

Gender equality in politics

Ensuring that the leaderships of public administrations and parliaments reflect the populations they serve – including their gender composition – can contribute to the fairness and responsiveness of these institutions. Achieving gender equality in politics requires more than women and men having an equal share of parliamentary seats and ministerial positions. It requires that women and men of all backgrounds have equal access to such positions and can subsequently participate in decision making on an equal basis. Achieving this entails putting in place inclusive work environments, facilitating equal access to leadership roles (e.g. chairs of parliaments and parliamentary committees), and removing socio-economic barriers to political participation (e.g. through gender-mainstreamed and targeted public policies).

On average across OECD countries, 31.6% of the seats in the lower/single houses of their parliaments were held by women in 2021, compared to 26% almost a decade ago. Women's representation ranged from over 48% in Mexico and New Zealand, to less than 20% in Colombia, Hungary, Japan, Korea and Turkey. Between 2017 and 2021, France, New Zealand and Latvia increased the share of women in the lower/single house parliaments by more than 13 p.p., with New Zealand achieving the most diverse government of its history (IPU, 2021). During the same period there have also been significant setbacks, with the share of women falling by 10 p.p. in Slovenia, 7.9 p.p. in Iceland and 5.5 p.p. in Germany (Figure 3.10).

A gender-balanced cabinet is a strong indicator of a government's commitment to gender equality. In 2021, on average across OECD countries, 34% of federal/central government ministerial positions were held by women, an increase of 6 p.p. since 2017. Women's representation in cabinet posts increased widely in OECD countries, with women holding 40% or more of the ministerial posts in 16 OECD countries. Furthermore, countries like Spain, Finland and France have reached 50% female representation in ministerial positions. Austria, Belgium and the United States have also achieved notable gains in women's representation in ministerial posts, with increases of over 29 p.p. since 2017 while Hungary, Korea and Portugal saw increases of over 18 p.p. In the case of the United States, for example, this can be correlated with the President's commitment to nominate a diverse cabinet and leadership. Despite this overall improvement, several countries have experienced setbacks. Between 2017 and 2021, women's participation in cabinet posts fell the most in Slovenia (31.3 p.p.), Poland (17.9 p.p.) and Estonia (14.3 p.p.) (Figure 3.11).

Methodology and definitions

Data for women parliamentarians refer to the lower/single house of parliament and were obtained from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's PARLINE database.

Data refer to the share of women parliamentarians recorded as of 1 January 2021, 1 January 2017 and 31 October 2012. Percentages represent the number of women parliamentarians as a share of total filled seats. There are three key types of gender quotas: legislated candidate quotas (which regulate the gender composition of the candidate lists and are legally binding on all political parties in the election); legislated "reserved seats" (which regulate by law the gender composition of elected bodies by reserving a certain number of seats for women members, implemented through special electoral procedures); and party quotas (also called voluntary party quotas, they are adopted by individual parties for their own candidate lists, and are usually enshrined in party statutes and rules). Data on quotas were obtained from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's PARLINE database.

Data on women ministers in national government were obtained from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Women in Politics database. Data represent women appointed ministers as of 1 January of each year of reference. 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 government or public agencies have not been included.

Further reading

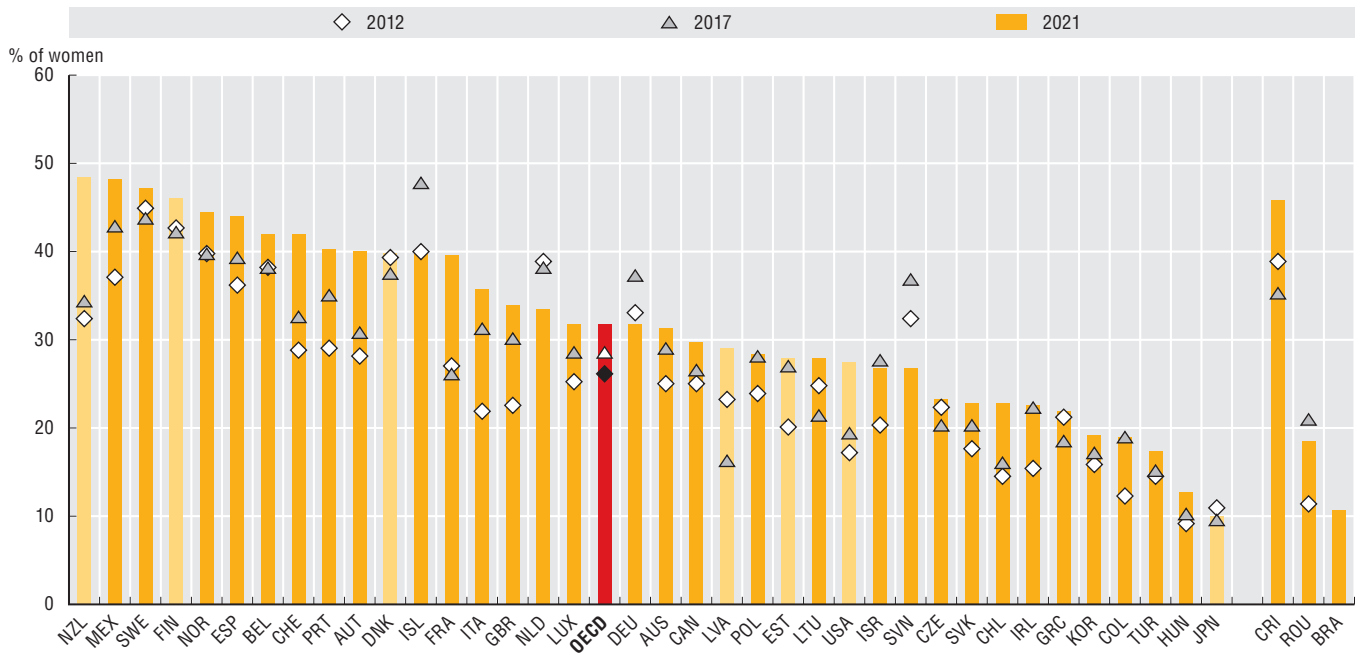
- IPU (2021), *Women in Parliament in 2020: The Year in Review*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, www.ipu.org/women-in-parliament-2020.
- OECD (2019), *Fast Forward to Gender Equality: Mainstreaming, Implementation and Leadership*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/g2g9faa5-en>.
- OECD (2018), *Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality*, OECD website, www.oecd.org/gender/governance/toolkit/.
- OECD (2016), *2015 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264252820-en>.

Figure notes

- 3.10. Countries in light orange represent lower or single house parliaments without electoral quotas as of February 2021. Data for Israel for 2021 correspond to the outgoing legislature as parliament was dissolved in December 2020 and new elections were yet to take place at the time of preparing this publication.
- 3.11. Data for the United States for 2021 correspond to the government appointed in January 2021 following elections held in 2020.

3.10. Gender equality in parliament and electoral gender quotas, 2012, 2017 and 2021

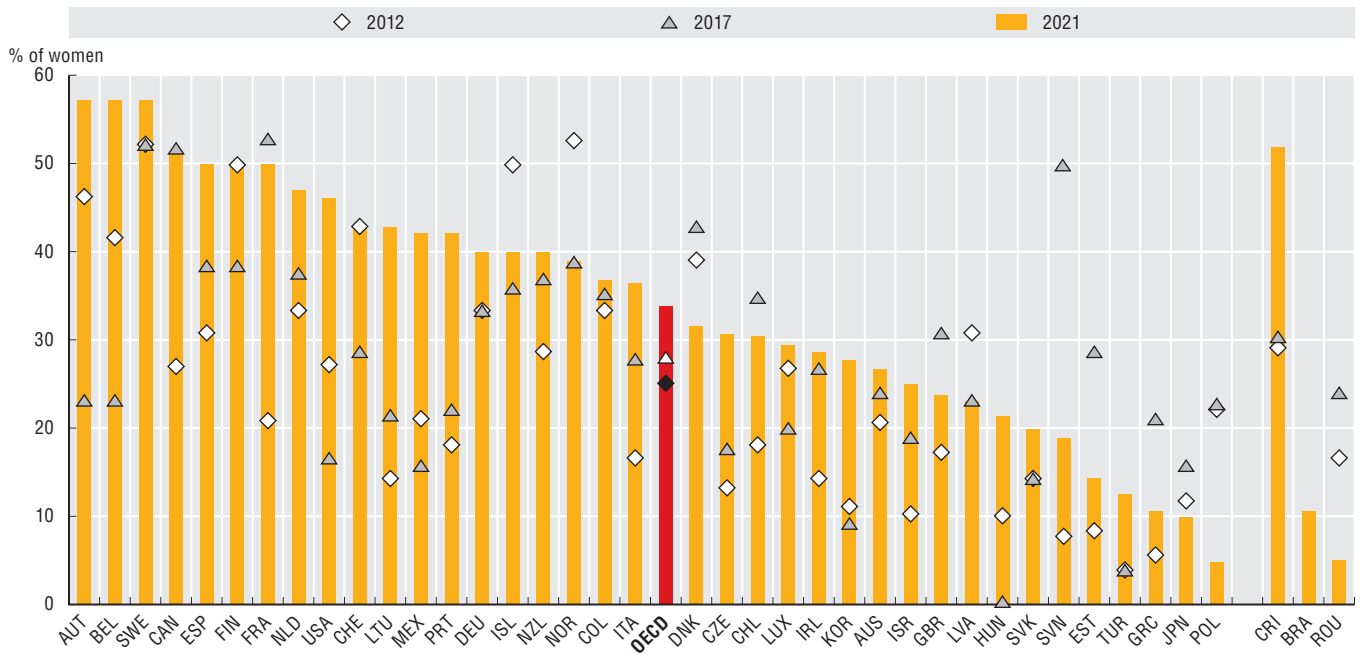
Lower or single house of the legislature



Source: Inter-Parliamentary (IPU) PARLINE (database).

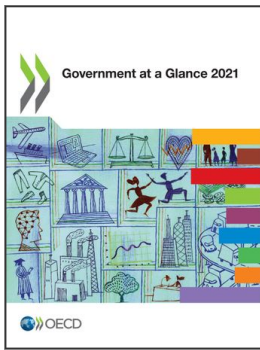
StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934257508>

3.11. Gender equality in ministerial positions, 2012, 2017 and 2021



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Women in Politics, 2021, 2017 and 2012. Data for Turkey for 2021 were provided by national authorities.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934257527>



From:
Government at a Glance 2021

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/1c258f55-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2021), "Gender equality in politics", in *Government at a Glance 2021*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/b4beed4b-en>

This document, as well as any data and 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. Extracts from publications may be subject to additional disclaimers, which are set out in the complete version of the publication, available at the link provided.

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.