

Women in politics

Women's representation in politics is important not only in terms of ensuring gender equality in the political process, but also for bringing attention to important socio-economic issues such as human development, gender-based violence, family-friendly policies, equal pay, pensions, electoral reform and the delivery of services. Yet women still face a "glass ceiling" blocking their full participation in political life in the legislature and political executive, and remain generally underrepresented in politics.

On average in the OECD, women held just over a quarter of seats in lower or single houses of parliament – as of early 2012 – with only 12 member countries reaching or superseding the 30% threshold recommended by the United Nations and Inter-Parliamentary Union for the representation of women. Compared to 2002, this marks a small increase of 6 percentage points on average. The representation of women in OECD parliaments is generally highest in Nordic countries, with 40% or more of seats held by women in Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Norway. In Turkey, Japan, Chile and Hungary women held fewer than a quarter of seats.

Countries with proportional electoral systems tend to have more women in legislature, possibly due to the practice of selecting a more gender-balanced set of candidates in party lists. In the OECD, 9 out of 12 countries meeting the 30% representation threshold use some form of proportional representation in the election of legislative representatives. In addition to the type of electoral system in place, women's political representation can also be impacted by cultural and financial barriers as well as by challenges in reconciling responsibilities of political and private life. To address this gap, nine OECD member countries have introduced gender quotas as a means of promoting gender equality in parliaments. Application of these quotas, however, may vary, from quotas applied during the nomination process (e.g. rules for placing women on party lists or to be nominated in an electoral district) to results-based quotas whereby a certain share of number of seats in parliament are reserved for women.

In the political executive of OECD member countries, the percentage of women ministers increased from 21% in 2005 to 25% in 2012. Data from 2012 shows that the share of female ministers ranges from over 50% in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland to less than 10% in Hungary, Estonia, Slovenia, Greece and Turkey. Women often hold social and cultural policy portfolios. Although the process of ministerial appointments differs depending on the country's political system (parliamentary voting or appointments versus presidential appointments with or without parliamentary approval), women are not represented equally in any system.

Methodology and definitions

Data for women parliamentarians refer to lower or single houses of parliament and were obtained from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's PARLINE database. Data refer to share of women parliamentarians recorded as of 31 October 2012 and 25 October 2002.

Countries in light blue represent lower or single house parliaments with legislated candidate quotas as of January 2013. Legislative quotas are enshrined in the election law, political party law or other comparable law of a country. By definition, both forms are based on legal provisions, obliging all political entities participating in elections to apply them equally. Non-compliance with legislative quotas can result in penalties for those political entities that do not apply to them. Data on gender quotas were obtained from the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) *Global Database on Quotas for Women*.

Data on women ministers were obtained from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's "Women in Politics" posters. Data represent appointed women ministers as of 1 January 2012 and 1 January 2005. Data show women as a share of total ministers, including deputy prime ministers and ministers. Prime ministers/heads of government were also included when they held ministerial portfolios. Vice-presidents and heads of governmental or public agencies have not been included in the total.

Further reading

International IDEA (2007), *Designing for Equality*, Stockholm, Sweden.

OECD (2012), *Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264179370-en>.

Figure notes

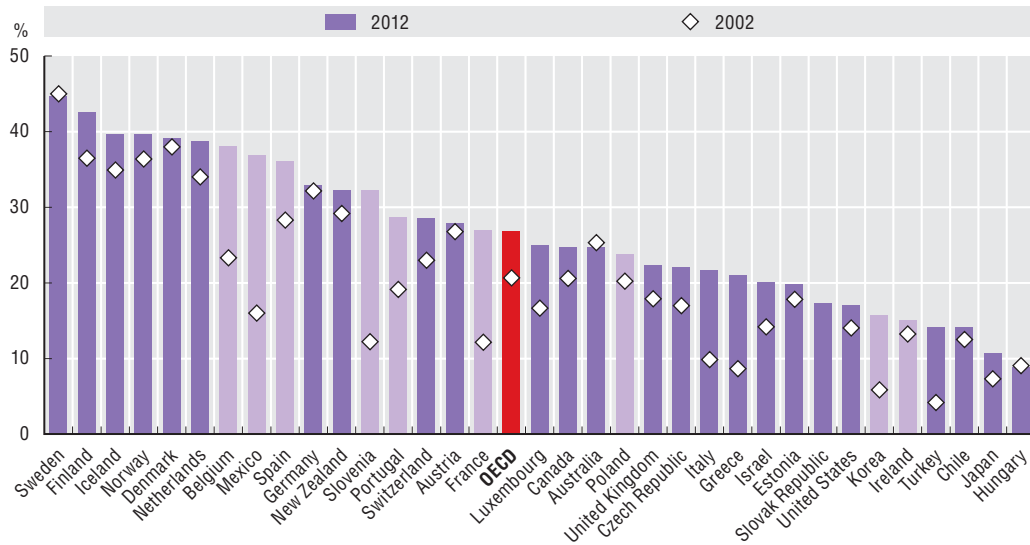
6.9: Data refer to share of women parliamentarians recorded as of 31 October 2012 and 25 October 2002. Percentages represent the number of women parliamentarians as a share of total filled seats. 2002 data for the Slovak Republic are unavailable.

6.10: Data represent women appointed ministers as of 1 January 2012 and 1 January 2005. The total includes deputy prime ministers and ministers. Prime ministers/heads of government were also included when they held ministerial portfolios. Vice-presidents and heads of governmental or public agencies have not been included.

Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

6.9. Share of women parliamentarians and legislated gender quotas (2012 and 2002)

Lower or single house of Parliament

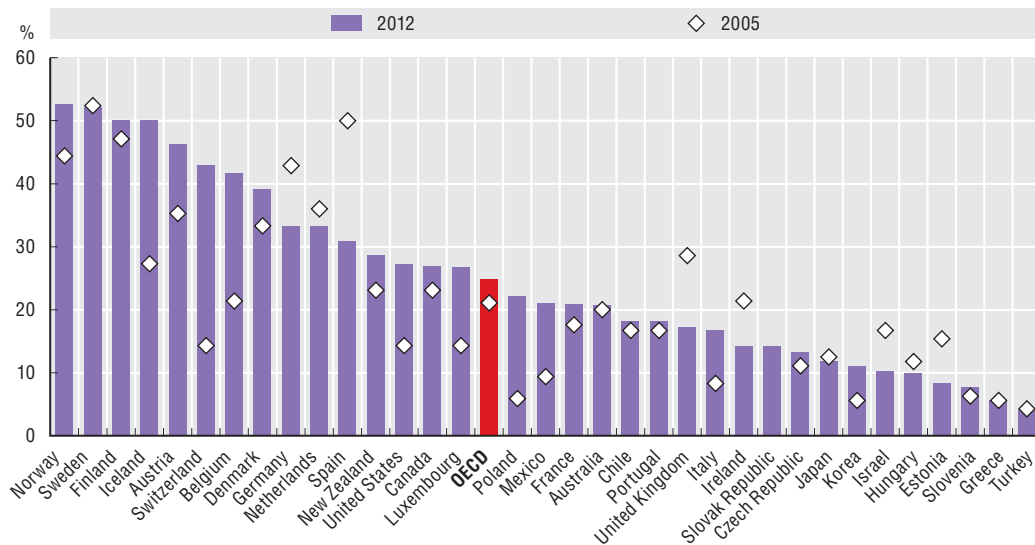


Note: Bars in light purple represent countries with lower or single house parliaments with legislated candidate quotas as of 21 January 2013.

Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), PARLINE (database); and IDEA, Quota Project (database).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932942697>

6.10. Share of women ministers (2005 and 2012)



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "Women in Politics" Posters, 2012 and 2005.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932942716>



From:
Government at a Glance 2013

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/gov_glance-2013-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2013), "Women in politics", in *Government at a Glance 2013*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/gov_glance-2013-43-en

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