

Women in politics

In many OECD countries, increasing the number of women in parliament and the number of women appointed to ministerial positions is an important objective. Greater gender balance amongst politicians can improve the quality and responsiveness of public policy by focusing attention on issues such as equal pay, work-life balance and gender violence. Gender-sensitive parliaments can also improve governments' efforts in effectively implementing gender equality and mainstreaming strategies, as parliamentary committees may also serve as important independent oversight and accountability mechanisms. Yet women still face a "glass ceiling" blocking their full participation in political life in the legislature and political executive, and remain generally under-represented in politics (OECD, 2014).

On average in 2015, 27.9% of the seats in lower/single house parliaments were occupied by women, ranging from more than 40% in Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Spain to less than 10% in Japan (Figure 3.5). Between 2002 and 2012, women's representation in parliament has only moderately increased (+ 7 p.p.) and still only 16 OECD countries reach or exceed the 30% critical threshold in 2015.

Some of the barriers to greater participation of women in parliaments include, for instance, few female candidates and uneven access to financing, lack of work-life balance, limited political encouragement, lack of commitment to gender balance within parties and gender stereotypes. Many OECD countries have introduced gender quotas as a mean (often temporary) for increasing women's political representation to close historical imbalances, as well as correct for or prevent rollbacks in gender equality. Across OECD countries, quotas are applied mainly during the nomination process (e.g. rules for placing women on party lists or to be nominated in an electoral district). These quotas can be legislated gender quotas (established by the constitution or electoral laws, they reserve a number of places on electoral lists for female candidates) or voluntary party quotas (targets set by political parties to include a certain percentage of women as election candidates).

Representation of women in ministerial positions at the central/federal level of government is also somewhat limited with about 29.3% of women appointed ministers on average in OECD countries in 2015. There is significant variation of women's representation in ministerial positions among OECD countries. For instance, in 2015 while gender parity was achieved in Finland, France and Sweden women still accounted for fewer than one in ten ministers in Hungary, Korea, the Slovak Republic and Turkey. Between 2005 and 2015, there has generally been an increase in the representation of women in ministerial positions in OECD countries (+ 8.2 p.p.) although it should be noted that data can vary significantly from one year to another depending on political cycles and cabinet re-organisations. Following the elections in 2012, France for instance saw a very large increase in the number of women ministers between 2012 and 2015 (+ 29.2 p.p.) and this is

also the case of Estonia, Italy and Slovenia, whereas in countries like Austria, Belgium and the Slovak Republic there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of women ministers during the same period.

Although the process of ministerial appointments differs depending on a country's political system (parliamentary voting or appointments versus presidential appointments with or without parliamentary approval), women are still not represented equally in many OECD countries.

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 1 December 2015, 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 of Quotas for Women.

Data on women ministers were obtained from the Inter Parliamentary Union's "Women in Politics" database. Data represent the percentage of appointed women ministers as of 1 February 2015, 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

OECD (2014), *Women, Government and Policy Making in OECD Countries: Fostering Diversity for Inclusive Growth*, OECD, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264210745-en>.

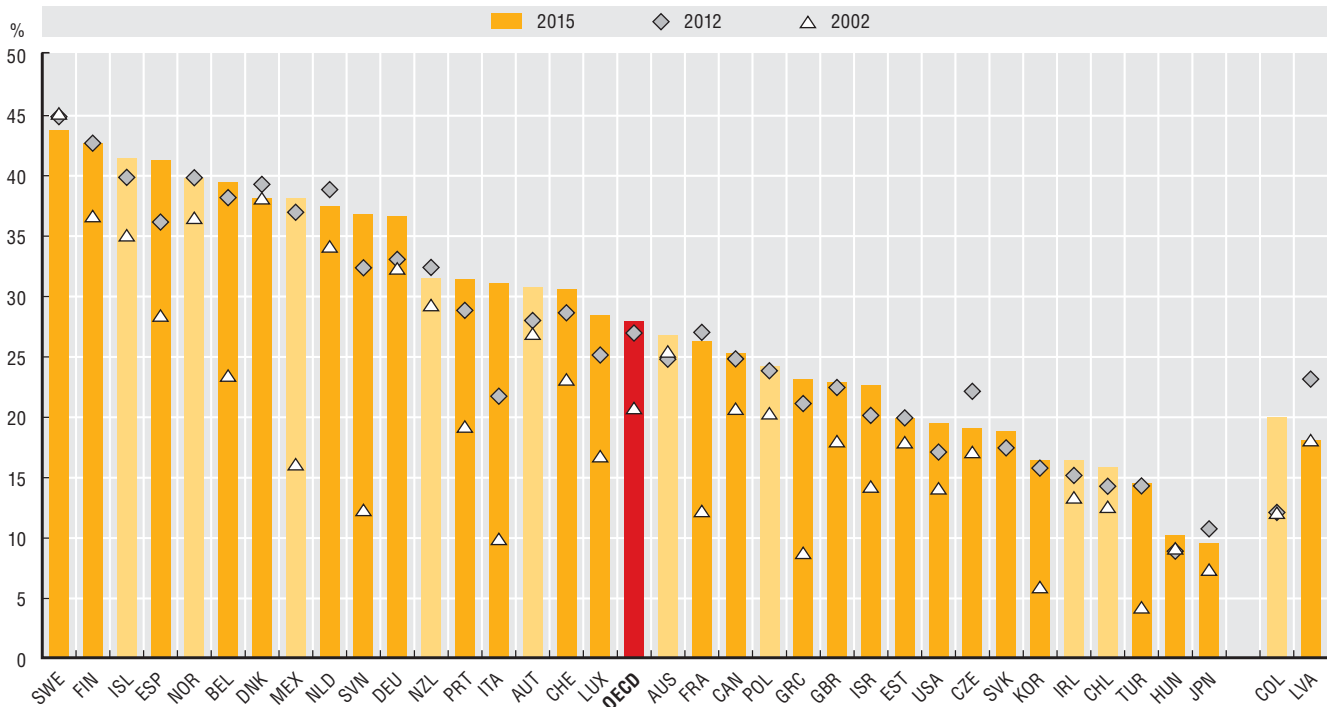
OECD/CAWTAR (2014), *Women in Public Life: Gender, Law and Policy in the Middle East and North Africa*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264224636-en>.

Figure notes

3.5: Data for the Slovak Republic for 2002 are unavailable.

3.5. Share of women parliamentarians and legislated gender quotas

Lower or single house of parliament

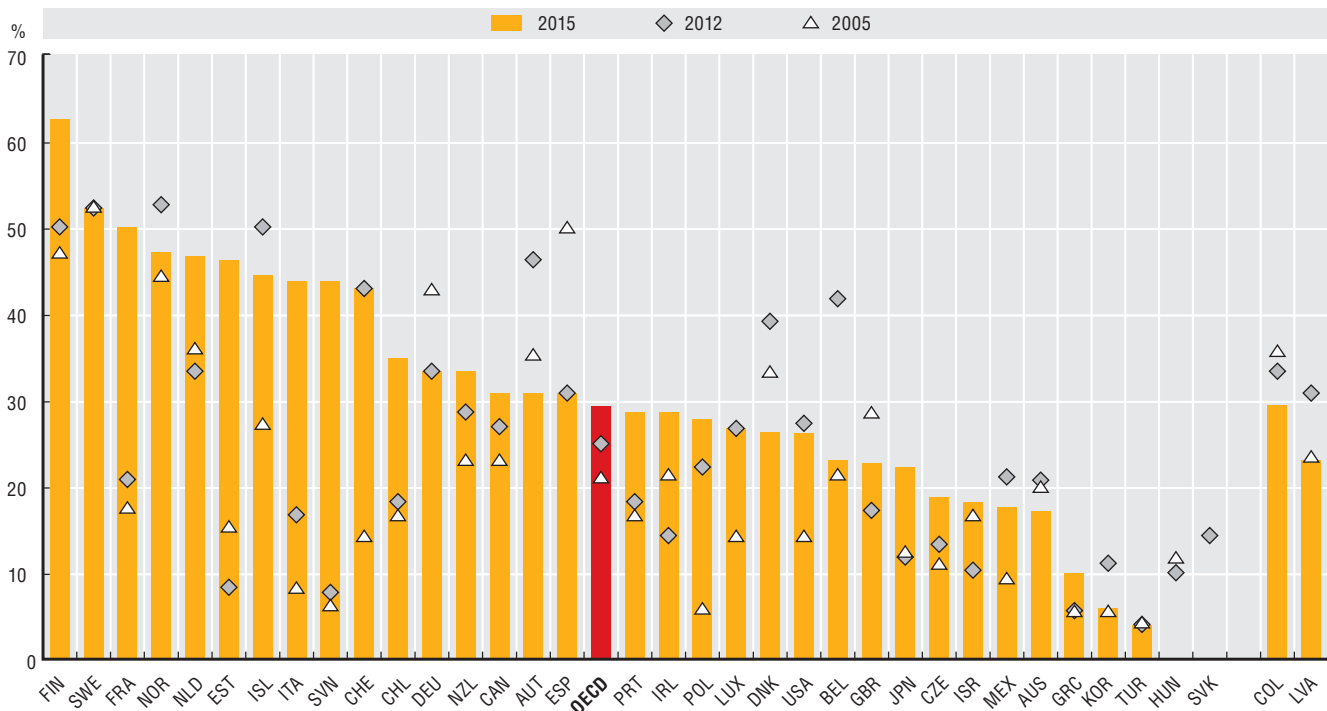


Note: Bars in light orange represent countries with lower or single house parliaments with legislated candidate quotas as of 21 January, 2013.

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), PARLINE (database), and IDEA Global Database of Quotas for Women.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933248642>

3.6. Share of women ministers



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) "Women in Politics", 2005, 2012 and 2015.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933248658>



From:
Government at a Glance 2015

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/gov_glance-2015-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2015), "Women in politics", in *Government at a Glance 2015*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/gov_glance-2015-24-en

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.