of women members in various regions of Spain, France, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Poland, Romania, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania and Latvia. At the local level, EIGE [data](#) show that in 2017 women mayors or other leaders and members of local and municipal councils accounted for 32.1 %.

Women in regional assemblies, 2017



Map 2.19 Women in regional assemblies, 2017

% of members

- 0 – 10
- 11 – 20
- 21 – 30
- 31 – 40
- 41 – 50
- > 50

Countries without regional assemblies: BG, EE, IE, CY, LT, LU, MT, SI (women in national assembly).  
Regions without assembly: ES63, ES64, PT1, England excl. London (women in national assembly).  
Source: European Institute of Gender Equality, JRC, DG REGIO

0 500 km

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Source: [7th Report on economic, social and territorial cohesion](#), European Commission, 2017, p. 87. For EU countries without regional assemblies (BG, EE, IE, CY, LT, LU, MT and SI), the number of women in the national assemblies is shown).

In some countries, such as Sweden, the share of women in regional government had increased without the need for a legislated gender quota. In Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal and Ireland, quotas had been used to raise the number of women at the national and/or regional level of government.

### Stakeholders' views

A 2016 Council of Europe [report](#) claims that overall, women are not particularly better represented in regional parliaments, which usually tend to be newer institutions compared to national parliaments. This finding contradicts the idea that women predominantly find inroads in new institutions. The report claims that changing older institutions through the establishment of a gender-balance approach therefore seems neither more nor less difficult than changing new institutions. Setbacks in the representation of women in local/regional government are also possible for a wide variety of reasons. The report concludes that, if well designed, gender-quota legislation or parity systems are effective tools to establish gender balance in political decision-making. In order to be effective, such measures need to be complemented with additional practical measures.

A 2018 [position paper](#) by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) claims women are still under-represented in decision-making and leadership positions in all spheres of life, but the situation in local and regional governments is especially bad: in the EU, only 15 % of mayors and approximately 35 % of local or regional council members are women. In its [European Charter for equality of women and men in local life](#), the CEMR makes recommendations on women's participation in local politics.

A European Women's Lobby [note](#) on women in politics provides a number of reasons for women's under-representation. For instance, it suggests that women have less confidence to put themselves forward for election; once they do, they often struggle to get an electable spot on the election list. The note further states that sexism is still rampant in politics and that women are often not welcome. When women do run for election, their campaigns often receive less funding than those of their male counterparts. In addition, across the EU, women spend double the amount of time on childcare compared to men.

### EU institutions and advisory bodies

Local and regional participation falls within the remit of the EU Member States. Nevertheless, equality among women and men is a fundamental right and a core European value that is enshrined in the legal and political framework of the EU. The EU's commitment to gender equality in decision-making is further reinforced by the European Commission's [Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019](#), which lists the promotion of gender equality in decision-making as a priority area of action. Similarly, the Council's [European Pact for gender equality 2011-2020](#) seeks to promote women's empowerment in political and economic life. Moreover, to strengthen the promotion of gender equality and raise EU citizens' awareness of gender equality, the EU founded the European Institute for Gender Equality in 2006.

To further promote the participation of women in EU-funded programmes, many EU funds cover aspects related to [gender mainstreaming](#). The [European Committee of the Regions](#), an advisory body to the EU, also includes a number of elected female representatives serving in local or regional authorities.

### European Parliament

In 2012, it welcomed the [parity systems/gender quotas](#) introduced in some Member States and urged others to consider legislating to facilitate gender balance in political decision-making at European, national and regional level. It asked for the application of rank-ordering rules to electoral candidate lists for regional, national and EU elections, and for the definition and enforcement of effective sanctions for non-compliance. It called on Member States to link and set targets for political parties, based on parity between sexes, as a prerequisite for funding. In 2017, the Parliament also stressed the [importance of supporting the participation of women in decision-making in rural areas](#) by means of training activities designed to encourage their presence in sectors in which they are under-represented. It asked the Member States to promote equality between women and men in the various management and representation bodies in order to foster equal participation and power. In addition, a December 2018 [study](#) for Parliament's Regional Development Committee made a number of recommendations for improving gender equality and gender mainstreaming in EU funded programmes.

